

Within the lecture series
DIASPORA. EXPLORING A LIFE MODEL
the Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue kindly invites to

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Member of the Middle East Youth Peace Forum

VOICES FROM THE MARGINS: RECONCILIATION AND DEMOCRATIC INCLUSION THE CASE OF ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Curated and moderated by
Isolde Charim

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Bashir Bashir

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Bashir Bashir was a member of the Middle East Youth Peace Forum from 1994-2000.

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Diaspora. Exploring a Life Model

Contrary to the dictum that economic conditions will bring forth matching types of people, we are currently confronted with a pronounced mismatch. The dynamism of capitalist economics is generating an apparently boundless mobility. Whereas locations follow the pull of flexibilisation, the people attached to them remain tied to fixed, 'grounded' identity concepts. The cultures of our nation states hold no mental resources for the life of modern nomads. In view of this situation, we shall embark on a mental oil-drilling exercise in search of such resources. Our starting point is the concept of DIASPORA: The centuries-old dispersion of diverse peoples will not be perceived as synonymous with plight and displacement, but in its positive sense as a rich source of experience. The present series is an attempt at exploring a variety of ways of tapping this source. There may be national, cultural or economic differences, but what is common to all diaspora groups is the development of a specific form of non-territorial, supra-national network identity "avant la lettre", which signifies neither total integration nor parallel society. Previous participants in the series have been: Khaled Fouad Allam, Benedict Anderson, Rainer Bauböck, Homi K. Bhabha, Birand Bingül, Diederich Diederichsen, Tony Judt, Hanno Loewy, Saskia Sassen.

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Isolde Charim

Good evening. After a long break I welcome you to a further session of our lecture series Diaspora. Exploring a Life Model. Not only these lectures have acquired a kind of tradition, but also the fact that on most of our evenings another important event takes place. We had a lecture on the evening where President Bush came to Vienna. So why not having a lecture at the so much nicer occasion of Obama's inauguration? In this sense I am very happy that so many of you are with us tonight. A series means that every evening stands for itself and at the same times fits into the series of evenings that preceded it. The lecture tonight is in dialogue with the one of our last guest, Sari Nusseibeh, but also with our very first guest, Tony Judt, and with the reflections of Hanno Loewy. They all have in common the unresolved question of the Middle East conflict. Tonight we have the honor to welcome Bashir Bashir,

a guest who fulfills the specific feature, the specific access to our topic, that is he himself represents the complex identity he is speaking of. Just a few words. Bashir Bashir is research fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. He studied political theory in Jerusalem and at the London School of Economics. He is teaching political philosophy in London, Canada, and Jerusalem. And Bashir Bashir is Palestinian, a Palestinian Israeli. This biographic fact gives the main topic of the thinker Bashir Bashir a specific relevance. The topic of reconciliation, reconciliation in democratic societies. When we invited Bashir Bashir to the Kreisky Forum this invitation had not pressing actuality. In the meantime the tide of events have provided this topic with a bloody actuality. Reconciliation is not only more needful than ever, but also emphatically called into question. Let me just mention a last point. This evening is related to the spirit of Bruno Kreisky in more than one way, the location, the issue, and the specific biographic relation of Bashir Bashir. The secretary general of the Kreisky Forum, Gertraud Auer, will tell you more about this specific relation. Thank you very much.

Gertraud Auer

I would like to steal only a few moments because I would like to share especially with Margit Schmidt a big emotion that we both have tonight because we started 15 years ago a program which was called the Middle East Youth Peace Forum, a gathering of Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian, and Austrian young people who worked together for almost seven years in different programs. I am very happy that some of them are here tonight. Many of them are present virtually because many of them know that Bashir is here tonight thanks to face book. Bashir was the youngest participant of the group in 1994 when we started the program with a peace conference. It was the Middle East Youth Peace Conference in July 1994 where the young people who participated decided not to leave each other once the conference was finished, having one week of fun in Vienna and then going home to their respective communities. They decided to go on and work together. And so every year we tried hard to get the money and get the timing and bring the group together to share what they did in the meantime in their respective communities. I think this was an outstanding program for many years. It stopped as a program in 2000 for several reasons, mainly because you grew up, you became professors, parents, some of them have more than one child. I met some of them in Jerusalem last month. This year we have our 15th birthday. I think the occasion that Bashir is here was the initiative to try to make a birthday party in Bethlehem in spring of this year. I hope you have a good evening tonight and I leave the floor to Bashir. Thank you.

Bashir Bashir

Thank you very much. I think I have to start with an emotional note myself as well but I am going to keep it very brief. It is very emotional for me to be here. Even after the program of the Middle East Youth Peace Forum stopped I kept very intimate links with the Bruno Kreisky Forum with the encouragement of Margit and Gertraud. I am very thankful to you Margit and Gertraud for your encouragement, your support, and for offering the facilities even when the youth peace forum was over and for allowing me some productive times when I was in Vienna on private visits. Thank you for the challenges, the experiences as an academic, as a person in general. Some of the ideas that I will present today were presented probably the first time here at the Kreisky Forum in 2000, but were underdeveloped and didn't have any philosophical body. Today I hope they will be much more detailed, much more accessible and much more precise with some theoretical and applicable dimensions to them.

My talk tonight is about a different Israel. My talk tonight is about a new Israel. If you wish my talk tonight is about a more democratic, a more human, a more just and more inclusive Israel. If I want to put it differently, my talk tonight is about a bi-national Israel. I want to argue in my talk tonight that there are at least three dimensions that are meeting each other in an even imposed form of marriage. Indeed, the combination of these three dimensions leads us to think differently about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in general and certainly about the relationship between the Palestinian minority in Israel and the state of Israel. These three factors are the empirical factual dimension, such as the fact that the Palestinians and the Israelis or the Arabs and the Jews inside Israel are interlinked not only in terms of geography. This is only one example of the factual empirical dimension. My talk tonight will not deal with this dimension. The second dimension is the democratic dimension which is concerned primarily with the principles of reciprocity, equality, democratic virtues and others. My talk tonight will tackle this dimension, but briefly. The third dimension which lies at the crux of my talk tonight is the historical reconciliatory dimension. I want to argue that focusing on the reconciliatory dimension in Israel lead us to the conclusion that a new form of Israel must be created.

What I have said now is that I want to apply the politics of reconciliation in the Israeli context and more precisely how that politics of reconciliation affects the relationship between the state of Israel and its Palestinian minority. Inside Israel there is a huge Palestinian minority. These are the remaining of the Palestinians after the Nakba in 1948. They are about 17% to 18% of the population. They are scattered in the whole country, not concentrated in one piece of geography. They are in the Galilee, in the triangle, in the South, in the Negev, and they are in the mixed cities.

