

## **Meron Benvenistis Botschaft an die Israelis: „Hört auf zu greinen“**

Meron Benvenist ist einer der großen Querdenker in der politischen intellektuellen Szene Israels. 1934 als Sohn eines landesweit bekannten und politisch rechts stehenden Geographen in Rosh Hanikra an der Grenze zum Libanon geboren, befasste er sich während des Studiums an der Hebräischen Universität in Jerusalem mit der Geschichte der Kreuzfahrer, arbeitete zwischen 1971 und 1978 als Leiter des Planungsstabs mit dem damaligen Jerusalemer Bürgermeister Teddy Kollek zusammen, promovierte in Harvard mit einer Arbeit über Konfliktmanagement und baute 1984 mit geringen Fördergeldern das „West Bank Data Project“ auf, mit dem er die politische Unumkehrbarkeit der Siedlungspolitik zu begründen suchte. Seit den 1990er Jahren arbeitet Benvenisti als freier Publizist, als Buchautor, als Dozent und als Gastprofessor in Israel und in den USA. Er räumt ein, dass er an schweren Fehlern zu Lasten der Palästinenser beteiligt gewesen war, so in Tel Aviv und bei der Entfernung von 160 arabischen Familien aus dem Mughrabi-Viertel, um den riesigen Platz vor der „Klagemauer“ anzulegen.

Übersetzt in die englische Sprache liegen folgende Publikationen und Bücher vor: „The West Bank Handbook. A Political Lexicon“ (with Ziad Abu Zayed and Danny Rubinstein, Jerusalem 1986), „Intimate Enemies. Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land“ (Berkeley et al. 1995), „City of Stone. The Hidden History of Jerusalem“ (Berkeley et al. 1996) und „Sacred Landscape. The Buried History of the Holy Land Since 1948“ (Berkeley et al. 2000). Benvenistis jüngstes Buch „Der Traum eines weißen Sabra. Autobiographie der Desillusionierung“ (Keter Publishing House 2012) ist bislang nur in hebräischer Sprache erschienen.

Im vorliegenden Interview mit den einflussreichen Publizisten Ari Shavit rechnet Benvenisti mit all denjenigen ab, die sich aus ideologischen und/oder lieb gewordenen politischen Gründen weigern, der Realität ins Auge zu sehen: dass die Zwei-Staaten-Lösung grundlegend gescheitert sei. Nachdem er eine Gleichsetzung Israels mit der südafrikanischen „Apartheid“ verworfen hat, kommt er zu dem Schluss, dass die Teilung des Landes geographisch, physisch und psychologisch unmöglich sei. Denn die Araber würden Jaffa und Akko nicht vergessen, während für die Juden das Land Israel eine Einheit bilde. Wie die Beispiele Spanien, Kanada und Belgien zeigten, würden die binationalen Strukturen auseinanderfallen.

*„Glauben Sie, dass ausgerechnet im Nahen Osten jüdische Fanatiker und palästinensische Fanatiker unter einem Dach leben wollen?“*

Das Land könne keine Teilung vertragen, es leide, es sei zornig. Die Berge würden um der Trennungswand willen zerschnitten, das Herz weine im Namen des Bodens.

An die Stelle des überholten Zwei-Staaten-Paradigma will Benvenisti *„ein alternatives Paradigma der Ebenbürtigkeit der Ehre“* setzen. Beide nationale Gemeinschaften seien integraler Teil des Landes. Nachdem nach 1948 die israelische Regierung Landenteignungen vorgenommen habe sowie für die ungleiche Verteilung öffentlicher Mittel und für den Fortgang von Organisationen wie den Jüdischen Nationalfond [„Keren Kayemet le-Israel“, KKL] und die „Jewish Agency“ gesorgt habe, deren Dienste nur Juden zugutegekommen seien, habe das Jahr 1967 einen Quantensprung gebracht: Es ging nicht mehr um die Judaisierung Galiläas, sondern um *„den Vollzug einer wilden Politik der Enteignung jenseits der Grünen Linie“*. Nicht

Yossi Beilin<sup>1</sup> habe den Prozess von Oslo gestaltet, sondern Oslo habe die Chance geboten, die Besatzung indirekt und dienlich fortzusetzen. Erst habe Israel gegen die Araber gebaut, doch danach haben die Araber damit begonnen, gegen Israel zu bauen.

