

BARREÑADA, Isaías and ABU TARBUSH, José. *Palestine. From the Oslo Accords to Apartheid*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2023, 176 pp.

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Understanding the infinite implications, the myriad centripetal circumstances, and the multifaceted aspects that compose the narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the various and equidistant narrative conjugations that historically have been made of it, understandably requires exhaustive study and dedication. Only through meticulous and rigorous knowledge can the intellectually stimulated and emotionally moved citizen approach the particular paradigm of the Middle East, devoid of misinformation, bias, and speculative tendencies.

The new publication by Doctors Barreñada and Tarbush coincides with a historical moment that further justifies the suitability, timeliness, and valuable contributory nature of an academic production capable of shedding light on a narrative as media-driven as it is uninformed; a story as captivating as it is manipulated; a conflict, ultimately, deeply rooted in a land and in two peoples, condemned to violence, destruction, hatred, intolerance, and segregation. But what have truly been the historical-political circumstances that led to the massacre on October 7 and a new all-out war? What have been the endogenous flaws of a historical process aimed at seeking a negotiated solution to the conflict? What can be expected from an ideology that, when deconstructed in a timely manner, forms the rich substrate that feeds the very soul of the conflict?

Coinciding with the thirtieth anniversary of the start of the “peace process” in Oslo, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the outbreak of the “Nakba,” and simultaneously with the horror that unfolds daily with increasing intensity in the land of Historical Palestine, *“From the Oslo Accords to Apartheid”* stands as an essential academic contribution to draw attention to the inextricable gravity of the events surrounding a process condemned from the outset; afflicted by partiality and the disruption of political symmetry, leading to a destruction of the other based on profound misunderstanding.

The rich work of both Dr. Barreñada and Dr. Abu Tarbush draws from a deeply informed knowledge of the subject matter; from a prolonged and detailed study; from a scholarly and erudite approach to the multifaceted paradigm of the Middle East. This scholarly authority converges in an academically significant work that explores issues of utmost relevance for both specialists and those intellectually interested in delving into the complexities of an incomprehensible conflict. It should be emphasized, however, that, notwithstanding the academic rigor expected from it, the work does carry a subjectivity, that while not overshadowing the truth of the facts presented, does recommend a diligent cross-referencing with other publications that explore reality from different perspectives. The historiographical debate deserves diligent enrichment, based not so much on the contrast of the facts presented but on the ideas that serve to weave them together.

The so-called “peace process”, aimed at establishing a conclusive end to the horror unleashed since 1948 in the land of “Historical Palestine”, has traditionally been considered initiated with the bilateral and initially secret talks that took place in Oslo in 1993. This precise historical moment would be seen as a milestone, a genuine achievement deserving of international acclaim: a real step towards the long-awaited peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Precisely one of the reasons for this reverential recognition is the groundbreaking, modern, and advanced nature of the process; for the first time, the involved parties seemed to demonstrate sufficient willingness to sit at the negotiating table. In practice, this meant the necessary acceptance of a series of concessions that constituted a blatant affront to the mythical and nationalist narratives of both sides.

For decades, two planes of approach to Oslo have coexisted in the historiographical academic debate, and although there have certainly been cases where both perspectives have harmoniously coexisted, overlapping in the narrative the virtues and shortcomings of this process, it is equally true that most of the time, this debate has been fueled by very contrasting considerations regarding the spirit that guided the diplomatic approach. *“Palestina. De los acuerdos de Oslo al apartheid”* proposes a deconstruction, not so much of the substantive implications of Oslo for and within the entire process, but rather of the ideological roots of the Israeli side: a radical ideological approach that was originally and essentially the main obstacle for Oslo to become a valid diplomatic initiative.

From a structural standpoint, the publication, comprising seven chapters, plus annexes and a well-nourished reference *corpus*, adopts a narrative format devoid of linear continuity. This allows circumnavigation of converging processes based on scattered chronologies, facilitating comprehensive assimilation and timely comparison. In particular, this narrative presents us with, rather than the factual extract of a given chronology, a sort of panoramic view that begins in Oslo and navigates through the endemic impossibilities of achieving peace within a regime dominated by an “ethnocentric and segregationist ideology”. The inclusion of the term “*apartheid*” in the title should not mislead the reader: the work does not present a comparative study of Palestinian and South African phenomenologies; it does not contrast or expose both models to deconstruct their similarities or differences. What the book proposes is the direct assimilation of this concept into Israeli policy deployed towards the Palestinian population, as a basic instrument of a colonial strategy founded on principles of ethnic cleansing, racial segregation, dispossession, and transfer.