But before I get into the very specific example of how I want to apply the politics of reconciliation inside Israel and how that application gives us more hopeful, more inclusive forms of politics I want obviously to tell you how I came to think in theoretical terms about the politics of reconciliation and what the politics of reconciliation means. Tonight I will not bore you with too much theoretical discussion, but I want to tell you that the notion of reconciliation that I want to present tonight is built from four principles that I will later detail and apply in the Palestinian-Israeli case. These principles are collective memory of exclusion, acknowledgement, taking responsibility, and the last one is offering an apology and reparations. One might say, okay, how did you come to really think about these principles and why they are important for democratic states or democratic societies. Here, if you allow me, I want to make a brief theoretical and philosophical introduction. But this theoretical trajectory that I am going to make is going to be applicable in the state of Israel and I will address it step by step. This is why it is important to make this theoretical philosophical trajectory that is intimately linked to the history of consolidated democracies.

My talk is that I want to apply the politics of reconciliation into the Israeli-Palestinian case inside Israel, not between the Palestinian national movement and the state of Israel. The politics of reconciliation that I want to examine is composed of four principles: memory, acknowledgement, responsibility, and apology and reparations.

I want now to briefly introduce to you how that kind of theoretical framework is intimately linked within very particular societies or democratic societies. I want to call them consolidated Western democracies which are mostly settler based societies such as Canada, America, Australia, New Zealand. These are the examples that come to my mind. Here is the story.

After the Second World War the dominant model of democracy that dominated most of the Western democracies, a model that was called aggregative model of democracy. This aggregative model of democracy was primarily a majoritarian model of democracy. What I do I mean by aggregative majoritarian model of democracy? This model of democracy sees individuals as having preferences and interests that are predetermined prior to the political process. Politics in this understanding of aggregative democracy is about different aggregations, associations, interest groups in which they fight and bargain among themselves in order to take decision. In other words, citizens in this understanding of democracy, and I am being reductionist here, are viewed basically as passive agents in which they are required once every four years to cast their votes and in which most of the political process and the political action is done by these associations because they are viewed as representatives of the individuals that compose the society. In this aggregative majoritarian model of democracy the decisions were taken by majority votes, like we ask, the majority raises hands, and they vote, and they take decisions. This model has been proved to be problematic. This model has been attacked by different theorists from different directions. Some theorists that hold republican views or Aristotlean views attack this model on perfectionist grounds. What does that mean? They say this model does not provide opportunities for citizens to exercise their rights of participation in meaningful ways in order to develop as citizens and exercise their civic virtues. That is an Aristotlean republican form of politics. Others attack this majoritarian aggregative model on the ground of epistemology. They are saying that the problem of this model is that it does not provide informed rational collective decisions, and what we need is more informed decisions making processes. I am not interested in these criticisms. They are fascinating. I teach two independent courses on each of them.

But this is not what interests me. I am interested in a third set of criticism. That third set of criticism actually is the criticism that say that this aggregative majoritarian model of democracy is inherently exclusionary when it comes to deal with the issue of pluralism and diversity in society. This aggregative majoritarian model of democracy was

primarily assimilationist based on a notion of nation building and ideology of nationalism. Put it differently, under this model in many consolidated democracies that embarked in one way or another on a nation building project led to a form of exclusion or oppression because they wanted to assimilate certain minorities. This assimilation led to exclusion of minorities such as ethnic minorities, national minorities, homosexuals, and other forms of minorities in the society. So the trouble here is that the model that dominated the scene was problematic because it didn't deal adequately with the multicultural reality and the diversity that existed in most of these societies. And actually it was blind to these differences and diversities. And it actually was difference blind in the sense that the project is about nation building. There is one culture, one national language, one symbol, that form the basis to create a nation. One might ask how is this related to reconciliation? Here how it is related to reconciliation. And this is my theoretical contribution that I have developed in the last few years.

This model that I have named in the third set of criticism, that is accusing the majoritarian model of not dealing with the issue of pluralism adequately is called multiculturalism. So now we have seen a move in most of these consolidated democracies that I have in mind. They moved from a purely majoritarian model into a multicultural form of politics in which they want to give public acknowledgement and recognition of the minorities and to grant them differentiated treatment and citizenship. My argument is that this multicultural model in democracies that are consolidated but have legacies of historical injustices such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, is inadequate. I claim that in societies that have these characteristics, the politics of multiculturalism is not enough to deal with the problems that face these societies. Why? Because the legacy of historical injustice in the form of racism, oppression, Apartheid, or whatever gives rise to very particular sets of claims that are not captured by the multicultural requirement. Multiculturalism often sets procedural inclusion or theories of justice in which they claim that they will deal adequately with the exclusions of minorities and groups in society. This is if I want to put in very simple terms. But I argued in my philosophical theoretical work that these multicultural models in the context of historical injustices are not enough. Why? Because mostly groups that have been subject to historical injustices do not only require the recognition of their culture, or religion, or language which basically the multicultural model proposes. The multicultural model wants to recognize language, culture, and other things. I think the story has one additional building block. That one additional building block comes from the fact there is a historical dimension to that legacy of injustice. Across generations if there is a group that suffered from historical injustices, they usually ask for an additional set of rights that actually are not offered by multicultural policies and multicultural theories.

Without getting into too much detail, I want to name what are these sets of rights, or I want to name some of them for you and to link them to the Israeli case. Later in questions I can detail more how these claims emerged.

I have identified four principles, or four points, or four additional claims that usually groups that have suffered historical injustices or countries that have suffered from legacies of historical injustices seem to be dealing with implicitly and hidden in the political agenda. These four principles are the principles that compose what I call the politics of reconciliation. And again these are memory, acknowledgement, responsibility, and offering apology and reparations. I want to tell you how the trajectory that I just presented to you in terms of intellectual development of theory and not only intellectual but even historical is intimately linked to the Israeli case with certain specificities. And I want to apply these principles as I present them into the Palestinian minority relationship with the state of Israel and come to the conclusion.

So what about the story of Israel? And here again I make a very reductionist, brutal summary. As we go you will see what I mean. Israel since its establishment in 1948 has adopted a majoritarian model, difference blind model, assimilationist in its nature, called melting pot. In that model the Palestinian minority in Israel – which is about 15% of the population was systematically subject to continuous forms of oppression, and where excluded right away from the definition of the state in terms of practice, and was excluded right away out of the political game in the sense of genuine inclusivity. Other groups such as Mizrahi Jews who came from Arab and Muslim countries were subject to oppressive assimilationist policies in order to render them more to behave or to adopt principles and values and norms that were dictated by Ashkenazi Jews that came from Europe. I want to focus in my talk more on the Palestinian side and I want to say that Israel fits perfectly into that majoritarian model in which basically voting is the main mechanism of taking decisions. So if voting is the main mechanism of taking decisions then the

Palestinians will be automatically out of the game because they will be easily outvoted. If decisions need to be taken by majority and the majority is Jewish then the decisions will be easily taken by the majority and the majority is Jewish. But Israel is not unique in that sense. Israel like many other countries in the world embarked on a project of national building. And any project of nation building that we know of history is assimilationist, exclusionary, oppressive, and inherently by definition problematic vis-à-vis minorities if there are minorities in society. So what Israel has proved through the years that the Palestinian minority in Israel, just to give you one example, was subject to military rule until 1966. That basically meant that they were deprived of all their rights except the right to cast their votes. The right to vote was secured because the Palestinians actually mostly voted for lists that the Mapai Party, the party of Ben Gurion, created to recruit the Arabic vote. So except the right to vote Palestinians were deprived of every single other right including cultivating their lands. They needed a permit from the military officer that used to be in the area even if they want to walk hundreds of meters to their fields. But I don't want to get into too much detail. There is an overwhelming consensus today in Israel, including the Likud Party, that the Palestinian minority in Israel has been subject to discrimination that is today discussed as a fact. How do they name and define the Palestinian minority, what are the reasons for the discrimination and how to handle the situation of oppression is different from one party to another. But that is not the crux of our topic tonight.