*„Sie sind nicht besser als wir. Wir haben den Boden vergewaltigt, und sie haben den Boden vergewaltigt, und nun ist der Boden verletzt. Doch ich weiß, dass am Ende der Boden uns auslachen wird: weil wir nicht ohne ihn und er nicht ohne uns existieren kann. ... Wir haben die palästinensische Landschaft zerstört, haben nach den Resten von Herodes und König David gebuddelt, um unsere Existenz zu rechtfertigen, und herausgekommen sind wir mit einer Landschaft aus Asphalt und Einkaufszentren, die nicht einmal wir mögen.“*

Die Gesetzesbrecher in Judäa und Samaria sollten hinausgeworfen werden. Das volle Recht solle allen zugutekommen, den jüdischen Siedlern und den Palästinensern. So wie die Siedler dort leben, müssten die Araber hier in ihre Dörfer zurückkehren können. 140 palästinensische Dörfer in Israel seien zu Naturschutzgebieten und Nationalparks umgewandelt worden. Wenn der gemeinsame Staat nicht wünschenswert sei, müsse eine neue Struktur gefunden werden, in der es weder einen jüdischen noch einen palästinensischen Nationalstaat gebe, sondern einen Rahmen, in dem beide Völker auf der Basis der Ebenbürtigkeit auf der Suche nach vernünftiger Ausgewogenheit miteinander streiten.

Er, Benvenisti, sei nicht mehr bereit, den Liberalen mit ihren plumpen Phrasen von Frieden, Besatzung und Grüner Linie zu folgen, die ihnen das gute Gefühl verschaffen würden, für das Unrecht, für die Enteignung und für die schrecklichen Taten dieses Landes nicht

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<sup>1</sup> Yossi Beilin war damals für Außenminister Shimon Peres als dessen Stellvertreter Verhandlungsführer mit der palästinensischen Delegation unter Leitung von Achmed Qurea („Abu Ala“).

verantwortlich zu sein. Er sei nicht David Grossman, der in seinem Buch „Der Gelbe Wind“ wie Captain Cook das Leben von Eingeborenen in einem fernen Land beschreibe. Er sei nicht Ze'ev Sternhell<sup>2</sup>, der ständig auf die Ankunft eines Deus ex machina in Gestalt von Barack Obama warte, damit dieser Israel zu einem Frieden zwingt, den es nicht wolle. Doch weil er, Benvenisti, das Land liebe, das trotz alledem lebendig und munter sei, verwehre er sich gegen das Greinen der orientalischen Juden und der weißen Alt-Israelis.

### **Jerusalem-born thinker Meron Benvenisti has a message to Israelis: Stop whining**

#### **Interview mit Ari Shavit in „Haaretz“, 11. Oktober 2012<sup>3</sup>**

Meron Benvenisti was my first editor. At the beginning of the 1980s, Ariel Sharon established more than 100 settlements in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. At the beginning of the 1980s, Meron Benvenisti founded a Jerusalem-based information center to monitor the settlements Sharon established. At the beginning of the 1980s, I was a very young, very enthusiastic young volunteer in Peace Now, which thought (rightly) that the settlements Sharon was establishing and that Benvenisti was monitoring were going to lead Israel to perdition. Thus I found myself working for the tempestuous Meron.

In a small apartment on the edge of Jerusalem's Rehavia neighborhood, he would roar in a booming voice while I documented every new settlement in the territories, every new road in the territories, every industrial zone. He would shout and rant while I noted a land expropriation and another land expropriation and yet another land expropriation. The country's leading journalists came and went. And the leading American journalists came and went and foreign embassies requested information, whose compilation was funded (barely) by foreign foundations. But after the melee subsided, I cast my gaze on the man who caused a media storm by claiming

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<sup>2</sup> Emeritierter Professor für Politische Wissenschaften an der Hebräischen Universität in Jerusalem und häufiger Gastautor in „Haaretz“.

<sup>3</sup> In der hebräischsprachigen Ausgabe von „Haaretz“ ist das Interview mit dem Titel „Meron Benvenisti: Hier wird es keine zwei Staaten geben“ am 04.10.2013 erschienen.

that the occupation was irreversible. An overgrown boy, I said to myself. An overgrown – and delightful – boy.