Thus, the first chapter paints a general portrait aimed at consolidating the cognitive foundations of the conflict itself, simultaneously drawing attention to a series of basic concepts to understand the Oslo Agreement and formulating the driving premise that will guide the narrative: “Why has peace failed?”; A question that will begin to be answered from the second chapter itself, accumulating empirical and convergent answers throughout the following pages.

In the authors’ view, the peace process itself was built on asymmetrical foundations. They argue that in the very architecture of the diplomatic process, explanatory hints of its endemic diseased nature, can be found. Indeed, the approach to the negotiations was tainted by what they define as a “total lack of reciprocity”: Israel entered the process under the auspices of its supremacy, imposing vague formulas aimed at circumventing the applicability of UN resolutions. This was further confirmed by the paradoxical dichotomy observed on the ground, where Israel consolidated a colonial strategy capable of thwarting any aspiration for Palestine’s self-determination, a revealing attitude in itself of the internal ruptures and divisions within the process.

The third chapter subtly breaks the narrative line and delves with particular emphasis into the exceptional nature of the Palestinian issue: specifically, the Palestinians’ thwarted attempts to establish an independent, sovereign state, one that is self-contained and free from external influences. In it, the authors also outline some brief notes on economic issues, never at any point confusing the disciplines. What they seek to do is draw attention to the “liberal approach” given to the construction of peace in Oslo. An approach that ultimately fostered a political-economic situation aimed at consolidating Israeli colonial dynamics and Palestinian dependence on the “*metropoli*”.

From the fourth chapter onwards, the work engages in an immersive exploration of the ideological intricacies of Zionism, theorizing that it was – and continues to be – precisely these intricacies that explain the entropy of the process. In particular, the work presents the Israeli paradigm as the outcome of an ideological program evolving towards radicalization – something that even generates internal dissent – opening thus a debate that proposes two hypotheses:

- a) The current radical drift is the natural evolution of a Zionist project undergoing logical historical transformations.
- b) The “ethnocratic” nature of the State of Israel is now reaching its maximum expression, with Zionism being a theoretical construct that legitimizes a fundamentally segregational and imperialistic project.

To inform the debate, the subsequent chapter traces back to the very birth of Zionism in the late 19th century, invoking the ideological circumstances that nurtured its germination and have fueled a series of policies that historiography assimilates into the paradigmatic casuistry called “*settler colonialism*.” At this point, the influence of the so-called “New Historians of Israel” is evident in the construction of this book. In that sense, it is essential to draw attention to the singular influence that Ilan Pappé’s work has had in enriching the reviewed text, given that they share a common theoretical substrate (particularly: Pappé, 2017¹). The book relies significantly on the ideas presented by the author, particularly concerning the paradigm of “*settler colonialism*,” the theory of the continuity of the Nakba, and the model implemented in Gaza as an “*open-air prison*”.

The final sections of the publication present a series of issues more aligned with current events than with the historical construction of the process; in particular, explore the geostrategic context in which the conflict is currently embedded, with an emphatic focus on Israel’s stance toward this context. The shift in the global international political landscape, leading to a certain displacement of the United States from its historical role as an uncontested hegemony, has prompted Israel to turn its attention to new powers, intending to seek their support and protection. To this end, Israel has entered into a series of pacts and alliances with economically influential Arab countries. This dynamic has created a deeper rift in the Arab world and the Middle East, given the differential strategy supported by Israel’s fragmented regional policies.

In conclusion, the work aims to draw attention to a series of historical evidences that, interconnected in the light of hindsight with core ideological tenets of the State of Israel, allow the unveiling of causations ultimately explaining why the peace process failed. In the pursuit of such a premise, the book conducts a diligent exploratory exercise providing a broad, albeit aprioristic, perspective on the phenomenology of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Zionist ideological bias hindering its peaceful resolution. An essential read to grasp a fundamental part of the historical explanation for the continuity of a heartbreaking conflict.

1 Ilán Pappé, *La cárcel más grande de la tierra: Una historia de los territorios ocupados* (Madrid: Capitán Swing, 2017).