The Power of David's Stone:

Watch out, Goliad, here comes David!

The meaning behind the throwing of stones in the Palestinian-Israel conflict

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A study on the reason behind Israeli harsh actions against Palestinian stone throwers.

MA Thesis Religion, Conflict and Globalization

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Abstract | Since the start of the Israel-Palestine conflict in 1948, the conflict has been seen as a battle over land and political power. It is seen as a conflict fought with stones. Over the last few decades, Israeli actions against stone throwers have become disproportioned in their harshness and violence. This thesis sets out to understand why this is. Working with the understanding, based on the dominant societal and historical narratives in both Israel and Palestine, that we need to change the lens through which we see the conflict, this thesis will argue that the disproportioned harshness from Israel is the result of a perceived direct attack against their identity.

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"My conflict with the Other revolves around one single question: who between us, today, deserves the status of victim? I often told the Other, joking: "Let's exchange our roles. You are a victorious victim... I am a dominated victim.""

—Mahmoud Darwish, interview with the Lebanese poet Abbas Beydoun, Al Wasat (London), 1995

Introduction |

   It is 75 years since the establishment of Israel. The Zionist movement established Israel as a political secular homeland for the Jews on land promised by God and seen as empty, 'A land without a people for a people without a land'. The problem was that the land was not empty. On the same day, Israelis celebrated their Independence Day with big festivals and military parades showing the opulence of their defence force; Palestinians mark 75 years since the start of the Nakba—the catastrophe in which Palestinians were displaced from their land and homes.

   Since 1948, Israel and Palestine have been in constant conflict over who should be allowed to live on the land. A lot has happened in the past 75 years: wars, political changes, protests and intifadas. From the Intifadas, we get the best-known image of the conflict. One of the protesters during the Second Intifada was a young Palestinian boy, Faris Odeh, only 14 years old. This boy was photographed throwing stones at Israeli soldiers near a Jewish outpost in Gaza. This has become an iconic image – a young boy with his right arm bent back to launch a rock toward an Israeli tank stationed directly in front of him – of Palestinian resistance.[1] Photos like these are presented as a fight between the Palestinian David and the Israeli Goliath: the Palestinian boy

Picture 1: Faris Odeh throwing a stone at an Israeli tank in Gaza, 29/10/2000.

armed with stones is confronting the Israeli well-equipped military.[2] Ever since the First Intifada, throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers has become an iconic way for Palestinians to resist the Israeli troops and settlers.

   Even though Palestinians are best known for throwing rocks, this does not mean they are the only ones who use this violence in this conflict. There are also enough settlers who pick up stones. However, there is a difference visible in the consequences both groups face when throwing stones. The same act is met with a different response from the authorities. When an Israeli is seen throwing a stone, it is met with a soft-gloved hand, but when a stone is thrown by Palestinians, the punishment is detainment, jail or can even be as severe as death. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) routinely arrest children suspected

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[1] Bessant, J., *Making-up People: Youth, Truth and Politics,* (London: 2021), 4.

[2] Zuhur, S., *Colors of Enchantment: Theatre, Dance Music and the Visual Arts of the Middle East,* (New York: 2001), 120.

of throwing stones.[3] Aside from detaining and arresting Palestinian stone-throwers, it is not uncommon for the IDF to respond with tear gas, rubber bullets, and even live ammunition.

During my stay in Israel-Palestine in the spring and early summer of 2023, I attended the weekly protest in Sheikh Jarrah. Here, the different reactions of the authorities to stone throwers became very clear. Normally, this demonstration is not too eventful. The protest takes place in the centre of Sheikh Jarrah, where on one side of the road, Israelis gather and on the other side, Palestinians. Military and police always accompany the Israeli side. That day, protesters on both sides of the conflict were more agitated. The first stone was thrown by a young boy on the Israeli side. Not much later, a stone was thrown from the Palestinian side; the stone did not even reach the other side of the road. The military responded immediately. From one moment to the next, a boy was seen running away, followed by six soldiers and police with their batons out.

"*Stones kill*"[4] was the response by Education Minister Naftali Bennett when an Israeli soldier shot and killed 17-year-old Mohammed al-Casbah for throwing stones at the Israeli military. Not much later, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked said that "*a stone thrower is a terrorist*",[5] but it seems like this is only the case when the thrower is Palestinian. In 2018, during the eviction of the illegal outpost of Netiv Ha'avot, Israeli settlers threw stones at the police and military. As a result, six officers were injured, but only three settlers were arrested; they were released the same day.[6] A few months earlier, 16-year-old Mussab al-Tamini joined a group of Palestinian teenagers throwing stones at IDF soldiers and vehicles entering Deir Nitham. He was shot in the neck during these clashes and passed away on the spot. In an interview, the family said: *"Even though he was throwing stones, that's not reason enough to kill him. They could have injured him and arrested him if they really wanted to."*[7] Where the settlers throwing rocks got off with a slap on the wrist, the Palestinian lost his life. When a stone is thrown by a Palestinian, the IDF is quick to react and punish. Stones from the Palestinian side are combatted with live bullets and lengthy prison sentences. Over the years, academics like Emily Schaeffer Omer-Man[8], prestigious

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[3] 'Israel: Security Forces Abuse Palestinian Children Chokeholds, Beatings, Coercive Interrogations', Human Rights Watch, published 19/07/2015, https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/19/israel-security-forces-abuse-palestinian-children, visited 20/09/23.

[4] 'Bennett after commander shoots stone-thrower: Stones kill, just ask Adele Biton', The Jerusalem Post, published 03/07/2015, Bennett after commander shoots stone-thrower: Stones kill, just ask Adele Biton - Israel News - The Jerusalem Post (jpost.com), visited on 20/09/2023.

[5] Bernstein, D., 'Knesset increases stone-throwers' sentences', The Times of Israel, published 21/07/2015, https://www.timesofisrael.com/knesset-increases-stone-throwers-sentences/, visited on 20/09/2023.

[6] Magid, J., 'Bulldozers raze Netiv Ha'avot outpost after settlers clear out', The Times of Israel, published 13/06/2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/bulldozers-raze-netiv-haavot-outpost-after-settlers-clear-out/#:~:text=Nine%20cops%20were%20injured%20during%20the%20eviction%2C%20six,for%20hurling%20objects%20at%20cops%20from%20the%20roof, visited on 20/09/2023.

[7] Patel, Y., ''They came to kill': Palestinian village grieves for 16-year-old Musaab al-Tamimi', Middle East Eye, published 05/01/2018, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/they-came-kill-palestinian-village-grieves-16-year-old-musaab-al-tamimi, visited on 20/09/2023.

[8] Schaeffer Omer-Man, E., 'Extrajudicial Killing with Near Impunity: Excessive Force by Israeli Law Enforcement against Palestinians', *Boston University International Law Journal* 35:115 (2017), 115-156.

organisations like *Amnesty*[9] and *Save the Child*[10], and news outlets like *+972 Magazine*[11] and *Al Jazeera*[12] have pointed out Israel's unwarranted and excessive force against Palestinian stone-throwers. What is missing in this discourse is a theory on why Israel is using excessive force. To be more specific, the current discourse on the force used by Israel against stone throwers negates the role narratives play in people's daily actions and understanding of the world. To understand Israel's reaction, we need an analysis of the narratives on both sides with regard to the throwing of stones. This thesis aims to provide a theory for the extreme position Israel takes in the form of an analysis of the narratives in both societies combined with Jeurensmyer's theory of a cosmic war.

The question that will be central is: *Why is Israel acting with excessive force against Palestinian stone-throwers?*

This thesis will work with the understanding that the excessive force used by Israel is not solely based on the physical threat that a thrown rock brings. According to the numbers, the cases where people were injured because of a thrown stone are very low.[13] That is why I will work with the understanding that we should not look at the physical meaning of the throwing of a stone, but we should look at the mental meaning. The first two sub-questions will focus on an alternative lens through which we can analyse the conflict: w*hat are the main historical and societal narratives in Israeli and Palestinian society that form their identities? Can the Israel-Palestine conflict be seen as a Cosmic War?* In the last chapter and sub-question, *what meaning is given to the action of stone-throwing by Israelis and Palestinians?* The focus will shift to the action of stone-throwing itself. As will have been mentioned in earlier chapters, the myth of David and Goliath is used in both societies, but especially Israel, to form narratives. The third chapter will use this myth to give meaning to the throwing of a stone.