He was born in 1934 in Jerusalem, went to a kibbutz (Rosh Hanikra) for self-fulfillment and left the kibbutz. He studied at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (history of the Crusades), and left the Hebrew University. He joined Teddy Kollek (Tourism Ministry, Jerusalem Municipality), and left Teddy Kollek. After he ceased to be deputy mayor of the city and after failing to enter the Knesset, he went to Harvard and earned a Ph.D. in conflict management and founded the West Bank Data Base Project in Jerusalem, to document the establishment of the settlements. Between and between, Benvenisti wrote books about the Crusaders, about Jerusalem, about the conflict and about cemeteries. For 18 years he wrote a column in this newspaper. He now divides his time between Caesarea and the city in which he was born, where he will be buried and for which he grieves.

I plead guilty to having a weakness for Meron. I love his volcanic temperament and I love his authenticity and his unbearability. I love his sabra quality and his earthiness, and I love the intensity of his tragic romanticism. Benvenisti is not only an out-of-the-box person; he is an out-of-the-system, out-of-the-mold, out-of-every-convention person. Being irresponsible, immature and unrestrained, he does not feel a commitment to any solution or any stream of thought. Being all chutzpah and provocation and quarrelsomeness, he does not belong to any group. But it's precisely that lone-wolf intellectual wildness that makes him so fascinating. Serious and not serious, logical and illogical, Meron Benvenisti contains within him all the contradictions and all the vicissitudes and all the irreconcilables of the land with which he is engaged in a relentless wrestling match.

It has been 10 years since we last met. The man who opens the door for me is older and less healthy than the man I knew. After two major heart operations, he is thinner, softer and a bit more conciliatory. When I enter, he does not tell me what he thinks about my articles and my path and my worldview. Instead, he gives me a gift: a short letter written in a refined hand that my mother's aunt wrote to his father in the village of Zichron Yaakov 92 years ago. Surprisingly, this delicate letter is what opens the subversive autobiography ("The Dream of the White Sabra," 2012, Hebrew) of the subversive Zionist I have come to listen to. Because, when all is said and done, what's important for this subversive Zionist to say is that he is from here. From within. From this land. From the guts of the story against which he rails.

*What is it you are saying, Meron? That we are South Africa? That we are white settlers like the Boers and are suppressing the natives like the Boers and that we are doomed to collapse like the Boers?*

The comparison to South Africa is wrongheaded, simplistic and dangerous. There was something there which does not exist here: biological racism. The whites there were only 17 percent, and the blacks 83 percent. But on the other hand, the whites and the blacks shared the same religion and lived with one another and the blacks were not expelled. So, I do not accept the allegation that Israel is an apartheid state. Even what is happening in the territories is not exactly apartheid. But what is taking shape here is no less grave. This is a master-nation democracy; in German, a "Herrenvolk democracy." We are a country that behaves like a full-blooded democracy, but we have a group of serfs – the Arabs – to whom we do not apply democracy. The result is a situation of extreme inequality.

There is a society here of settlers who dispossess others by seizing their place and pushing them out and creating a unilateral power system of migrant rule. That system cannot survive. Ultimately, the good Israelis will not be able to sustain the tension between their liberal values and the brutality of the reality amid which they live. They will leave. They are already starting to leave. Therefore, what's needed is a transition to a different paradigm. The Jewish nation-state is doomed. It will implode. In the end, the only way to live here will be to create an equality of respect between us and the Palestinians. To recognize the fact that there are two national communities here which love this land and whose obligation is to channel the unavoidable conflict between them into a process of dialogue for life together.

*Just a minute. You are saying more than I can take in. I have no argument with you about the settlements and the settlers. But that is exactly why the solution of two states for two nations was devised. That is exactly the reason that the majority of Israelis are ready for a partition solution. It will take time, it will be hard, but in the end we will have a Jewish-democratic nation-state here and they will have a Palestinian nation-state there. That is the way, it is the only way.*

It is time for you and your friends in Tel Aviv to understand: it is impossible to divide this land. Impossible. You cannot tell the Arabs to forget about Jaffa and Acre. They will not forget. And you cannot get any Palestinian to sign off on "the end of the conflict." They will not sign. And the Green Line, which was the great alibi of the left, no longer exists. The Green Line is dead. The separation fence: that is truly apartheid. Separation is apartheid. Tel Avivians don't want to understand this, but the Land of Israel is whole. It is a single geopolitical unit. It follows that the partition of the land is impossible. It is as impossible geographically and physically as it is psychologically. What's impossible is the solution you are proposing. Even in Spain and Canada and Belgium, the binational structures are breaking up and falling apart. So, do you expect that in the Middle

East, of all places, the Jewish fanatics and the Palestinian fanatics will be able to live under one roof?