What I want to raise is that several Israeli scholars have recognized that this assimilationist model of democracy is problematic. Why? It is problematic because it systematically rules out and excludes the Palestinians and certain extent the Mizrahi Jews. However, most of the vocal and critical voices among the Israeli academics that emerged were Mizrahi Jews or Ashkenazi sympathetic to the Mizrahi Jews. These scholars agreed on the need to move to more inclusive forms of citizenship. In order to move to a more inclusive politics, new models were proposed by different thinkers and mostly political theorists and sociologists in Israel. These scholars proposed a different Israel. I want to name three examples of these models and demonstrate why I think these new models are problematic.

One model was ethnic democracy by Sami Smoha from Haifa University. This model actually is problematic even if it did propose to change the melting pot and assimilationist model. It is problematic because it maintains the hegemony of the ethnos of the Jewish people in the state of Israel. In very simple terms it says that Israel can function as an ethnic democracy as far as it gives the minority at least not only the role but the subjective feeling that they can influence not politics in general but at least the decisions that are concerning them. So it does not have to be genuine, it must be only subjective. This is a very problematic model because it maintains the view that politics is conducted according to ethnos and not demos. That is not democracy because democracy doesn't operate exclusively according to ethnos. If ethnicity defines your role in democracy that is not called democracy.

There was another model offered by the political theorist Yael Tamir who is the education minister today in Israel. Her model is called liberal nationalism. She developed that while she was writing her thesis in Oxford and before she entered into politics. The trouble of Yael Tamir's proposal of liberal nationalism is that it gives normative theoretical justification for the hegemony of the Jewish group in the state of Israel. If you want I can go into details later on. But I think that it is even documented by mainstream academics in Israel today that Tamir's liberal nationalism actually is not necessarily a good proposal because of the ethnic liberal nationalism of Tamir hidden in it. Again her model maintains somehow the status quo and provides a justification for what is existing in Israel in much more fancy aesthetic philosophical terms.

There were other models that were proposed by Mizrahi activists and theoreticians such as Yossi Yona and Yehuda Shenhav who proposed a multicultural Israel. And even another guy, a Palestinian scholar from Tel Aviv University Amal Jamal, proposed another model that is multicultural as well. These actually are the most serious models for moving to an inclusive Israel. They propose a multicultural proposal in Israel. But I will argue and I argued already, but I want again to make a jump fast, that I think they stop short of taking seriously the historical dimension of oppression in Israel. Why? Because the Palestinian minority in Israel is not requiring political demands that are only take the form of respecting their culture and respecting their language. That is not the ceiling of their political demands. The ceiling of their political demands as it was manifested in three extremely important documents called the Haifa Declaration, the Future Vision, and the Adallah Constitution that were published in the last four years. In the three documents Palestinian intellectuals, politicians, journalists, activists named their own visions of a different

Israel. Even when they called it multicultural Israel, and some of them called it multicultural Israel, they referred in an implicit way to the points that I have named.

So let me get into these points that I think we need to take seriously. And what is being offered by the previously mentioned scholars is definitely not taking them into account. In other words, I argue that what is proposed to revise the political system in Israel is not enough. So what is the model that I am proposing to be enough or much more effective? I propose to complement certain proposals of inclusive Israel by a politics of reconciliation. Why is the politics of reconciliation important and why are these sets of claims that I will name not captured by what is proposed thus far by various scholars?

Let us start with the collective memory of exclusion. Why is collective memory of exclusion important and what does it mean? Collective memory of exclusion is extremely important because it serves as invaluable, extremely important source of proposing a different historical narrative about the history of the composition of the nation. Put it differently, a collective memory of exclusion that is held by the Palestinians in Israel and Palestinians at large tells a different story about how that nation or how the recent history of that land was, how the state of Israel or how the history of that land is told. One important dimension here is that the Palestinian collective memory of exclusion serves as a counter narrative to the hegemonic master narrative of the state of Israel that is orchestrated by different agencies in Israel including the historiography of the academia. What does that mean? That means that there is a narrative that dominated and is still dominating in Israel that tells how this land and how this country came to birth. One of the dominant lines of that is that they told the story that this land was empty or mostly empty. Palestinians through their own collective memory of exclusion tell a different story. They say not at all, Palestine was a very flourishing, very active, dynamic society included cities, villages, aristocracy, elites, cinemas, theatres, journalism, and everything. It was a functioning, fully dynamic society. The state of Israel, according to this memory, was built and was formed on the ruins of a different nation.

What does memory of exclusion entail in that sense? The memory of exclusion is not serving here only just as a counter to the hegemony or a counter narrative. It serves far more purposes in my view and these are services that I will later on talk about.

One final point about memory! I am not claiming that the Palestinians have a unified form of memory. But there are parameters that you can identify within the Palestinian memory. Memory is not something that you can grab. But I am saying how they counter their own notion or their account of history about the conflict. I am not arguing that there is homogeneity in there. There is no homogeneity in there. But there are agreements on certain things. One might argue, and here in the Palestinian case, Palestinian minority does not only want to give legitimacy to its memory. And there by the way it's not that I make a symmetric parallel between Israeli majority and the Palestinian minority. There is no symmetry. And usually this collective memory serves actually to deconstruct and undermine that kind of symmetry. And here the Palestinians in Israel demand go beyond memory. They don't want only that their memory be taken seriously. They want actually that the state of Israel acknowledges that there are historical injustices. Why? Because the Palestinians in Israel do suffer from historical injustices and they suffer from these injustices to this particular day. And understanding their current situation of inequality and the severe and disproportionate distributions of resources in Israel is intimately linked to the fact of this history of oppression. So there must be an acknowledgement that there are historical injustices. And these historical injustices are not accidental historical events, but they are the deeds of human beings and ideologies and practices. But this takes us to the third principle. And the third principle says that it is very crucial and important to recognize and to give space for memory and to recognize that there were injustices, and these injustices are the deeds of human beings. Why are these crucial but not sufficient? Because the Palestinian minority in Israel is demanding that the state of Israel takes responsibility on causing these injustices. So the fact that I can recognize that you suffer from injustices does not mean that I take responsibility that I am the one who caused mostly these injustices. So the Palestinians in Israel demand that the state of Israel recognizes these injustices and takes responsibility for causing them, i.e. that the primary cause of the Palestinian injustices in the state of Israel was committed by the state of Israel. It is not that the Palestinians were born to be underdeveloped, it's not that the Palestinians all of a sudden discovered after forty years that their infrastructure is underdeveloped. It is like this because the state of Israel has systematically

discriminated, mistreated, marginalized, and excluded the Palestinians from the definition of the demos in the state, from the definition of the common good in the state, and from any other things related to their own destiny.