[9] 'Israel/OPT: End brutal repression of Palestinians protesting forced displacement in occupied East Jerusalem', Amnesty International, published 10/04/2021, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/05/israel-opt-end-brutal-repression-of-palestinians-protesting-forced-displacement-in-occupied-east-jerusalem/, visited on: 05/05/2023.

''Trigger-happy' Israeli army and police use reckless force in the West Bank ', Amnesty International, published 27/02/2014, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2014/02/trigger-happy-israeli-army-and-police-use-reckless-force-west-bank/, visited on 05/05/2023.

[10] 'Stripped, Beaten and Blindfolded: New Research Reveals Ongoing Violence and Abuse of Palestinian Children Detained by Israeli Military', Save the Children, published 10/07/2023, https://www.savethechildren.net/news/stripped-beaten-and-blindfolded-new-research-reveals-ongoing-violence-and-abuse-palestinian#, visited on 21/07/2023.

[11] Leifer, J., 'Israel's different responses to Jewish and Palestinian stone throwers', +972 Magazine, published 17/07/2018, https://www.972mag.com/israels-different-responses-to-jewish-and-palestinian-stone-throwers/, visited on 30/08/2023.

[12] Wilson, N., 'Israel Allows Lethal Force on Stone Throwers: Report', Aljazeera, published 04/06/2016, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/7/4/israel-allows-lethal-force-on-stone-throwers-report, visited on 04/05/2023.

Chandler, A., 'Should Israel Be Declaring War on Rock-Throwing?', The Atlantic, published 17/09/2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/should-israel-be-declaring-war-on-rock-throwing/405895/, visited on 04/09/2023.

[13] Natan, S.B., *All Guilty! Observations in the Military Juvenile Court*, No Legal Frontier, 2011.

As mentioned, the structure of this thesis will consist of three chapters. The first chapter will focus on narratives and identity, the second on cosmic war, and the last one on stone-throwing.

Chapter One, Interwoven Narratives, will centre around the first sub-questions: w*hat are the main historical and societal narratives in Israeli and Palestinian society that form their identities?* How do these narratives form the national identity? This will help us understand the important ideas and beliefs in forming the national identity of these two groups. In the social and humanities sciences, it is well-known that stories are an integral part of society. People create nations around shared historical understanding. They place themselves in societies based on narratives about success and form their shared ideologies based on religion. To understand a society and its group formation, you must understand the stories people tell themselves. This is why the first part of this thesis will focus on these narratives. I will question what the historical and social narratives are in Palestinian and Israeli society. Distinguishing what the main identity-forming narratives are, showing the juxtaposition of the Palestinian and Israeli narratives as contrasting interpretations of myth and history. First, the focus will be on the historical narratives. The choice to separate these narratives is that the stories about a nation's origin and achievements create the perceived characteristics of a national community and are used in newer societal narratives as justification.[14] The narratives in both societies will be reconstructed in this thesis with the help of news outlets like *The Times of Israel* and *Haaretz,* as well as social media like Twitter and Facebook. Furthermore, narratives presented to me during my time in Israel-Palestine will also be included in this chapter.

Chapter two, Cosmic War, will focus on changing the lens through which we analyse the Israel-Palestine conflict. The chapter's central questions will be: What is a *cosmic war*? Why can the Palestinian-Israel Conflict be seen as one? I posit that the Israel-Palestine conflict should not be viewed as a 'normal conflict', a battle over politics or land, but as a Cosmic War, as described by Juergensmeyer in his book *Terror in the Mind of God*. A cosmic war is a battle between metaphysical forces—good and evil, right and wrong, order and chaos. The fighters in a cosmic drama are working with the belief that they are fighting a strictly evil force. Furthermore, the fight is to protect one's culture and identity. Juergensmeyer provides a few characteristics which, when visible in a conflict, will increase the change in transforming the earthly conflict into a cosmic one. Reza Aslan expanded on Juergensmeyer's idea by outlining ten characteristics that can change a conflict. This chapter will examine these characteristics and argue for their visibility in the Palestine-Israel conflict.

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[14] Yadgar, Y., 'From the particularistic to the universalistic: National narratives in Israel's mainstream press,1967–97', *Nations and Nationalism* 8:1 (2002), 55-72, at 55-57.

Amin, S.N., 'The impact of identity politics in challenging national narratives: A case study among Canadian Muslims', *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 14:3 (2014), 418–35, at 418.

Létourneau, J., Chapman, A., 'Editorial – Negotiating the nation: Young people, national narratives and history education'.*London Review of Education* 15:2 (2017), 149-151.

Chapter three, David and Goliath, will use the cosmic war idea to analyse the stone-throwing violence displayed by Palestine and Israel. The focus will be on: When, where, how and by whom the stones are thrown? *What meaning is given to the action of stone-throwing by Israelis and Palestinians*? Answers will be formulated by focusing on the biblical story of David and Goliath. Both groups, as will be shown in the first chapter, see themselves as David in this story, meaning the oppressed and attacked victim. This chapter will take a further look into the David and Goliath myth in both societies. As well as looking at the biblical understanding and characteristics of David and Goliath and laying these next to the analysis of stone-throwing, a conclusion on who is playing Goliath and who David is in the current conflict can be made. The last part of the chapter works with the meaning behind the throwing of a stone, together with the conclusions made in chapters 1 and 2, to find out why Israel uses excessive force against stone-throwers.

There are a few terms used in this thesis that need a clear definition. Ask people on the street to name the definition of violence, and they usually paint a picture of war and strife, wherein violence is a mere form of chaos and destruction. Traditionally, philosophical discussions have also worked with this understanding.[15] In this understanding, violence is merely seen as acts serving to show the anomaly of a period in society's history. When a society faces such an outburst of harmful actions, it is seen as a symptom, something that is caused by other forces operating in society.[16] No known human societies or social formations exist where interpersonal aggression is absent.[17] The contingent nature of violence has been argued against in some sociological approaches. Scholars like Georges Bataille have argued that violence is innate to human nature.[18] This means that a society's historical background is not necessary to understand violence.[19] This understanding deprives all other functions of a violent act; violence has no goal other than itself. Conversely, people like Alan Kramer see violence as culturally and historically contingent.[20] Or Jan Plamper, who, by paraphrasing Benedicte Grima, argues that violence is cultural in the same way emotion is cultural.[21] This does not negate that violence is also a universal phenomenon, existing in all cultures throughout history.

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[15] Rae, G., Ingala, E., 'Introduction: The Meanings of Violence', In: Idem, *The Meanings of Violence: From Critical Theory to Biopolitics,* (New York: 2017), 1-10, at 1-2.

[16] Abbink, J., Aijmer, G., (ed.), *Meanings of Violence: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, (London, New York: 2020), 1.

[17] Ibidem, 1-2.

[18] Bataille, G., Lovitt, C.R., 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', *New German Critique* 16 (1979)64-87, at 67-70.

[19] Dwyer, P., 'Violence and its Histories: Meanings, Methods, Problems', *History and Theory* 56:4 (2017), 7-22, at 16.

[20] Kramer, A. 'War of Atrocities: Murderous Scares and Extreme Combat', in: Lüdtke, A., Weisbrod, B., (ed.), *No Man's Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the 20th Century* (Göttingen: 2006), 11-34, at 32-33.

[21] Plamper, J., *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, (Oxford: 2015), 251.

This thesis will take a similar approach to understanding violence as Plamper and Kramer. Working with the understanding that the meaning behind an act of violence can only be understood by unravelling the layers of history and understanding the society in which it is enfolded.[22]

Where the meaning of violence is difficult to understand, the definition of violence is a little easier. The definitions of violence provided by David Riches will be used in this thesis to classify acts as violent or non-violent. Riches starts his understanding of violence with the contested use of damaging physical forces against other humans, which can lead to possibly fatal consequences and purposeful humiliation of the other. [23] Furthermore, violating property with the intent to hurt a person will also be seen as violence. Focusing on the first part of the definitions, damaging physical forces against other humans include throwing stones. Taking Riches' basic definition together with Plamper and Kramer's understanding of violence, we come to the conclusion that a physical as a symbolical interaction occurs when acts of violence are performed.