*You're dreaming, Meron. You are more divorced from reality than any Tel Aviv leftie.*

First of all, I am not proposing solutions. That is not my job. I am saying that the dominant paradigm is a lie, and I am fighting it. I am proposing an alternative paradigm of equality with honor. I am bringing a different terminology and a different way of looking at reality; because the "villa in the jungle" approach won't work. If you bring about a coerced and unjust division, you will end up with a Palestinian state that is crippled, hurting and angry, which will turn violent. The right wing is correct about that. You saw what happened in Gaza. The disengagement solved nothing and brought Hamas to power. And in the future, you are liable to get something worse than Hamas in the West Bank. That is why division is not a solution to the problem – it is an exacerbation of the problem. It's true that the Middle East is not a comfortable place. But you came to live in the Middle East. So, what will you say now: "Sorry, it was a mistake, so pack your bags and leave"?

I am not about to pack my bags and leave. I do not have a foreign passport and I will not have one. I am a native son. I am native-born. I am from here. That is why I know that two national communities emerged in this land, both of which are an integral part of it. There are two national communities here that live together in the same place, one within the other. In this situation, partition is not an option. There was a time when it was possible, but no longer. This country is a shared land, a single homeland.

*Fine, I get it. Now let's go back. To the bedrock. Was Zionism born in sin?*

Zionism was not born in sin, but in illusion. The illusion was that we are coming to a land in which there are no Arabs. And when we figured it out, we pulverized the country's Arabs into five different groups: the Arabs of Israel, the Arabs of Gaza, the Arabs of the West Bank, the Arabs of Jerusalem and the refugee Arabs. We succeeded in creating a divide-and-rule system that made it possible for us to rule them and to preserve hegemonic power between the Mediterranean and the Jordan.

I do not want to say that Zionism is racist, but a constellation of traits developed here that is generally identified with racism, albeit without the biological element. We are imbued with a combination of hatred for the goy, which we inherited from our forebears, and hatred for the other whom we encountered here. The result is what we see today. Among a large segment of the public, there is an element of racism vis-a-vis the Arabs, but I would not categorize us all as racists. I

would say that what characterizes us collectively is ethnic hatred, ethnic recoil, ethnic contempt and ethnic patronizing. Instead of progress, Zionism brought reaction. It became a movement of dispossession based on nonuniversal, non-egalitarian values.

*When did this deviation by Zionism occur – in 1967 or in 1948?*

In June 1948. How so? Because that was when state institutions were created here that were supposed to operate according to universal values. That was the moment at which the Zionist revolution was supposed to stop behaving by means of revolutionary force and bring into being a normal Western state. But [David] Ben-Gurion, who until that moment was the head of an ethnic group, did not internalize the fact that he was no longer the head of an ethnic group. He transformed the nascent state into the continuer of the ethnic struggle. Thus, the Arabs who remained within the boundaries of the state were immediately subjected to ethnic discrimination. Discrimination was institutionalized by means of the Military Government, land expropriations, budgetary inequality and the continued existence of organizations such as the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Agency, which served only Jews.

But in 1967, that distorted situation, which was implicit in the state, underwent a quantum leap. Now it was no longer the Judaization of Galilee but the implementation of a wild policy of dispossession across the Green Line. Seizure of land, settlements, bypass roads: the creation of a declared situation of one law for Jews and another law for Palestinians. Oslo was a purported attempt to stop the rampant situation. There was mutual recognition between the nations, which is important. But in practice, it turned out that it was not Yossi Beilin who shaped the process but those who saw in Oslo an opportunity to continue the occupation indirectly and conveniently. Thus, a neocolonialist situation was created in the territories. We enjoy maintaining a captive market there which enriches us all.

At present we are talking about 350,000 settlers; or, if you also take Jerusalem into account, 550,000 settlers. So, everyone now understands what I said 30 years ago: it is irreversible. Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni can say whatever they like – it is irreversible. There is no way out of this mess.