But responsibility is a much more complicated term because one might say what if we have an immigration society such as in Israel, why an immigrant that comes to Israel needs to carry the responsibility of the previous generation. If the previous generation did these atrocities, these injustices, this discrimination so why I should be responsible? That's valid for America, Canada, and other places as well. And here my claim is that I recognize and acknowledge the normative problems involved in particular types of responsibility. Nevertheless, I think it is very plausible to draw intimate link between those who are currently living and those who are emigrating to these societies and differentiate between political responsibility and personal responsibility. Usually we are asking for constitutional political responsibilities. And actually it is very plausible to argue that current generations are beneficiaries of certain goods of the state because of mistreatment of previous generations. In other words, the wealth that the country enjoys now is because of unjust and exploitative activities of previous generations to certain groups in society. Another example that is very famous in the context of the holocaust and the holocaust survivors is that psychological fear can easily move from one generation to another. And I can attest to this claim through my encounters with other colleagues and other Israeli Jewish friends who come from families that are survivors of the holocaust. So what I want to make here is very simple. That the claim that responsibility is an extremely important principle, it has some complications but nevertheless I think we can still to a very large extent draw extreme, explicit links between the current inequalities and between past injustices.

The story does not stop when we take responsibility. Because taking responsibility entails some practical moves at the level of symbolism and the level of materiality. That takes us to the fourth and final principle and that is offering apology and offering reparations, i.e. that the Palestinians demand from the state of Israel to offer an apology and say sorry for what we have committed against you. Sorry that we have discriminated you, sorry that we have subjected you to systematic forms of exclusion and racism and oppression. But sorry is not enough. It is not enough because apology in that sense needs to be sincere, profound and genuine. But even that's not enough. Indeed, usually people demand reparations. What do I mean by reparations? There has to be a redistribution of resources of land, of economics, and many other goods in order to move from a distorted account of injustice into something that is much more inclusive, and much more human, and just based.

Now all of this that I have named here is not in order to promote any form of politics that is based on blame and revenge. That is not my purpose, neither the purpose of those who mostly side with these claims, neither the claim here to perpetuate victimhood. That is not the claim. And I will not be supportive of any form of politics that leads to this form of revenge and blame politics. The claim here is for a different form of politics. A politics that is more inclusive, more human, based on friendship and cooperation and human decency. That is the form of politics that the politics of reconciliation demands.

I want to make here an intimate link to the larger conflict and what does it mean in much more visionary terms. What I have said here is that the state of Israel cannot be a Jewish and democratic state. What I am entailing through my politics of reconciliation, and I don't shy away, is that the state of Israel must be two things. One, the state of Israel must be the state of all its citizens, i.e. by virtue of being a member in the state of Israel you are entitled to full package of individual citizenship rights like any other individual it doesn't matter where he is or where she comes from. That will put an end to fascist fanatics such as the Member of the Knesset Lieberman who came recently from Russia and hardly speaks even the quality of 20% of my Hebrew, who claims that I am illegitimate in the country and I need to leave the country. That puts an end to the scandalous form of politics in which a Jewish member in the Austrian society, in America, and others in potential the minute he or she lands in Israel is entitled to more rights than me who was born there and hundreds if not thousands of years my family has been there. But that's only at the individualistic level. And I think Israel does not only have to be the state of all of its citizens precisely because, and I am not among them, of those whose national identity is very dear to them. And here I have in mind most of the Israelis and most of the Palestinians. I want a liberal democratic state, but precisely because of facts on the ground and precisely because of pragmatism I want the state of Israel to be the state of its all nations. And in Israel there are two national groups. There is the Jewish Israeli group and there is the Palestinian Arab group. This requirement puts an end for Israel to conduct a politics of divide and rule and refer to us

sometimes as Muslims, other times as Christians, and other times as Druze, and others times as Bedouins of the North and Bedouins of the South, and sometimes as Muslims of the villages and Muslims of the towns. That is not what Palestinians in Israel think of themselves.. This is not the type of Israel that I hope for. the only way forward in my point of view is a bi-national Israel. Why? Because according to this model I am not asking the Jewish people to give up their own national aspiration. The two national groups are free to have their own language and to practice their language and the language will flourish. And I am not asking anyone to abandon their national identities precisely because the sensitivities about the powerful ideology of nationalism in modern times. But not only because of that. But also because I am taking into serious sensitivity the history of the Jewish people suffering from persecution, anti-Semitism, and holocaust in Europe. Precisely because I take that I have no problem the other way around. I support the right to national self-determination for the Jews in Palestine or more precisely the Jewish Israelis, not the Jews as such. But who said that the only way to cash out the right to national self-determination is through a sovereign independent state? That is a total fallacy even for those who consider themselves political theorists in Israel. There are many ways how you can cash out the right to national self-determination.

And what we can do, Israel happens to have built its own nation on the ruins of another nation. If the land would have been empty I have no problem that the ultimate manifestation of the right to national self-determination for the Jews would be an independent state. But this is precisely why intellectuals of a very particular kind, of a very particular key in the Jewish history such as Hannah Arendt opposed among other things a Jewish state in Israel. For they knew that there was another nation there.

One last statement that I want to say. I have presented here a presentation in which I focused mainly exclusively about the politics inside Israel. I want to make a final statement by saying that the politics of reconciliation entails even not a two-state solution to the larger Israeli Palestinian conflict. I think the politics of reconciliation gives us an inspiration and hope for moving from the failure of the two-state solution to a new form of politics, i.e. bi-national state solution. This form of politics invites us for optimism and hope. What do I mean by that? Unlike the international media, international bias, and dominant discourse within the Palestinian society and the Israeli society that say the two-state solution is the only game in town. I am very happy to announce that the two-state solution is not the only game in town. There are other more humane, more inclusive games in town. The bi-national state solution is one of the strongest, potential way out of this conflict. It is about time that we think out of the box and differently on the Palestinian-Israeli question. We know that since 1988 until today the two-state solution is failing. Oslo is failing. The peace process is failing. Why? Because the two-state solution as it is proposed mostly by Israel is not going to be accepted by the Palestinians. The two-state solution will be accepted by the Palestinians if it will answer their minimal aspirations according to how they are agreed by the international community, and the UN Resolution, and proposed by the Arab Initiative. But since there are facts on the ground such as the settlements, the wall, the refugee problem, Jerusalem that is becoming and interlinked city, you cannot divide Jerusalem anymore. Precisely because we have the challenge of the Palestinian minority in Israel the bi-national state is the solution. If these are the core issues of the conflict and everybody would agree to a certain extent with me that refugees, settlements, the Palestinian minority, the definition of Israel as a Jewish state and democratic state, and the problem of resources, and Jerusalem are the main problems of the conflict, so here the bi-national state solution offers us a different perspective. Jerusalem need not be divided, it's irrelevant to divide Jerusalem when we have one state. The settlements need not be removed all , most of them will remain there and setting mechanisms to compensate the Palestinians for their lands. The refugees are becoming a much more solvable problem when they will see that this entire land is their own nation. They don't require to go and demolish the Jewish settlements and place order to claim their houses back, i.e. they don't want to restore injustice by causing another injustice. The Palestinian minority will not be a minority anymore. But what does this bi-national state solution offers the Jewish people? It offers them the right to national self-determination in the form that even if they will be outnumbered they will be exactly with the same powers and the same authorities like the Palestinian group. And for those who wonder about a safer safe place for the Jewry. Indeed, in the new state if there will be Jewish groups that are persecuted, I can tell you that I and many others like me have no problems to have a clear article in the constitution that clearly says that this new country opens its door for these oppressed groups and recruit resources to help them. This state will be under certain circumstances a safe and secure place for every individual Jew that is persecuted anywhere in the globe and it will be open doors, but not with a right of return or a law of return which

gives and grants immediate privileges due to the fact that citizens of the state that are Jews or citizens of Israel that are Jews are more entitled to rights than any other Palestinian citizen. Thank you very much.