When we speak of violence, there is automatically someone who commits the violent act and one who is the target. Following this, we come to the question of what and who a victim is. Scholars from a broad spectrum of academic studies have contributed to a large body of literature on victimhood. These studies have focused on victimhood and human rights,[24] the construction of victimhood,[25] inclusive victimhood,[26] and much more. This thesis will work with the distinction between victimisation and victimhood. Victimisation is seen as an act of harm perpetrated against a person or group, and victimhood is understood as a collective identity based on that harm or past harm. It is important here that the act of violence that victimises someone and the victim's identity is neither linear nor has to be related. To better understand how a victim-based identity is constructed in Israel and Palestine, the sequence of five stages, from injured party to victim identity, outlined by Tami Amanda Jacoby, will be used. [27] A more in-depth explanation of the five stages will be given in chapter one.

This thesis will place a large emphasis on the victim identity within Israeli and Palestinian society. There is no intention to downplay or reject any victim claims these two groups make, an act typically associated with 'victim blaming'.[28] It should be self-explanatory that any act of victimisation is a negative experience

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[22] This understanding of the meaning of violence is further based on the inspiring work by Jon Abbink and Göran Aijmer. See: Abbink, J., Aijmer, G., (ed.), *Meanings of Violence: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, (London, New York: 2020).

[23] Riches, D., 'Aggression, War, Violence: Space/Time and Paradigm, *Man* 26:2 (1991), 281-297, at 295.

[24] Wilke, C., 'Recognizing Victimhood: Politics and Narrative of Rehabilitation in Germany, *Journal of Human Rights* 6:4 (2007), 479-496.

[25] Siniver, A., 'Israeli Identity and the Politics of Threat: A Constructive Interpretation', *Ethnopolitics: Formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 11:1 (2012), 24-42.

[26] Ballinger, P., 'Exhumed History: Trieste and the Politics of (Exclusive) Victimhood', *Journal of South Europe and the Balkans* 6:2 (2004), 145-159.

[27] Jacoby, T.A., 'A Theory of Victimhood: Politics, Conflict and the Construction of Victim-Based Identity', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 43:2 (2014), 511-530.

[28] Williams, S., 'Left-Right Ideological Differences in Blaming Victims', *Political Psychology* 5:4 (1984), 573-581, at 573-574.

for the victim; all human suffering is deplorable and should not be compared to the suffering of others. One victimhood does not negate the victimisation of the other.

A few notes need to be made before starting the main argumentation in this thesis. The Israel-Palestine conflict is extremely contested. Reasons for this are religion, historical suffering, and ideas of human rights. It must be made clear that this thesis is neutral in the conflict. If criticism is given, it is not an attack on any aspect of the social groups in this conflict. Furthermore, the criticism given does not refer to the religion of these groups. The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism works with the definition of antisemitism that the committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial called the IHRA Plenary in Budapest 2015 created. This definition adopted the following non-legally binding working definition of antisemites: *"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed towards Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, towards Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."*[29] This definition includes eleven "examples" of antisemitism, of which seven focus on the State of Israel.[30] To clarify, this thesis can, in certain parts, describe the Israeli military and government's actions in a critical way. This does not mean that this thesis holds any antisemitic sentiments. One should remember that criticism of Israel's actions could be a reaction to a human rights violation or the emotion that a Palestinian person feels on account of their experience at the hands of the state of Israel. It is not antisemitic to support arrangements that work for full equality for all inhabitants. Thus, even if contentious, it is not antisemitic, in and of itself, to compare Israel with other historical cases of settler-colonialism or apartheid.

The same argument accounts for the Islamophobic sentiments. At no point in this thesis are the descriptions of violence and claims that the Palestinians have on the land mend in an anti-Islamic or anti-Christian way. In any part, the conflict is more based on ethnic struggles than religious ones. This does not negate that religion is part of ethnic identity. It means that when violence is used, it is not merely out of religious reasoning. With this, I want to underline that this thesis does not see any religion as inherently violent. The reasons for violent actions that are described in these pages are driven by multiple forces.

What also ties into this is the use of religious group names for national groups. Many newspapers, articles, and other forms of information use the word Jews to indicate Israelis and Muslims to indicate Palestinians. For this thesis, I will avoid these terms. It is incorrect to say that these national groups are

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[29] 'About the IHRA non-legally binding working definition of antisemitism', International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism, visited on 26/05/2023.

[30] Ibidem.

only made up of people identifying as Jewish or Muslim. Historically speaking, Palestine has been a mix of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish groups. Israel is a little different because of the laws prohibiting non-Jewish people from emigrating to the land, enforced by the 2018 so-called Nation-State Law. This does not negate that Israel holds more than Jews. There are also Christians, Muslims, and Druze who were all absorbed into the state of Israel. This thesis is not in any way an attack on the religious identities of these groups. If criticism is given, it is directed towards governmental implanted rules, not an ethnic group.

Lastly, before we continue, it is important to stress a couple of things. First of all, when we talk about Palestine, we are not talking about a Palestinian nation-state. One has to remember that for the vast part of history, the concept of the nation-state did not exist.[31] Throughout history, we have seen national states "*states governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralised, differentiated, autonomous structures*", but the concept of a nation-state combined the idea of a national-state and the idea of "*a state whose people share a strong linguistic, religious, and symbolic identity*".[32] Nowadays, the nation-state is so ubiquitous that most people internalise the concept of the nation-state as normal. With this position, we should not imagine our ancestors as a closed-off, unchanging, well-defined homogeneous group having exclusive ownership over land that somehow corresponds to modern-day borders. The idea has no basis in history. Unfortunately, this is the foundational myth of many reactionary ethno-nationalist ideologies, which will become evident when discussing the historical narratives of the Israeli and Palestinian people. People need to remember that claiming a nation-state based on a historical precedent is in itself not possible and that this claim always comes from a created narrative.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine has been ongoing for more than 75 years and has known many stages. A steady stream of violence and victimisation has taken place between the two communities, and there is no end in sight. This thesis will not negate that both groups have been aggressors and victims during these 75 years. Giving more value to one's suffering over the other is not up to me. Feeling scared, no matter who directs the threat to someone, is a legitimate feeling. It is not up to outsiders to give value to these feelings. Especially not academics, whose role is to report as unbiased as possible. This said, any statement in this thesis that can be understood as pro-Israel or pro-Palestine should not be taken as such.

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[31] Paul, T.V., Ikenberry, G.J, Hall, J.A., (ed.), *Nation-States in Question*, (Princeton: 2003), 1.

[32] Tilly, C., *Coercion, Capital, and European States, ad 990–1992,* (Blackwell: 1992), 2–3.

Chapter 1 | Interwoven Narratives and Identity

All people are creatures of culture; we live in realities which we construct ourselves, both collectively and individually.[33] Our cultures are created by narratives, myths and rituals that are alleged to have emerged as a result of humans' desire to turn chaos into order. By means of rituals, patterns and habits, humans try to give form and meaning to life.[34] Narratives play an important role in this; they provide an interpretive anchor for experiences and assist in the process of structuring collective and individual identity.[35] By creating a context of causality and continuity, narratives constitute a structural mechanism through which people imbue their worldly understanding and their personal and collective experiences with meaning.[36] When narratives are shared, they provide a sense of safety and meaning, increasing people's sense of coherence. Using this culturalist approach, meaning and group connections are constructed from nothing but sharing beliefs in specific narratives created out of shared experiences, values and interests. The narrative will be internalised and exerted as a strong power over our actions and views. Narratives can be perceived as more 'real' to people than 'reality' itself. They are seen as self-evident, a normal way to perceive the world, events and other people.

For this thesis, we want to know the main narratives in Israeli and Palestinian society and how these narratives form their national identity. To answer these questions, we need to understand what constitutes a narrative, what role narratives play in conflict, and how popular narratives help form identities.

Narratives are a vital and instrumental part of human's process of creating connections and organising features of cultural life.[37] "Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."[38] Through storytelling, we make sense of reality and the world around us.[39] As noted by scientists like Van Dijk, many researchers have focused on analysing narrative patterns in disparate cultural and discursive forms such as books and ordinary conversations.[40] There are many different

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[33] Somers, M.R., The Narrative Constitution of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach, *Theory and Society 23* (1994), 605-649, at 613-614.