Zionism, which did not undergo a metamorphosis in 1948 and did not desist in 1967, became a kind of revolution-in-progress and thereby became like the other revolutions-in-progress of the 20th century. It forged a situation that a liberal democrat cannot live with and cannot accept. This is a situation that cannot endure indefinitely.

*I will tell you where you differ from the Zionist left. For most of us, the key concept is the "State of Israel." As we see it, the Zionist enterprise was intended to bring into being a place where the Jewish*



*people would constitute the majority and enjoy sovereignty. If there is no majority, there is no sovereignty and no democratic-Jewish state; there is no point to all this. It's more convenient to live as a minority in Manhattan. But for you the basic concept is the "Land of Israel." In that sense, you resemble the right wing and the Palestinians. You have a soil fetish. You come from the soil and you live the soil and you speak in the name of the soil.*

It's true that I live the story of the soil. I live the whole land and I am mindful of all the people who live here. That is how I know that the land cannot tolerate partition. And I know the land is hurting. The land is angry. After all, what two great monuments have we built here in the past decade? One is the separation fence and the other is [architect Moshe] Safdie's terminal at Ben-Gurion Airport. The two monuments have something in common: they are intended to allow us to live here as though we are not here. They were built so that we would not see the land and not see the Palestinians, and live as though we are connected to the tail end of Italy. But I see all the fruit groves that were demolished in order to build the fence. I hear the hills that were sliced in two in order to build the fence. The heart weeps. The heart weeps in the name of the soil. For me, the soil is a living being. And I see how this conflict has tortured the soil, the homeland. I grieve for the torments of the homeland.

For years, we built against the Arabs. We dried the Hula Valley and we wrecked Jerusalem and we tore apart Judea and Samaria. But afterward, the Arabs started to build against us. They are no better than we are. We raped the soil and they raped the soil, and now the soil is violated. But I know that in the end it will be the soil that laughs at us: because we cannot exist without it and it cannot exist without us.

In the past, there were so many nations that thought they had succeeded in wresting control of the land. None of those nations was willing to share the land; they wanted the land for themselves and tried to seize it the way you seize a mare. But that noble untamed stallion shook them all off. The point is that if you want to live here, you cannot live alone and you cannot live without listening to the soil. You need to know that the soil breathes and the soil remembers. If you do not understand that, you are not truly a native son. Not truly a native. Your place is not here.

*Now we have reached the heart of the matter: nativism. You have a nativist obsession, Meron. And I must tell you that there is something dangerous about your worship of the soil and your admiration for the natives, something undemocratic and illiberal and unenlightened. Why this contempt for migrants? What is the justification for rejecting those who seek a haven here? I discern in you a hidden preference for the Palestinian story over the Israeli story because you are enthralled by the fact that the Palestinians are natives here.*

I am drawn to the Arabs. I love their culture, their language, their approach to the land. Our love of the land is an acquired love. Look at the heritage project of [Education Minister] Gideon Sa'ar and [cabinet secretary] Zvika Hauser: it is kitsch. First we defined some sort of theoretical Land of Israel and then we fell in love with the concept, and then we destroyed everything that did not fit the concept. We destroyed the Palestinian landscape, dug to find the remnants of Herod and King David in order to justify our existence, and we came up with a landscape of asphalt and malls that even we do not like. "Man is a tree in the field" – that is not us. Our love of the land is a love that we imposed on the land and foisted on the land. With the Arabs, it is the opposite. Their love for the land truly sprang from the soil. Love of the fig, of the tree, of the house.

It's true that we have managed to mess them up, too. They are doing terrible things in Ramallah. But I love their love of the homeland. I love what [Palestinian national poet] Mahmoud Darwish writes about it and what [Israeli writer] S. Yizhar writes about it. I see a great closeness between [Mahmoud] Darwish and Yizhar. And I believe in a future in which the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Darwish and Yizhar live together. Because, as Yizhar wrote: Deep down, the soil does not forget. Only those who are capable of listening to the unforgetting silence of this tormented soil, from which everyone begins and to which everyone returns, Jews and Arabs, has the right to call it homeland. I believe in that with all my heart. In my perception, anyone who does not believe it is not a Zionist.