Isolde Charim

I have a problem on the theoretical level. Israel was created as an exclusive society. In its selfunderstanding it didn't want to be the United States and it didn't have the aim of becoming an inclusive society. That means that the definition of Israel is an essentialist definition. What you are proposing with the bi-national state has a kind of very paradox movement because in one sense you accept the existence of the state of Israel but you ask to change the definition to become something totally different from what it is.

Bashir Bashir

I think this is a very interesting question and it captures the complexity of many things. I would say what you say is true, but. And let me start with the but. I agree with you that the Zionist project is an exclusivist form of nationalism. I would even argue that Zionism in its mainstream understanding, not the Bohemian such like Hugo Bergman and others who came from Czechia. The mainstream Zionism, I would agree with you, actually was a very exclusivist, organic, East European in its nature. And in that sense it is very essentialist, I agree with you. But here come the complications. And that is that Israel or the Zionist movement at an early stage and then Israel had and has diverse Jewish views and groups. But Israel has or wants to pretend a different dimension in its politics. And that is that they want to be more depicted not as exclusivist. Why is that? Let me give you an example where that kind of tension that you name is extremely manifested. And that is in Israel the Declaration of Independence. In Israel's Declaration of Independence in which Israel says the state of Israel will treat all of its citizens and groups equally, will respect the minority, blablabla. That form of politics clearly exceeds the form of essentialism that is embedded in the mainstream Zionist movement. Why is the Declaration of Independence much more liberal? I still have a lot of problems. I don't think liberal more than the exclusivist essentialist understanding of nationalism that is more primordial vulgar in its sense as it is presented in mainstream Zionism. There are at least two different reasons that I can name now without getting into too much detail. One has to do with the fact that Israel's recognition by the international community was conditioned by Israel's respect of minorities inside Israel. This is the UN Resolution that recognizes the state of Israel. In that recognition Israel committed itself to respect minorities and grant citizenship rights. And actually that was one of the problems why they didn't carry on after the establishment of the state with the ethnic cleansing and dispossessing the rest of the Palestinians because there was an international eye on Israel. It was this spirit for international recognition at that time. But I think it would be quite reductionist and unfair just to look from that perspective. Probably those who wrote in the Declaration of Independence were explicitly torn between universal principles and between exclusivist primordial principles. So I am not saying that the balance or that tension, it's not a balance actually, it's a very severe tension, and definitely by your question you named the main problem of the state of Israel, is that the tension that comes in there it will be slightly reductionist to refer it only for instrumental purposes because there were a few names and personalities within those who are considered as Israeli Zionists that were more liberal than others. And I had an outstanding experience two months ago in which we, a group of scholars, mostly Palestinians, at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, printed the Declaration of Independence of the state of Israel and we read it word by word. And I can assure you in every single paragraph almost you will identify that tension. From one side universalism and from the other side very strong vulgar form of particularism. Whether that is a story only for instrumental, technical, tactical moves in order to enjoy international recognition I think the story is much more complicated than that. I think the Declaration of Independence of Israel is a fascinating document for political theorists in general and for many of the troubles that Israel goes through now in particular.

Isolde Charim

Let's come to your solution of this bi-national state. You were very much focusing on the Palestinian minority in Israel. But the concept of the bi-national state has a very specific situation because these are not all the Palestinians. You have the difference between the Palestinian minority, and the Palestinian national movement, and the Palestinians outside of Israel. So why this claim to the state of Israel to become a citizen? At the end of your speech you said this two-state solution didn't work out. But it didn't convince me. It sounds for me very utopian because your claim is not only to be acknowledged as a full citizen. Your politics of reconciliation and accepting the memory of injustice and so on means to totally rebuild and make a new definition of the state. This sounds to me

much more utopian than this two-state solution where the Palestinians don't have to ask the Israelis for being citizens and acknowledged.

Bashir Bashir

You are right. But let me add to your accusation of being utopian other terms that I am accused of. And I will tell you what my views in that respect are. I am often accused not only of being utopian. I am accused of being excessively optimistic and being a dreamer. Well, I have a few things here to say. I think you are posing a serious challenge, but I will tell you where is the challenge. But let me tell you first why I think I have no problem for being a dreamer, why I think I am not utopian or I am utopian but to a certain extent that is not totally disconnected. Actually my utopia comes is based on the realities there. I named the three factors that I think contribute massively to the fact of bi-nationalism. One of them is the pragmatic. My dream is not only in the name of justice and historical justice. My claim is that facts on the ground are strikingly calling for bi-nationalism. So my argument actually is the following. Actually there is a bi-national reality already in historic Palestine. Like if you are a bird or have a beautiful eye of a bird that you can distance yourself from historic Palestine and look at Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Actually what you will see that there are Jews and Arabs living but they are deeply interlinked and intermingled. So what frames our thinking as concepts about the politics is very problematic. The two-state solution frames our understanding of politics. But actually the two-state solution is ignoring realities. It is ignoring realities not because I want to take the conflict in a larger historical perspective, because I am here and might be accused that I am taking the conflict to a larger historical perspective than just 1967, I am taking it to the boundaries of 1948. But even if I want to remain within the boundaries of 1967 people do not understand to which extent the settlement project in the West Bank is just unbelievably destroying any hope for a viable Palestinian state. I invite you to have a look on Jerusalem. Jerusalem actually represents the geography of Israel-Palestine. Since Jerusalem cannot be divided, since you have 200.000 Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem, only in Jerusalem, and since East Jerusalem does not exist as exclusively Arab anymore this is historic Palestine. So in that sense my calling for a bi-national does not stem from utopia. It is that I am motivated by different conceptions of politics that read intimately the reality, that want to propose a way out and thinking differently about the situation because everyone agrees that we are stuck. I had a meeting before I came here with a Palestinian intellectual, Rashid Khalidi, who is a very prominent Palestinian historian at Columbia. We invited him at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and mostly there were Jewish-Israeli scholars. Everyone including the so called center Israelis agreed in the room that we are in a deadlock, that we are in trouble, that the Israeli Jews are shooting themselves in the feet because of the settlements and the wall and other things. And I said, so if we agree on the diagnosis of the situation that we are stuck so we will have to understand that the solution we are operating with is problematic. Everybody agrees in the room. If that is the case so I am naming my own notion of politics that is not utopian in my point of view. It is actually embedded in realities, that I want to give them different names, different politics. But your challenge comes when you say but people have very strong national sentiments and mistrust and hostility. How are you going to solve that? The national identities we can solve easily by granting each group the right to national self-determination, but they don't have to be states. And you know as a philosopher that the right to national self-determination does not have to be cashed out in a national state. It can be in confederation, in federation, different forms of institutions and constitutional arrangements. The challenge is the challenge of attitude and perspective. And this is the issue how you can overcome deep, profound hostilities and mistrust. And especially when you have a national movement such as the Zionist national movement or the state of Israel that has in its rationale an extremely powerful story of the Bible. And the Bible is one of the most important influential documents on the face of earth. The Bible tells that story. And you have one of the most important, profound tragedies of human modern times- the Holocaust. And definitely Europe is the main perpetrator of that crime and feels guilty and the whole West feels that if the holocaust presents anything it presents the failure of the enlightenment project. I am taking that into account. Whereas I see how that affects Palestinians when they manoeuvre against the rest of the world against immense odds. But I have hope. I have hope in two things. That my project is very moral inclusive, democratic, and just based. And I think if we miss anything in that piece of land it is to have dreamers. And I have no problem to dream.