[34] Segal, R.A., The Myth-Ritualist Theory of Religion, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 19:02* (1980), 173-185, at 174.

[35] Hammack, P.L., 'Narrative and the Cultural Psychology of Identity', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 12 (2008), 222-247, at 239.

[36] McAdams, D.P., Josselson, P., Lieblich, A., (eds.), *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative,* (Washington: 2006), 176-177.

[37] Bruner, J., *Act of Meaning: Four Lectures on Mind and Culture,* (Cambridge: 1990), 22.

Bruner, J., 'Culture and Mind: Their fruitful Incommensurability', *Ethos* 36 (2008), 29-45, at 32.

[38] Feldman, M. S., Skoldberg, K., Brown, R. N., & Horner, D., Making sense of stories: A rhetorical approach to narrative analysis, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 14:2* (2004), 147-170, at 147.

[39] Lule, J., *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*, (New York: 2001), 13.

[40] Dijk, T. A. van, *News as discourse*, (Hillsdale:1988), 9-12.

levels and forms of narratives. This thesis discusses two types of narratives: historical narratives and societal narratives. Both play an intricate part in the creation of national identities.

History is a powerful tool for forming worldviews and bonds between people.[41] Carl Becker observed, "*The kind of history that has the most influence upon the life of the community and the course of events is the history that common people carry around in their heads.*"[42] It is well-known in historical science that how the nation remembers history forms a part of people's national identity.[43] Understanding the historical narrative a group believes in makes it possible to understand around what framework other narratives are created and identities are formed.

Societal narratives reflect and affect the properties of the societies where they emerge.[44] Societal narratives tell about societies' character, history, or envisioned future. These narratives can be about national pride, commonly held ideals and beliefs, or practical projects that a given society sets for itself. Such narratives are the fabric from which we weave the very tale of our lives.

Narratives that are held as truths by the collective can be seen as intervening variables among a series of other factors that create the conditions for a conflict to emerge and perpetuate. Although intergroup conflicts are often rooted in the longing for material resources and territorial or political control, they are given meaning through the construction of narratives. These narratives motivate group forming within their own social-cultural context but can also fuel antagonistic feelings about everyone who is not part of the community. Group narratives contain core "societal beliefs" that are typically characterised by claims of exclusive legitimacy, victimisation, and perceptions of the justness of the goals of one's own group.[45] This is especially the case in ethnopolitical conflict; as Zembylas and Bekerman argue, opposing narratives of both sides are characterised by the absolute justification and idealisation of the national self and the cultivation of its victimised collective identity alongside the

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[41] History aspires to construct and tell true stories about the discovered evidence of the past. Furthermore, history seeks to understand and explain past events by interpreting their meaning. For a more extensive explanation of the term history, see: Williams, R.C., *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History,* (3rd ed. London, New York: 2015), 11-19.

[42] Becker, C., 'What Are Historical Facts?', in: Snyder, P., (ed.), *Detachment and the Writing of History: Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker,* (Ithaca: 1958), 61.

[43] For example, the Netherlands held onto the idea of a liberal state based on their actions during the 1990s. The idea of being self-sufficient and rebellious comes from the historical understanding of the Dutch Revolt of the 17th century and the Batavian Revolution of the 18th century. History can be used to change the narrative. This is described in: Weiss-Wendt, A., Adler, N., *The Future of the Soviet Past: The Politics of History in Putin's Russia,* (Indiana: 2021).

[44] Corvellec, H., Hultman, J. 'From "less landfilling" to "wasting less": societal narratives, socio-materiality, and organisations', *J. Organiz. Change Manag* 25 (2012), 297-314, at 297-298.

[45] Bar-Tal, D. 'Sociopsychological Foundations of Intractable Conflicts', *American Behavioral Scientist* 50 (2007), 1430-1453, at 1438-1440.

exclusion and the devaluation of the 'enemy' and its narrative.[46] This is what we can see in the case of Israel and Palestine.

There is a strong linkage between narrative, conflict and peace. Narratives play a role in creating and legitimising conflict. At the same time, it can also create the proper environment for reconciliation.[47] Conflict can not be resolved when there is a continuation of conflicting narratives between the opposing groups. Paul Scham maybe said it best: "*that how the two sides understand—and misunderstand—their own and the other's history has a profound influence on their ability—and inability—to make peace.*"[48] In Israel and Palestine, their main historical and societal narratives have been static to such an extent that it has become taboo to criticise them, making it difficult to have a developing public debate. The community isolates people who disagree with their group's narratives.[49] The Israeli narrative is somewhat more homogenous than the Palestinian.[50] Even though the Palestinian narrative seems less articulated than the Israeli one, several authors have identified the existence of conflicting narratives as one of the main obstacles in conflict resolution.[51] The counternarratives between Israel and Palestine are inherently delegitimising the narratives of the other.[52]

The chapter will first outline the different historical narratives that Israel and Palestine see as true. Followed by an outline of the most prominent societal narratives within these two communities. I will conclude with an argument, based on the narratives, about what the prominent identities are by using Jacoby's theory of victimhood.

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[46] Zembylas, M., Bekerman, Z., 'Education and the Dangerous Memories of Historical Trauma: Narrative of Pain, Narrative of Hope', *Curriculum Inquiry* 38:2 (2008), 124-154, at 141-142.

[47] Daoudi, M.S.D., Barakat, Z.M., 'Israelis and Palestinians: Contested Narratives', *Israel Studies* 18:2 (2013), 53-69, at 58.

[48] Scham, P., Salem, W., and Pogrund, B., *Shared Histories: A Palestinian Israeli Dialogue* (Jerusalem: 2005), 1.

[49] Finlay, W.M.L., 'Pathologizing Dissent: Identity Politics, Zionism and the 'Self-hating Jew', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 44 (2005), 201-222, at 211-212.

Neslen, A., *In Your Eyes a Sand Storm: Ways of Being Palestinian,* (Berkely, Los Angeles, London: 2011), 101.

An example of pushing people out of society when they do not uphold the collective narrative anymore is Teddy Katz's. He wrote his thesis about the Tantura and the Palestinians who were massacred in 1948 by the Israeli Defence Force's Alexandroni Brigade. He broke with the narrative of the Israeli Defence Force being protectors against violence, not the instigator. For more information, see: Pappé, I., 'The Tantura Case in Israel: The Katz Research and Trial', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30:3 (2001), 19-39.

[50] Daoudi, Barakat, 'Israelis and Palestinians', 58.

[51] Rotberg, R.I., 'Building Legitimacy Through Narrative', in: Rotber, R.I., (ed.), *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict,* (Bloomington: 2006), 1-18.

Auerbach, Y., 'National Narratives in a Conflict of Identity', in: Bar-Siman-Tov, Y., (ed.), *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* (Jerusalem: 2010), 99-134, at 110-112.

[52] Kelman, H.C., 'The interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The Role of the Other in Existential Conflict', *Journal of Social Issues* 55 (1999), 581-600, at 590.

Kelman, H.C., 'Social-Psychological Dimension of International Conflict, in: Zartman, I.W., (ed.), *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Methods and Techniques,* (Washington: 2007), 61-107, at 68, 77.

Historical Narratives |

"A nation is a "group of people united by a mistaken view about the past and a hatred of their neighbours." - Karl W. Deutsch –

Understanding the start of the conflict in our modern time is difficult. The modern history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has a convenient elasticity; it changes dramatically depending on who is telling the narrative and where they start the story. Therefore, it is important to underline that the sources describing the historical timeline of the events around the conflict are often not neutral, making creating an objective narrative difficult.

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a modern conflict that originated in the 'short twentieth century'. However, the roots of the conflict – involving competing historical claims to the same stretch of land – go back thousands of years. This part will provide a short overview of the early historical background of the region and the people to provide an understanding of the significance the two groups ascribe to the land and their claims for living there. This will be followed by a more extensive historical account of the two historical understandings of the twentieth century. The focus will be on the important actors, interests and narratives that comprise the contemporary part of the conflict history. Furthermore, this part of the chapter will provide an overview of the two historical narratives influencing the societal narratives of Palestine and Israel and, thus, their roles in the conflict itself.