*After everything you have said here, about the masters and the dispossessors and the suppressors, do you still consider yourself a Zionist? Is there such a thing as a Zionist who is against the Jewish nation-state? Is there such a thing as a Zionist who is in favor of a binational state?*

Look, despite everything, Zionism is a success. It created a Jewish national community here that is alive and kicking. It forged a Jewish-Israeli nation that was not here. That's why everyone wants to be a Zionist – to be part of the success. And I will not give all kinds of Revisionists and Likudniks the pleasure of saying that they are Zionists and I am not. In my view, the Revisionists and the Likudniks are good only in verbiage. They're all talk. Look at this prime minister: All he knows how to do is spout verbiage. To go to the United Nations and speak excellent English and show some ridiculous drawing. In this matter he is totally his father's son. With them it's all verbiage. With them there is no coping with real life. And it disturbs me deeply that these Likudniks were able to transform the tremendous project of the working Land of Israel into something flawed.

Because, despite all my criticism, I am very proud of my kibbutz past. I am very proud of the United Kibbutz Movement and of socialism, and of everything we succeeded in doing. I am thrilled to hear the “Internationale” and to sing the “Internationale.” What were the Revisionists, after all? A few thousand breakaways who purport to claim that they expelled the British. The only thing they were good at is talk. Only talk.

And it's the same with the Mizrahim [Jews of Middle Eastern or North African descent]. I do not accept all this Mizrahi whining. Because, what would the Mizrahim have done if we had not been here to take them in? What would they be worth? What would have happened to them if we had not created the Israeliness to which they connected and turned into some sort of cartoon? If it had not been for us, the Mizrahim would have remained a potpourri of migrant cultures. True, we made plenty of mistakes. But we made a heroic decision to take them all in. And by that decision we effectively committed suicide. Our Hebrew-Israeli culture dissolved under the flood of immigration. That is why we now have Likud governments and constantly hear Mizrahi whining. But I do not accept either the one or the other. I am proud of being a white sabra. And I will not allow anyone to expel me from the Zionist camp. I am one of the founders of this place. I am from the Zionist Mayflower. I will not allow anyone to treat me as a non-Zionist.

*So, on the one hand you are a Zionist, but on the other hand you want full justice and full equality for the Palestinians. How does that work in the real world? Do you evacuate settlements or not? Do you take in refugees or not? Do you accept the right of return or reject it?*

The settlements are of no interest to me. Lawbreakers should be expelled. The rule that should be applied in Judea and Samaria is full equality between the Jewish settlers and the Palestinians. After 45 years it is no longer possible to hide behind the term “military occupation.” There is no such thing as military occupation that is not temporary. But in the same degree that the settlers live there, the Arabs have to return to their villages here. There are 140 Palestinian villages inside the State of Israel on which no communities were built but were turned into nature reserves and national parks. Some of them, at least, can be rebuilt.

The people of Ikrit and [Kafr] Bir'im [in Upper Galilee] have to be allowed to return to their lands. There is no justification for Kibbutz Baram to occupy so much pastureland. The Palestinians have to be allowed to pray in the abandoned mosques. And every time people make billions from lands that belonged to Arabs, a certain percentage should go for the refugees. The Palestinians should be given a share of the profits that are raked in when all those huge malls are built on lands of kibbutzim and moshavim [cooperative villages]. And certainly the quarter of a million “present absentees”

who live in Israel should be given their rights: to build a home, be hooked up to the power grid, not to have to live in “unrecognized villages.”

Don't be so frightened of the Palestinian villages and mosques that I am talking about. There is no cause for the demographic fear. Most of the refugees don't even want to return. We need to break down the highly charged question of the right of return into a series of acts of conciliation that address the trauma and move toward some sort of more equitable arrangement. I do not believe that it will be possible to live in one state according to the principle of one person-one vote. If so, the side that gets a majority will exploit its majority to seize the power centers and suppress the other side. We need to find a structure that will not be either a Jewish nation-state or a Palestinian nation-state, but a shared framework in which the two nations will go on squabbling – but on a foundation of equality. A foundation that consists of my acknowledgment of their story and their acknowledgment of my story, with an attempt to find some sort of reasonable balance between the two.