One last thing is that if you would have asked an African-American three years ago, five years ago, that an African-American president will be sworn into the White House today and now he is the President of America, they would have said you are under drugs or you just need a mental hospital. And here we have much more intimate

similarities actually than America because America has its own particular elastic, dynamic, promising, flourishing democracy. Israel is not like that. But Israel is much more like South Africa. If you would have asked five years or six years or even three years before the collapse of the Apartheid they would have probably thought as well that you are under the effect of alcohol or drugs, probably not three years but ten years before the collapse. I here have a bargain. And my bargain might fail, I am not saying that I am deterministic. But my bargain is on hope, on morals, and justice, and historical contingency. I cannot control historical contingency. But I hope.

Question

Peter Kreisky. Yesterday Joshe Sobol, a famous Israeli-Jewish writer and playwright, made the same proposal in Austrian radio as you did today. He argued also in the same area that because of the settlements of about 200.000 Jewish people in West Jordan there is no chance to separate as he thought before. And this Intermingling of population has happened. this is the irony of the right wing, very oppressive settlement policy and the Labor Party following up also and securing this policy. This is one argument. There is another example, the ongoing process in Spain is somewhat similar. It was unthinkable up till 1936 when Spain was regionalized for a moment until Franco took over, and since the 1980s the country if it won't be splitted into three or four parts, these means a third of Spanish inhabitants and a bit less of the area of Spain. This process is going on in Spain if it will not happen a separation of Spain in three or four parts. There are also other examples existing if you look at the European map on a softer level, but it was unthinkable after several hundred years of oppression of minority languages in France that this ideology of unified France with only the French language as dominant has shifted somewhat. And this is in relation to the French situation. ???

Question

I have a quite naive question I cannot solve. Is Israel a secular state? Is is a nation or a religious state? Therefore I think there is a big problem about it, also with this bi-national state. Are Palestinians Christian or Muslims, is that important? Is religion so important still? With you example about Spain, I remember the Roman saying divide et impera.

Question

I have also an unending hope and idealism, but I feel very unease with this utopian way of speaking. These days here and in many other Western European countries they are celebrating the week of ecumenical dialogue between Christian and Jewish communities. It is a very utopian way which allows to be silent about injustices. Although you said your utopic way is based on facts on the ground I did not feel enough, even this bi-national state, I am not clear what it would be. What is with the Westbank and what about Gaza? I think we need really to be ready, at least in this house, to face realities. German speaking including Austrians don't dare call injustice injustice because we are afraid we are seen as antisemitic. Others are afraid because the American protector would be mad at us, better we follow his line. But really it's time to face the facts and call injustice injustice. They cannot undo the trauma of their persecution, of Shoah and so on, by committing and tolerating and defending new expulsions, new walls of ghettos and discrimination. I think we here have not the right to be utopic.

Bashir Bashir

Let me start from the last question. I think utopia does not have necessarily to be disconnected from facts. Actually there are different types of utopia. Utopia is not connected and is mystical and is very spiritual and has nothing to with realities, that is not the type of utopia my project promotes. The first type of Utopis is to be found in sophism and other kinds of Christian mysticism and Jewish mysticism. This is one form of utopia. Another form of utopia is when you have a political program that is inspired by ideals, but actually motivated by realities. That is the form of utopia that I am proposing, takes facts and faces realities and wants to take them into account and serious consideration. What I am inviting by this, I don't like to call it utopia, is to use different terminology and different frames, conceptions in order to diagnose and propose solutions to the conflict. I agree with you that injustices need to be named by their names. That goes very much to Israel itself and to the Israeli society, and I have my own troubles and my own struggle on a daily basis within the Israeli society in order to face and tell and let them acknowledge that basically what the state of Israel is committing towards the Palestinian minority is discrimination, and what it is committing for forty years of occupation in Palestine is immoral and unacceptable by any standards. Now where is the hypocrisy, and I agree with you here? And that is, Europe is hypocritical and America is

hypocritical. Each one of them has their own problem why they are hypocritical. One dimension that explains the hypocrisy of Europe when it comes to the Palestinian question is interest-based hypocrisy because their interests are much more intimately linked to Israel than to the Palestinians. That is an interest based issue. And it is very well known that there are double standards in international law and in the international community. Everybody knows that. Now when Europe asks why there is frustration and anger in the Arab and Muslim world and other quarters such as Latin America it is precisely because they ignore or overlooks this kind of hypocrisy. If you want to be democratic then you will have to respect that the Palestinians have the only democratically elected government in the Arab world even if Hamas is in power. Another dimension why there is hypocrisy in Europe, particularly in Europe and less in the States, is because Europe feels guilty when it comes to the Jewish people because of the trauma and the crime of modernity of industrial mass killings in the form of the holocaust. But that goes again to very big problem in my point of view that I have my own text in that. And that is faced towards Israel and towards the Europeans. Towards Israel I say, one of the most unfortunate things that happened to the Jewish people as such is that Israel appropriates the right to speak in the name of the Jewish people. That is one of the most unfortunate developments that have happened in my point of view in the modern history of the Jewish people. Having that monopoly on writing, orchestrating, defending, speaking in the name of the Jewish people by the state of Israel is certainly a very problematic development in the Jewish modern history because if you would have had voices at an early age in the 1960s such as Hannah Arendt, Primo Levi, and others who were consistently humanistic in their approach and were viewed as legitimate voices today Tony Judt who spoke here would not have to hide in his office in New York because any view of criticism of Israel would be classified as anti-Semitism or hatred of Jews despite the fact that he is Jewish himself. As for Europe I think that we here have not learned the lesson. Instead of being involved in a kind of revealing and a kind of confronting the facts of the European modern history and the failure of a strong dimension of the modern project of the Enlightenment, Europe is totally complicit by feelings of guilt and by feelings of distancing itself from responsibility in order to embark on a universal discourse of rights which somehow offers blind support to Israel. It is shameful and an ultimate manifestation of hypocrisy that you see the European leadership going to Jerusalem to express solidarity with the Israeli society whereas the victims of hundreds of Palestinians in this strike on Gaza and ever since forty years and continuous form of occupation and not to express solidarity or not to express enough level of solidarity is a total manifestation of hypocrisy that will always add to the frustration, lack of respect, and the double standards that Europe is viewed as it is viewed in the Arab world, in the Muslim world, and in Latin America, and among leftist powers and forces inside Europe itself.