Early History: Two Times, Two People |

When describing the early history of Israel-Palestine, it is difficult to treat the topic with historical objectivity. This part will outline its early history, in short, a synthesis. Approaching the early history of Israel (not Palestine), the main primary source is the Torah, a document composed after the fall of the Jewish political power (the Torah was likely composed around 333-164 B.C.E.)[53]. Working with this source, we must remember that the main goal of the Torah was not to provide an accurate presentation of history in our modern sense of the historical discipline. The dating of the primary sources itself is an ongoing debate in the scientific community.[54] The goal of the composition of the Torah can be found in a combination of elements, which include the motivation to formalise historical text, theological treatise, aesthetic literature, and political propaganda.This does not negate that the biblical narratives hold historical evidence within their pages. The narrative in the Hebrew Bible and works such as Torah, Joshua and Judge are based on historical facts that were known to the authors at the time but are less

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[53] Greifenhagen, F.V., *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map,* (London: 2003), 206-207.

Newsom, C.A., *The Self as Symbolic Space: Constructing Identity and Community at Quran,* (Leiden, Boston: 2004), 26.

[54] For an extensive overview of the historiography of see Hoffmeier, J.K., *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition,* (New York: 1999), 7-10).

significant than presenting an ethically satisfying narrative; that is the case of biblical narratives based on theological views. This all means that the Thora does not disregard historical facts but that the historical facts take a back seat to the theological thrust of the story. Another source of information about this era in History can be found in archaeology. The narrative changes according to the different sources are evident in the narrative of Joshua's victory over the Canaan indigenous people.[55] Where the Hebrew Bible speaks of the military conquest of Canaan, the archaeological evidence retrieved from the region once known as Canaan does not support this biblical historical narrative of upheaval. For this thesis, the choice has been made that the early history provided will follow more the Biblical descriptions than the archaeological. This is done because we are looking in this thesis at historical narrative; we are not trying to accurately reconstruct historical events. Furthermore, Israel's claim of existence is based on a religious belief in the land promised by god. It only stands to reason that when describing the historical narrative, we have to start with the source material that gave that promise.

When describing early Palestinian history, there is less difficulty in finding sources to work with because of the larger collection of written sources and the longer history of its people on a static piece of land. The Palestinian understanding of their history before 1948 can be found in pro-Palestine websites like *Decolonize Palestine[56]*.

The Jews have lived in the area that has, throughout history, been known as Israel for nearly 4000 Years. The area that now a day is called Israel and Palestine is historically a place where many different religious dominations have found a home. Somewhere between 1800 and 1500 B.C., Hebrew people migrated to Canaan. According to the Hebrew Bible, God promises Abraham and his descendants a new home in the land of Canaan.[57] Following the holy scriptures, the region was colonised by Abraham and developed by his son Isaac and grandson Jacob; later, his name became the inspiration to the region (Jacob, also known as Israel, from Yisrae'el meaning, 'persevere with God'). Throughout the historical narrative in the Hebrew Bible, the reference to the land of Canaan as the Promised Land given to the descendants of Abraham is often repeated.[58] Similar attachments can be found with Jerusalem, which, according to the Hebrew Bible, was described by God to Jacob as "*the site that the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes, as a place established in His name. It is there that you shall go to seek His presence*".[59]

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[55] Deuteronomy 32:51-52, Biblia, https://biblia.com/bible/esv/deuteronomy/32/51-52, visited on 20/05/23

Joshua 1-19, Biblia, https://biblia.com/bible/esv/joshua-1-1--joshua-19, visited on 20/05/23.

[56] Decolonize Palestine, Homepage, https://decolonizepalestine.com/, visited on 28/05/23.

[57] Genesis, 12., Biblia, https://biblia.com/bible/esv/genesis/12, visited on 20/05/23.

[58] Genesis, 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8, Biblia, https://biblia.com/books/esv/Ge1.1, visited on 20/05/23

[59] Deuteronomy, 12:3, Biblia, https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/deuteronomy/12/3, visited on 20/05/23.

Years later, when King David and the descendants of Abraham defeated Goliath with a single stone breaking the Philistine power, they conquered the city in the tenth century B.C. and formally established the Kingdom of Israel. Jerusalem began to fulfil the function of a spiritual and national capital for the Jewish people. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. King David's son, King Solomon, whose reign derived from biblical chronology is set from 970 to 931 B.C., he built the First Temple to house the Ark of Covenant on the earlier appointed place by God. The newly established kingdom was split into two kingdoms with the death of King Solomon around 931 B.C.[60] What followed was a time when the perceived homeland of the Jewish people was almost always under foreign control; the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans all claimed the land at a certain point in history. The First Temple was destroyed at the beginning of the sixth century B.C. when the Assyrian Empire fell and the Babylonians took over. Leading Israeli citizens were exiled to Babylon, where they developed to form the Israelite religion into the now a day recognisable Judaism with a monotheistic view.

The period where the Jews returned to their promised land and the revision of their religious beliefs is known as the Second Temple Period, from the late sixth century till 70 C.E., named after the reconstruction of a temple on the site where the First Temple was destroyed at the beginning of the century. Retaking its role as the centre of Jewish religion and life. In 135 AD, following a failed Bar-Kochba Revolt against the Romans, the Roman Empire expelled the Jewish community. Following the Romans renamed the land 'Palaestina'. In 70 C.E., the Romans destroyed the Second Temple, only the Wailing Wall remains, and ended the early Jewish power over the region. The place that, since King David's defeat of Goliath, was the home for the Jewish people was now lost to them. It was not the first time in their history that the Jews were sent into a diaspora, but with the Roman power taking over and destroying the temple fractured the Jewish community. They lost their stronghold and power over the land on which they lived since the time of King David. Even with the defeat of the Jewish people, they never completely disappeared from the region and always held on to Jerusalem as their national and religious capital with its history of Jewish Kings and High Priests. This meant that

First, a view historical events that shaped Palestine. In the seventh century, former Israel, now named Palestine, came under the control of Arabs, who introduced their own language and their religion, Islam, to the region. When the first caliph, Abū Bakr, declared a holy war around 634 C.E., he started the occupation of Palestine by the Beduin-Muslims, which brought the Islamic faith to the region. The Islamic traditions would guide the development of this area for the next centuries. Jerusalem became the centre of the Islamic faith in the region, with the Al-Aqsa mosque as its focus. Not even a thousand years later, the land was taken by the Ottoman army in the Battle of Marj Dabiq (1516), starting the

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[60] Mieroop, M. van de, *History of the Ancient Near East ca. 3000-323 BC*, (3rd ed., West Sussex: 2016), 239.

longest chapter of Palestinian history, which lasted for over 400 years. Over its long history, the Ottomans divided Palestine into various political divisions. The Ottoman Millet system provided a degree of autonomy in religion and government.[61] This made the Palestinian identity more influenced by cultural likeness and the land itself than its political leader.

The Ottoman period is a key time in the Palestinian historical narrative. It is seen as a peaceful period before the British mandate and the state of Israel. Although, through the centuries of Ottoman rule, the Islamic religion was dominant, it did not negate that a relatively open relationship was held with the other religions. The Ottoman sultans, as well as his court, took great care to observe the Shariah law (interpreted through a Sunni perspective), allowing extensive rights to the individual, Muslim and non-Muslim alike.[62] These rights included the right to life, religion, property, fair trial, and social protection. The emphasis in the Palestinian historical narrative is often placed on a peaceful co-existence of religions before the Zionists came.[63] Existing historical facts are used to promote this idea. For example, the inscription on the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem reads, "There is no God but Allah, and Abraham is his friend", in a nod to Christian and Jewish Ottomans, who, like Muslims, are considered to be part of an Abrahamic religious tradition.[64] This does not negate that the dominant Islamic religion influences the culture of the whole region. Still, the cooperation between the different religions and the freedom and peace of the Ottoman Empire is important in the Palestinian historical narrative.

Jewish early history in the area, now a day known as Israel, is an old one. It is a story of a Jewish kingdom and a story of the Jews as victims losing their land and temple. The Palestinian narrative of their early history is less focused on marginalising the different religions because of the millet system deployed by the Ottoman Empire.[65] Making the Palestinian historical narrative of their early history one of inclusivity with other religions in an through Islam influenced land where they have lived since the seventh century.