*When did all this happen to you? After all, your father was one of the first of the Zionist educators who taught local geography [in Hebrew: “knowledge of the land”] and preached love of the land. You were a student leader of Mapai, the ruling party at the time and the forerunner of today's Labor Party. The deputy of Teddy Kollek and one of the unifiers of Jerusalem. When did you suddenly cut yourself off from the umbilical cord of the Zionist establishment and become an anomalous figure who promotes weird ideas that infuriate both the right and the left?*

The subtitle of my book is “An autobiography of disillusionment.” And that is exactly what it is. I went through an interesting process. My father wanted me to be one of the cornerstones of this country. He wanted the small soles of the feet of his son to touch this soil and no other. He tried to forge in me – and in many thousands of others whom he taught – a feeling of absolute belonging to the Land of Israel. And he succeeded. That is why I went to Kibbutz Rosh Hanikra in the 1950s and experienced the transcendent feeling of working in the banana groves – without noticing that in order to plant the banana trees, I was uprooting olive trees, thousands of years old, of a Palestinian village.

That is why in the 1960s I bribed Arabs to remove hundreds of graves from the Muslim cemetery on the Tel Aviv shore so that it would be possible to clear the land on which the Hilton now stands. After the Six-Day War, I was with Teddy [Kollek] and “Chich” [Maj. Gen. Shlomo Lahat, afterward mayor of Tel Aviv] when we decided together to remove the 106 families of the Mughrabi neighborhood to create the large plaza of the Western Wall. I remember to this day

the bulldozers and the clouds of dust that rose into the air and the old woman who was buried under one of the houses.

In all those cases and during that whole period I was a go-getter. I did not understand the meaning of what I was doing. But when I started to deal with the Arabs of East Jerusalem, I began to understand. I saw that the problem is not only the individual rights of the Palestinians but also their collective rights. And when I monitored what Arik Sharon was doing when he established 120 settlements in the West Bank, I suddenly realized that it's irreversible. Finished. The Green Line is finished and the hope of a Jewish state here is finished. After all, the notion of a "Jewish-democratic state" is an oxymoron, and the two-state solution is no solution.

And the terms the left uses – "peace," "occupation," "Green Line" – are lying, stock phrases. Their only purpose is to give Israeli liberals the good feeling that they are not responsible for the injustice and the dispossession and the terrible deeds their country is doing. I decided that I was no longer going to take part in that fraud. I would not take part in the left's conceptual [population] transfer. I am not David Grossman of "The Yellow Wind," who went to describe the occupation in the West Bank like some Captain Cook describing the life of the natives in some remote country. I am not Ze'ev Sternhell, who is constantly waiting for the arrival of some deus ex machina by the name of Barack Obama to force on Israel a peace that will not happen.

The fact is that, in the end, because my father so much wanted me to be a native, I am truly a native. And as a native, I see all the natives who live here – both the Israeli natives and the Palestinian natives. I am not afraid of them and do not flinch from them and do not patronize them. I believe that there is a possibility that they will find some imperfect way to live in the one common homeland.

*Strangely, you are less pessimistic than many of the left-wing veterans. You, of all people, are not saying that the country is finished and all is lost. Do you feel that your generation succeeded or failed?*

My generation both succeeded and failed. Mostly failed. Look, I belong to the population group that was here in 1948 – people who were 6 years old or more before the state's establishment, and who were therefore shaped by prestate Zionism. Now I am an extinct species. But when you look back, you see that we played a tremendous part in forging this society and this national community. At the same time, you see that we lost all the wars we fought. We lost the war of creating a new person and creating a new culture and creating a new society. All in all, it came out pretty crappy for us. Everything was debased. And we, because of our bourgeois way of life, let the other forces take over in Israel and vanquish us. And the

reason they vanquished us is that they were more steadfast in their goal and we were more pampered.

Living in Jerusalem today, I live in a bubble. Jerusalem outside my bubble is a city that has disintegrated completely. It is on its last legs. It does not exist. And it is too painful for me to see that. When I travel around the country today, I don't understand exactly what is happening. Everything is different. Not what we wanted it to be; not something I can understand.

But all of that pales in the face of our huge achievement in establishing a Jewish-Israeli national community here which, despite everything, is alive and kicking. That is why I do not accept the whining of the Mizrahim and I also do not accept the white whining of the veteran Israelis.

It was not by chance that I titled my autobiography "The Dream of the White Sabra." As the white sabra, I am not ashamed of anything. I made mistakes and I admit the mistakes, but in the end I am proud to be a son of the founding fathers. I of all people feel myself to be a Zionist. Sometimes it even seems to me that I am the last Zionist.

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