As for the naive question you put a very big question whether Israelis are religious and nationalistic. I would view the Zionist movement as a colonial project. But who am I, Bashir, to say to the Jewish people who after sixty years of particular history that conceived themselves in the state of Israel as a national group, who am I to come in a paternalistic way to say you are not a national group? I would engage in an intellectual historical discussion whether the Jewish people back in Europe after and before the holocaust formed a national group, I have my own views on this discussion. The Zionist movement was not popular among the Jews in Europe. The Zionist movement did not enjoy support that much in the European Jewry. Most of those who were survivors of the holocaust and did flee the Nazi regime wanted to go to Europe or to America, not go to Israel. There were historical developments profound and in the Zionist movement and the Jewry in Europe itself not far away from here. In Bohemia, in Czechia there were very interesting voices of Jewish intellectuals. They were completely different voices than mainstream Zionism. So the story is very complicated. But to get to your point, there is a Jewish historical development that Israel orchestrated that is, this people feel that they are a nation. I am not in a position, I don't want to be in a position to exercise any form of paternalism. Their group of people feel that they are a nation today. So in that sense I have no problem whatsoever to acknowledge the right to national self-determination for the Israeli Jews in Palestine. Whether that gives Israel a particularity of how the religion combines with nationalism, it does. There is a very strong tension between those orthodox Jews who see theology and religion as extremely fundamental dimension of nationalism and between Zionists who secularized certain rituals and certain dimensions in order to capitalize, in order to build a form of nationality. The story is very complicated, you are right.

As for the examples of the gentlemen, you are right. You name different examples. There are different examples, some of them are more successful than others. Look at Belgium. Belgium is about to fall apart, and that is not a very successful form of bi-nationalism. I can give you another example. Canada ten years ago was about almost to fall apart, but not today. Your examples both are a very serious challenge to my proposal. I am aware of that. Even

these examples that pose very difficult situation to the Palestinian case, I think we still can hope for an operative workable dimension because Palestinians and Israelis cannot be separated. In what sense? They can be separated under one condition only. And that is of ethnical cleansing. If Israel needs a purely Jewish democratic state it needs to get rid of 20% of its population, this is 1.3 million Palestinians. You need to get rid of them or you will keep on oppressing them and discriminating them, and then that is not democracy. You will make a dictatorship of a Jewish theocracy. And that is not going to be called democracy, that is going to be a theocracy. And I think there are very strong voices today in the Israeli political system and Israeli intelligentsia still marginal, but very strong calls for that form of politics.

Question

You mentioned that nations have a long history. That is true for the Israelis. In their history wherever they were they were a minority. They were in the best case second class citizens or experienced antisemitism. Therefore the Israelis feel to have a country of their own is the main reason for being there. If it had not been for antisemitism Zionists would have been a tiny majority and would not have had that influence. By the way it was not really the holocaust, it was the people who survived the concentration camps when they came back to Poland, to Romania, they found antisemitism and they were in the DP camps and then went to Israel. It was not the German destruction but it was the antisemitism in the other countries. I cannot imagine that after all that what the Palestinians have suffered from the Israeli they could within one or two generations form a peaceful bi-national state with Israelis. I don't think that's possible, it would require generations. And therefore I think support should be given to a two-state where Israel accepts its responsibility for all that happened to the Palestinians and support the formation of an independent Palestinian state which is economically independent

Question

It's a factual question. I understand you are a research associate at the Van Leer Institute. Why do they sponsor your research?

Question

You had mentioned explicitly the hypocrisy of European policies regarding the policy of the European Union. Last week the ambassador the Czech Republic presented the priorities of the Czech Presidency in the next six months. Of course there was energy, economy, and the role of Europe in the world. And inside the role of Europe in the world was promoting the relationship with Israel. Of course it is only Israel. There was nothing said about Palestine. From your point of view what would you expect from the European Community?

Bashir Bashir

To the question about nations having long histories, and Zionism existing before the holocaust, and my proposal requires generations. Let me start with the nation thing. This is another fiction. One thing is that nationalism is a modern phenomenon. I don't really know whether we really can talk about nations in the time of the Habsburg Empire here or the Ottoman Empire. We were talking about communities. So one of the most spread misunderstanding and misconception that nationalism is not a modern phenomenon. Indeed, it is a very modern phenomenon. The nation state is just a hundred, two hundred years old. It's very new. So nations don't have long histories. This is another fiction in order to build a nation. In that sense nationalism is a very modern phenomenon. And that makes actually the question of the Jews, whether the Jews or the Palestinians were a nation or not. So that fits again into that kind of discussion we were talking about, whether which identity really served as the most constitutive identity to determine. This is one thing. And that is that nationalism actually is a modern phenomenon and actually the nation state is very modern. Zionism indeed was before the holocaust. I think Zionism instrumentalized the holocaust to a very large extent to achieve its goals. And Zionism and the Jewish question does not stem from the holocaust. The Jewish question is intimately linked to anti-Semitism. So it does not mean the Jews were living in heaven in Europe before the holocaust. The Jews were facing a lot of anti-Semitism and persecution even in Europe. But the Jewish communities themselves were at least split in two camps. One camp wanted totally to assimilate and be Germans because they believed in the ideals of modernity and enlightenment. And the other camp wanted a more particularistic form of identity. And here come different schools of thoughts. One of them, a minor voice was Zionist. Others wanted autonomy such as cultural autonomy in Poland and other places. In that sense the history is very complicated vis-à-vis the emergence of the Jewish question vis-à-vis what is

the best answer to the Jewish question. And here there are different views. And Zionism was a voice among many others and actually was a marginal voice to some extent and it gained power as it progressed. But I think the question of the Jewish question if it poses anything and it presents anything in my point of view, and I am telling here as a person who is interested in intellectual thought and history of political thought and political theory, if it says anything it says about how deep in certain dimensions the whole European enlightenment project failed in certain dimension. But that's for another intellectual profound and probably for another talk, not for this talk.