These two early historical narratives play into the roles modern Israel and Palestine take in their societal narratives, as will be clear later in this chapter. Where the early historical narrative in Israel is focused on the Jewish Kingdom of Israel, Palestine's focus is on the inclusive and peaceful time under Ottoman rule. A peace that, in their narrative, will be broken with Zionism.

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[61] Barkey, K., 'Islam and Toleration: Studying the Ottoman Imperial Model', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 19:1/2 (2005), 5-19, at 12-14.

[62] Aral, B., 'The Idea of Human Rights as Perceived in the Ottoman Empire', *Human Rights Quarterly* 26:2 (2004). 454-482, at 454.

[63] Decolonize Palestine, Palestine under the Ottoman Empire, https://decolonizepalestine.com/intro/palestine-throughout-history/, visited on 28/25/2023.

[64] Ibidem.

[65] Braude, B., 'Foundation Myths of Millet System', in: Idem., *Christians And Jews in the Ottoman Empire,* (London: 2014), 65-86.

Modern History: One History, Two Narratives |

The modern history of the conflict follows the line of a few historical events that impacted both Israel and Palestine. These groups have their own interpretation of their modern history. Palestinians will tell a story of a flourishing region that was destroyed by Israel in 1948; on the other side, the Israeli Jews will tell a story about a flourishing and safe country that once was destroyed. The embellishment of the narrative, along with who is seen as a hero or villain, changes depending on which side you ask. Even with these two narrations of the story, certain events are historical facts. A concise history of the Israel-Palestine region's conflict will be written below. The reader must take into account that the narratives provided are based on historical facts, meaning names and dates, but are portrayed in a certain way that the 'historical truth' is disputed. Meaning that the existing narratives mirror each other. This effectively means that if one version is accepted as the 'historical truth', the other must be classified as untruth. Arguing that both narrations are correct could be interpreted as neither is 'historical truth' but only fictional retellings of the past. Because of this and the remaining value in the historical interpretation by the two groups for the final argumentation in this thesis, this subchapter will provide a historical outline incorporating two views, Israelis and Palestinians, on the historical facts that are known.

The story of the modern origins of the conflict starts at the end of the nineteenth century. This era in history is well known for the growth of nationalistic sentiments. The doctrine of nationalism that arose in the Western World directly resulted from the longing for freedom and self-rule introduced by the French Revolution.[66] In this environment, the fathers of Zionism established the belief that the Jewish people could copy these ideals. They looked at the growing examples of the European nation-state. The Zionist movement wanted to establishing a nation in their suggested biblical homeland, a nation save for Jews, with political independence, and guided by the Enlightenment principles.[67] The growing movement started an immigration wave of Jews to Palestine, which was part of the Ottoman Empire. Within the first twenty years of the twentieth century, the world experienced some big power shifts due to the First World War; some imperial powers lost their influence, like the German Empire, and others, like Britain and France, were able to retain and even extend their power. In 1920, the British Mandatory Palestine was established, bringing the region under the English flag. In order for Britain to establish this position, they worked with different groups. In 1915, a series of letters were exchanged between Sir Henry McMahon, who was Britain's high commissioner in Egypt, and Hussein bin Ali, Emir of Mecca and

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[66] Ben-Israel, H., 'Zionism and European Nationalisms: Comparative Aspects', *Israel Studies* 8:1 (2003), 91-104, at 93.

[67] Shimoni, G., Wistrich, R., *Theodor Herzl: Visionary of the Jewish State*, (Jerusalem: 1999), 147-148.

King of the Arabs. In these letters, which became known as the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the British pledged support to Arab independence if Hussein used his forces to revolt against the Ottoman power.[68] Two years later, the British also stated their support for the Zionist movement in the Balfour Declaration, which stated:

> *"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."[69]*

With this declaration, Britain publicly pledged to establish a National Home for the Jewish people in Palestine, according to the Zionists of a democratic nation. This means that the Balfour Declaration and the Mandatory Charter from 1923 stressed the historical connection of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel, promising the establishment of a 'National Home for the Jewish People while promising to safeguard the civil and religious rights of its majority of Arab inhabitants.[70]

Here, we find the first split in the historical narrative. Where the Israeli Jews see the declaration as the recognition of their religious and historical claim to the land by the then-ruling British power, the Arabs living in the Palestinian region see it as a broken promise for independence, given with the Hussein-McMahon correspondence. The Balfour Declaration is often viewed as one of the catalysts of the violence that followed the establishment of the state of Israel.

With the end of the First World War and the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Britain won the area of Palestine, which became then known as British-mandated Palestine, governing over the Arabs and Jews living in this territory—their power breaks in the fallout of the Second World War. After the horrors of the holocaust, many of the European Jews migrated to Palestine. In November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations passed Resolution 181, which called for the partition of British-mandate Palestine into two separate states (and a UN control area around the holy cities), one for the Jews and one for the Arabs, which became known as the Two-State solution.[71] The Arab states rejected this partition plan, voting against it, arguing that it was unrepresentative of the demographic distribution of

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[68] 'The McMahon Correspondence of 1915-16', *Bulletin of International News* 16:5 (Mar. 11, 1939), 6-13, at 7-10.

[69] 'Balfour Declaration 1917', Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp, (visited on 18/03/2023).

[70] Morris, B., *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited,* (Cambridge: 2004), 9-10.

[71] Resolution 181 (II) Future government of Palestine, Resolution adopted on the report of the AD Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question.

Jews and Arabs living in Palestine.[72] The Zionist leaders, on the other hand, accepted the proposed partition. The UN partition resolution awarded 55,5 percent of the total area of Palestine to the Jews, who constituted less than a third of the population and who, at the time, only owned 7 per cent of the land, whereas to the Arabs, who had enjoyed continuous possession of the land for centuries, made up over two-thirds of the population and owned the bulk of the land was assigned the resting 45,5 percent of the country [73] The UN decision was legally binding on the world stage but went against the wishes of the Palestinian population resulting in only Israel proclaiming its independence in May 1948. The British troops left the territory and the newly established Israel state claimed the land as assigned by the UN Resolution 181; a day after the declaration of independence, the new state of Israel found itself in a war with its neighbouring countries and the Palestinian population. Whereas Israelis know the period that follows as the 'Milhemet Haatzma'ut' or 'War of Independence', the Palestinians refer to it as the 'al-Nakbah' or 'the Catastrophe'. Part of the conflict in 1948 was the attack from surrounding Arab countries on the newly declared state of Israel. Ten months of fighting ensured, resulting in a victory for Israel. In their narrative, Israel is the small under-dock attacked the victim in this war, which they won; the idea of it being David's war with Goliath became popular within Israel. [74] For Palestine, the focus was put on the Israeli military, who, in their narrative, forcefully expelled more than 750,000 Palestinians from their land, capturing 78 per cent of historic Palestine land, more than what Resolution 181 stated.[75] The fighting continued until January 1949, when an armistice agreement was forged between Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. With this agreement, Jordan established control over the West Bank, and control of Jerusalem was split between Jordan and Israel. With the UN General Assembly Resolution 194, the UN recognised the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes or be compensated by the state of Israel.

The next diversity in narrative can be found in 1967, on June 5, when a war breaks out. For the Palestinians, it is known as 'al-Naksah' (The Setback); Israel called it 'The Six Day War'. It is also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Third Arab-Israeli War or the June War.[76] In the Israeli narrative, Israel conducted a pre-emptive attack against Egypt and gained control over territory formerly controlled by Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Israel gained control over the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. During the six days the war took, Israel roughly tripled the size of

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[72] Khalidi, W., 'Revisiting the UNGA Partition Resolution', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27:1 (1997), 5-21, at 9.

[73] Ibidem, 11.

[74] Gertz, N., 'Social Myths in Literary and Political Texts', *Poetics Today Literature in Society* 7:4 (1986), 621-639, at 633.

[75] Reuveny, R., Lerner, R.M., 'Healing and Reality in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', *Tikkum* 24:3 (2009), 46-78, at 47.

[76] Balfour, A., *Solomon's Temple: Myth, Conflict, and Faith,* (West Sussex: 2012), 259.

her territory.[77] This was the start of the Israelis establishing settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, and the Sinai Peninsula. Palestinians see the intrusion into the land with settlements as a violation of international law regarding Article 49 of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which states: "*The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies*."[78] This stance was also acknowledged on an international level when the UN Security Council passed Resolution 242, which called for the "*Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force*"[79] Israel did not follow the UN Security Councils proclamation and continued with establishing settlements in Palestinian territories.

In 1973, Israel was attacked by Egyptian and Syrian forces in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights on the Jewish holiday of fast, Yom Kippur. This three-week war became known in Israel as the Yom Kippur War. Once again, little David Israel was able to defeat Goliath, maintaining possession of the area. In Palestine, the war became known as the Ramadan War because it took place in the month of Ramadan. Their narrative is more focused on the role the United States played by supplying large amounts of weapons to Israel, without which Israel might not have been as successful in defending its territory. The war brought a defeat of Palestinian allies and a show of Western support for Israel.

On December 9, 1987, the first Palestinian Intifada began in the West Bank and Gaza. For Palestinians, the Intifada was in protest against the continued Israeli occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. The start of the Intifada was a bottom-up movement that organised big-scale non-violent demonstrations and strikes. As the Intifada moved on, riots became part of the protest, and for the first time, the stoning of Israeli security forces by Palestinians became part of the act of resistance. In Palestinian eyes, the intifada was the first time the people themselves protested against the taking of their land and freedoms.[80] The Intifada was not seen by Israel as a protest against the occupation. In their understanding the Intifada were unprovoked 'riots' and 'disturbances', which should be suppressed with police and army forces, installing curfews, closing educational institutions, arrests, and restrictions on economic activities. Israel experienced the Intifada as a violent attack within Israel. Especially when the violence was brought outside of the West Bank and Gaza in the form of suicide attacks against civilians. For six years, the Intifada continued. From the international

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[77] Laron, G., *The Six-Day War: Breaking of the Middle East,* (New Haven, London: 2017), 1.

[78] *Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilians Person in Time of War of 12 August 1949,* 185.

[79] *Resolution 242 (1967).* [in official UN languages other than English, the article "the" precedes "territories," thus implies that Israel has to return all the conquered territory]

[80] Neslen, *In Your Eyes a Sand Storm*, 49, 73, 121-123, 159.

understanding of this period, the Intifada of 1987 is often described as a brilliant model of the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation; it engaged all segments of the Palestinian people and was characterised by unity, organisation, and creativity.[81] This view of Palestinians changed with the violence during the Second Intifada.

The Second Intifada, commonly referred to by Palestinians as the al-Aqsa Intifada, began in 2000 when Ariel Sharon (then-Israeli opposition leader of the Likud Party, Israel's right-wing) entered the al-Aqsa compound in occupied East Jerusalem together with a heavily armed security force of one thousand men. Palestinians see it as a deliberate move by Sharon to provoke a violent reaction. Because his visit was close to the anniversary of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, of which Sharon was found by the Palestinians as responsible for his failing to stop the bloodshed. Although the Palestinians saw the visit of Sharon to the al-Aqsa Compound as the spark that set off the Intifada, the reason was understood to be the ongoing occupation of Israel in the West Bank after the Oslo Accords of 1993.[82] Israel sees it differently and has used the term Terror Intifada to describe the period.[83] Their historical narratives narrate that the Palestinian violence was planned before Sharon visited the Temple Mount and that the visit was used as an excuse for the attacks. This all started over four years of constant violence, with Israel claiming to undertake mostly preventive actions against terrorist threats. Palestine has taken the same road and also states its defence in most cases of violence. Both sides used extreme violence during the Intifada, targeting indiscriminately armed combatants and civilians. The conflict promoted Israel in 2002 to building the Separation Wall in the West Bank; Palestinians dubbed this wall as the Apartheid Wall.

Over the last two decades, tensions between Israel and Palestine have reached some high points. People on both sides are always aware that a third Intifada can happen at any time. It's one of the only things they are agreeing on.

The modern historical narratives of Israel and Palestine mostly state that they are only defending themselves. The focus is on the wrongdoings the other party is doing and the violence they themselves are experiencing. This stance is visible in how the young Israeli state had to defend itself against the military actions of surrounding states and the Palestinian loss of more and more land. The battle has transformed over the years into a more stannic war where both are shouting at one another that they

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[81] Agha, Z., Hilal, J., Khalidi, R., Al-Qattan, N., Rabbani, M., and Suleiman, J., 'After Balfour: 100 Years of History and the Roads Not Taken', *Al Shabak: the Palestinian Policy Network* (2017), 8-15, at 10.

[82] Tessler, M., 'Narratives and Myths about Arab Intransigence towards Israel', in: Rotberg, R.I., (ed.), *Israeli and Palestinian Narratives of Conflict: History's Double Helix,* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: 2006), 174-193, at 180-183.

[83] 'The Terror Intifada: The Current Wave of Palestinian Violence', Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ',
http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAHOi9oO (visited on 04/03/2023).

Bar-Tal, D., Teichman, Y., *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict: Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society,* (Cambridge: 2005), 115.

are only defending themselves and attacking each other over the land that each has or is supposed to have.

Societal narratives

The societal narratives are the umbrellaing narratives that use historical narratives and myths to create unity among its people, creating a story to form the national identity around it. These narratives are not value-neutral, but they represent various power interests.[84] People are constantly engaged in a process of negotiating the connection between their personal narratives and the dominant social narratives which form the national identity.[85] Over the years, however, a set of dominating societal narratives has emerged on both sides.

Societal Narratives in Israel

A visit to Israel or a dive into Israeli media shows that there are multiple narratives at play in Israeli society. Four of these narratives seem to be the most prominent. I have named these narratives the 'National Homecoming Narrative', 'There are no Palestinians Narrative', 'Security Narrative', and the 'Victim Narrative'.

The first to be discussed is what we can call the 'National Homecoming Narrative'. During the 19th century, many Western countries were involved in the process of nationalising. The first nation-states were created. In the later half of the 19th century, a compelling narrative of national homecoming and liberation began to emerge within different groups and countries. People called to unify their 'Imagined communities'[86] within the same borders. For the Jewish population, this outcry was given form and substance by the various Labor Zionist organisations whose central tent held that Jews constitute a nation in the secular-political sense, which means that they could claim, like the other nations, the inherent right of self-determination in their historic homeland.

A distinction between the Left and Right must be made here. The Left Labor Zionists saw the creation of their own state as the primary vehicle of national expression. While most of them would have agreed that the Jewish state had the right to be located in their historic homeland of Israel, they did not claim the right to encompass the entire land. The Right side, by contrast, promoted a 'territorial' Zionistic

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[84] Murray, M., 'Narrative Psychology and Narrative Analysis', in: Camic P.M., Rhodes, J.E., Yardley, L., (ed.), *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design,* (Washington: 2003), 95-112, at 99.

[85] Ibidem, 99.

[86] Imagined Community is a concept developed by Benedict Anderson. It describes a socially constructed community imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of a group. In his work, Anderson argues that in a nation-state, large groups of people create a perceived bond with one another on the basis of perceived solidarity and cultural unity. For more information, see: Benedict, A., *Imagined Communities: A Brilliant Exegesis on Nationalism' The Nation',* (London, New York: 2006).

doctrine. Proclaiming that based on the biblical tribal concept that the Land of Israel extended to the east of the River Jordan, historical Israel was basically separated by the Jordan River into two significant parts, the western land of Israel, which includes Israel proper as the 1967 occupied territories, and the eastern land of Israel, situated in the modern state of Jordan.[87] It would be an overstatement to say that all 'territorial' Zionists (during the 19th century as well as now a day) insisted that the modern State of Israel should be established in the whole of Historical Israel. Yet, while the majority believed that the State of Israel could be established in only the Western land, it remained committed to the ultimate vision of a modern State of Israel under Jewish control in their understanding of Historic Israel. God's command in the Hebrew Bible to cleanse the Holy Land of all "foreign" elements still lingers in the imaginations of a broad coalition of Religious Zionists, ultra-Orthodox haredim, and ideological settler groups.[88] This religious Zionism excluded competing national claims, placing exclusive Jewish control over the entire Greater Land of Israel over all other considerations.[89] Claiming rights to the land on the basis of historical religious text makes many Israelites define their national identity not only as a civic loyalty to the state but also as a religious obligation to the land. The national narrative begins with the religious claim of the land and ends with the state of Israel.