If that requires two generations I am not sure. I am not sure exactly, precisely because of the historical examples that I named. It could be. I am not saying that you are wrong. It could be that it might take generations, but it could take another five years or ten years and we will move in that direction. I don't know. I am saying that the facts on the ground are crying strikingly to bi-national reality. I think we have at least two main options if we want to ignore that. One is the status quo in which we will have another Zionist style that is existing in Palestine today. The status quo will maintain the hegemony of the Jewish Israelis on the Palestinians, their land, and their daily life, and will keep this as the most open air prison on the face of earth, and will keep discriminating Palestinians inside Israel and oppressing Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in different variations according to moods. This is one way. Another way would be to say that Israel wants a Jewish state. To do that it will have to discriminate or to redraw the boundaries of its political entity so that it will have purity. That is a vulgar form of nationalism intimately linked to fascism and Nazism and other forms of vulgar nationalism, and will require ethnic cleansing. These are not considered in my political views because I consider myself to be motivated by different morals and different principles of humanity and liberalism. This is why I want a much more inclusive, and this is why I want to accommodate the Jews in Palestine. The Palestinians are willing to give up 78% of historic Palestine to the state of Israel, and they are willing to do that and sign a contract tomorrow on the remaining 22% of Palestine. This is what the Palestinians are requiring, 22% of historic Palestine. Now the Israelis are offering them 60% of the 22%. This is not going to work. This is going to work only if you kill every single Palestinian on the face of earth.

As for the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute I don't exactly know what is the purpose of your question, whether you want to be informed about the Van Leer Institute or you wonder that I hold this kind of critical political views and I'm employed by them?!

Question

What is the Van Leer Institute?

Bashir Bashir

It's called the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. This is a Jewish family from Holland that donated money and endowment with a lot of money in order to create an institution in Israel that serves the culture, and the politics, and the society in Israel. And these institutions have different directors. This institute include in its members Palestinian professors and intellectuals such as Aziz Haider, Adel Manaa, and myself. But it mostly promotes actually activities related to culture and politics in Israel. They used to have very critical voices including Mizrahi intellectuals such as Yossi Yonah and Yehud Shenhav and even critical Ashkenazi philosophers such as Adi Offer. But there are many other mainstream intellectuals there as well. And actually this Institute today has very mainstream thinking and is much more within the limits of Jewish and democratic state. So in that sense the Institute is not anti-Israeli nor anti-Zionist, it is actually a Zionist institution but gives some manoeuvre and space for other voices to express themselves. I hope it will remain that way and that that voices will increase in order to offer different perspectives in Israel in times of racism and tribalism that is actually increasing in Israel. I hope that it will remain that way. Otherwise I will not stay in there. So it's a selfish interest in addition to other moral, democratic interest. Otherwise I welcome from the Kreisky Forum, a permanent residency, not citizenship.

As for the Czech Republic, this again goes back to the issue of hypocrisy. But I don't want to repeat myself. I want actually to take it to a different important point. And that is how Israel perceives itself, not from the perspective of Europe. You are interested in the perspective of Europe, I respect that, but I think I said enough of that. But let me tell you what I think is problematic about how Israel sees itself vis-à-vis Europe. And here if Israel remains viewing itself as an alien entity and seizes every single opportunity to tell everyone, including its citizens, that it does not belong to its scenery there then that will keep Israel being seen as an alien entity that needs either to be removed

or changed. And here I have my own views. And I think it is very problematic and actually very disastrous if Israel keeps seeing itself as part of the Western civilization. I have no problem that Israel sees very intimate links with the Western civilization, that's good. But I have problems with two things here. One, the so called Judaeo-Christian civilization. This is one of the most provocative concepts that I have heard in the intellectual history ever since I became an academic. What do I mean? Now all of a sudden the Judaeo-Christians are having intimacy in bed. I mean what are we talking about? The Jews have been serving as the ultimate other that is inferior in the history of Christianity and the history of modern Europe. What are we talking about? So let us be fair in depicting that. I always argue intellectually with my Israeli colleagues what are we talking about here? What is Judaeo-Christians? Actually if the Jews need to find hope they will have to find hope not only in their intimate links with Europe that has positive sides and negative sides. They will have as well to see the very interesting and actually more positive links with the Islamic world in the Middle East. This is one. Another thing, I think it is about time, and Israel has all the intellectual and human resources in order to integrate in the Middle East. And here the Palestinians, and me, and others, and the Arabs are offering the most generous offer for the state of Israel to integrate in the region. Israel can integrate in the region because of at least two reasons. A) because it has a very strong population that belongs to that part of the world, and it's very unfortunate that this population was subject to systematic assimilation and oppressive methods in which they are made forgetting by force their culture, their belonging to Iraq, to Iran, to Syria, to Lebanon, and many other places, Yemen, Algeria, that's very unfortunate. There are human resources. And I don't deny that in a certain point these Arab Jews or these Jews that come from Arab countries were subject to discrimination in these Arab countries, I am not saying that. But they were not subjected to anti-Semitism like in Europe. And there were golden times in history. Israel can build on that in order to facilitate its integration in that piece of land, in order not to be an alien entity, but to be part of that, of the Middle East.

One last thing, I think Israel would miss another opportunity. For the first time in the history of the conflict the whole entire Arab world came together to put an initiative that is called the Saudi Initiative in 2002 and offered Israel the following. Full collective recognition of the state of Israel within the boundaries of 1948, full normalization with the state of Israel by the whole entire Arab world, an agreed solution to the right of the Palestinian refugees to return in Israel. If Israel doesn't agree to this solution there is no solution. So Israel must agree and has to agree. In exchange of what? In exchange of Israel withdrawing to the boundary of 1967. These boundaries, i.e. Israel withdrawing from the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. This is all what the Arabs are demanding and this is something that is supported by the international community, international law, UN resolutions. What is Israel doing? The time the Arab initiative came out in the public, Israel actually was seizing Arafat and suffocating him to death, and they were making incursions in the West Bank in which they destroyed infrastructure, in which they weakened the PA, and now they are doing exactly the same to Gaza under the name of attacking Hamas. Here another form of hypocrisy. So if you would have been interested in a moderate Palestinian leadership you have the most moderate Palestinian leadership in the history of the conflict manifested primarily in the last three years with Abu Mazen. What have you done to Abu Mazen? If your pretext is Hamas then what have you done to the most moderate Palestinian leadership? Did you remove one blockade? Did you remove one checkpoint? Did you stop the expansion of the settlements in the West Bank? Did you open the offices of the Palestinian NGOs in East Jerusalem? Did you stop entering into the Palestinian territory? Did you stop detaining Palestinians on a daily basis in the West Bank? No. So I think Israel has a golden opportunity in which the whole entire Arab world is proposing acceptance and they are not demanding from them to get back to the 78% of Palestine. The Arabs are offering Israel 78% of Palestine and demand only 22%, in exchange of recognition, normalization, agreed solution to the right of the Palestinian refugees. So what is Israel doing? Total ignorance of that, total denial of that. Only in the last year or so they say, maybe we should consider this. But what do they do in actuality? Literally nothing, keeping ignoring that. That is the most dangerous form of politics because it will face, soon it is facing. I argue that it is facing. Others say it will face. I say it's facing that the two-state solution is not viable any more. I think the two-state solution is not viable. And I tried to demonstrate here that it is not viable not only because of facts on the ground, I think it's not viable because of desirable normative and justice considerations. But I accept that I am idealist here. So what about those who are pragmatics? If Israel keeps on with the settlement project what will the Palestinians do? Will the Palestinians accept Bantustans or a Swiss cheese form of state connected with tunnels and bridges? They will not accept that. So there is a golden opportunity for Israel to be accepted in the region, but they are not exploiting that.

Isolde Charim

Thank you very much for coming, thank you Bashir Bashir.