   Despite the different degrees of this narrative. The societal narrative of a national homecoming with the right of the Jewish people to the Land above other claims has become one of the basis of the Israeli 'national consensus'.[90] The National Homecoming Narrative is embedded in Israeli politics and education, making it a compelling, self-contained and self-evident truth. Making it a narrative that nowadays is outside of the realm of critical discussion and dissent.

   We can call the second narrative in Israeli society 'There are no Palestinians Narrative'. From the outset of the Zionist movement, it maintained a national narrative that promised the land of Israel as an exclusively Jewish country. Evident with the famous – or infamous – phrase: "A land without a people for a people without a land.", which became a slogan for the early Zionistic movement.[91] The land needed to be empty so that Israel could be established. Eliminating the Palestinians from the story was important in legitimising the claim on the land. This process of eliminating Palestine and the Palestinians from the story has taken different forms over the years:

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[87] Masalha, N., *The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Palestine-Israel, Volume 1,* (New York: 2007), 32.

[88] Ezekiel 39:12-29, Enduring World, https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/ezekiel-39/, visited on 19/08/23.

[89] McGoningle, I., *Genomic Citizenship: The Molecularization of Identity in the Contemporary Middle East,* (Cambridge: 2021), 218-219.

[90] Smooha, S., Peretz, D., 'The Arabs in Israel', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 26:03 (1982), 451-484, at 452.

[91] Garfinkle, A.M., 'On the Origin, Meaning, Use and Abuse of a Phrase', *Middle Eastern Studies* 27:4 (1991), 539-550, at 539.

I. There are no Palestinians, only Arabs. When reading Israeli news or speaking to Israeli citizens about the conflict, it is very rare to hear the use of specifying names such as Palestine or Palestinians. In the media, public discourse, and politics, Palestinians are turned into Arabs, making them indistinguishable from the masses of the Arab world. Take, for example, *The Israel Democracy Institute*, which reports on demographic changes. Their demographic statistics describe the approximately 1.6 million Palestinian citizens with Israeli citizenship not as Palestinian-Israeli but as Arab-Israeli.[92] The same goes for Israeli newspapers like *The Times of Israel* and *Haaretz*. In 2019, the current prime minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, said: "*The Arab citizens have 22 nation states around them, and they do not need another.*"[93] Again, showing that in the eyes of the government, there are no Palestinians, only Arabs.

In the same trend as labelling all the Palestinians as only Arabs is the process of erasing the Palestinian presence in the land. Not only were villages destroyed, starting in 1948, but their Arabic names were replaced with Jewish–Hebrew or biblical names in an attempt to emphasise links with the ancestral homeland.[94] Meron Benvenisti wrote about this process of destruction and renaming. He argued that the forestation of the land had been purposely designed:

> *"to conceal any evidence of Arab habitation: villages, cultivated fields, orchards and cemeteries-their planting intended to bury that stratum of the country's history, without trace and without memorial".[95]*

In 1950, the government's naming committee was officially formed. This committee is involved in giving names to new towns, intersections and bypasses, parks, springs, streams, etc.[96] Looking at the trend of naming, the conclusion must be made that the purpose of naming is the Judaization of the land, erasing the Palestinian identity. Different naming methods are used; Arabic names are directly translated into Hebrew, as was the case for Ayelet Hashahar, which was originally named Najmat al-Subh. It had also replaced Arabi names with other names motioned in Jewish sources that had often existed even before the Israelites arrived in Canaan. Think of the places like Acre and Jaffa that were changed to Akko and Yafo. Or names are changed on the basis of historical sources, which happened with Al-Quds

[92] Haddad, N., 'Research: Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel: 2021', The Israel Democracy Institute, published 17/03/22, https://en.idi.org.il/articles/38540, visited on: 26/03/2023.

[93] Wootliff, R., 'Defending Nation-State Law, PM Says Israeli Arabs have 22 Other Countries', Times of Israel, published 11/03/19, https://www.timesofisrael.com/defending-nation-state-law-pm-says-israeli-arabs-have-22-other-countries/, visited on 16/05/2023.

[94] Amir, R., *Who is Afraid of Historical Redress? The Israeli Victim-Perpetrator Dichotomy,* (Boston: 2012), 173.

[95] Benvenisti, M., *Son of the Cypresses: Memories, Reflections, and Regrets from a Political Life,* (Berkely: 2007), 34.

[96] Al-Ghubari, U., 'How Israel erases Arabic From the Public Landscape'*,* +972 Magazine, published 22/11/15, https://www.972mag.com/how-israel-is-erasing-arabic-from-its-public-landscape/, visited on: 03/06/2023.

(Jerusalem) in 2015 when the Arabic name was removed from road signs.[97] Only the Hebrew and the English names are now assigned to the city. It is a process to erase the Palestinian history from the land, erasing existing Arabic names and replacing them with Hebrew ones.

II.   Demonizing or ignoring leadership. In the Israeli media, the Palestinian leadership is not legitimised. It is either demonised in the case of Haj Amina al-Husseini, as visible at Yad Vashem, where an entire wall is devoted to linking al-Husseini with Nazi officials.[98] In his book *The Seventh Million,* Segev comments: "*The visitor is left to conclude that there is much in common between the Nazis' plan to destroy the Jews and the Arab's enmity to Israel.*"[99] When figureheads do not fit the narrative like the peace-seeking Musa Alawi, they are ignored. Creating either terrorist or illegitimate leadership in the eyes of Israel.

III.   Decontextualising resistance. Acts of resistance to the Zionistic movement are decontextualised and portrayed not as an act of resistance but solely as an act of hate and terror against the peaceful Israelis.[100] This is visible in the way in which Israel uses the term 'terrorist' to describe any Palestinian act of resistance. In the 1980s, as part of a Palestinian boycott of Israeli taxation, the residents of Beit Sahour collectively purchased a herd of eighteen cows to contribute the milk in the community to dodge the Israeli taxation. The herd of cows was soon labelled a security threat by Israel, leading to a seize order by Israel for eighteen cows.[101] It is also visible in what Israel will classify as an act of terror, which includes stabbings, shootings, ramming attacks, roadside bombs, and Molotov cocktails, but also the throwing of stones.[102]

With the help of these strategies, Israel has succeeded in eliminating the native Palestinian presence in the country. The influence of this narrative on Israel's experience and actions is evident in the destruction of 418 Palestinian villages and urban neighbourhoods in 1948,[103] the Israelification of the land,[104] creating facts on the ground,[105] the liberation of Judea and Samaria in 1967,[106] and vigorous

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[97] Al-Ghubari, 'How Israel erases Arabic From the Public Landscape'.

[98] Massad, J., 'Palestinians and Jewish History: Recognition or Submission?', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30:1 (2000), 52-67, at 56.

[99] Segev, T., *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust,* (New York: 1993), 425.

[100] Zulueta, F. de, 'Terror Breeds Terrorists', *Medicine, Conflict and Survival* 22:1 (2006), 13-25, at 18, 24.

[101] 'The Wanted 18' story was transformed into an animated documentary.

[102] Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Wave of Terror 2015-2023'.

[103] Kadman, N., *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Israel and the Depopulated Palestinian Villages of 1948*, (Bloomington; 2015), 3, 15.

[104] Ram, U., 'Issues and Agendas: The Colonization Perspective in Israeli Sociology: Internal and External Comparisons', *Jouranl of Histroical Sociology* 6:3 (1993), 327-350, at 336.

[105] El-Haj, N.A., *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society,* (Chicago, London: 2001).

[106] Halbrook, S.P., 'The Alienation of a Homeland: How Palestine Became Israel', *The Journal of Libertarian Studies* 4 (1981), 357-374, at 357.

settlements for the past 50 years[107], demonstrating the power of the 'there is no Palestinians' narrative. In short, the narrative turns real native people into non-intrusive abstractions or immigrants in their own land.

The third narrative to discuss is the 'Security Narrative'. Where the 'National Homecoming Narrative' dismisses Palestinians' claim on the land on the basis that the Jews had the holy and historical right to the land. The 'Security Narrative' comes to the same conclusion but works with more of an understanding of a colonial struggle, where the conflicting populations are geographically intertwined, and concerns of internal security outweigh those of external threats. Using this outlook within the 'Security Narrative', the Palestinians were turned into a kind of 'enemy-within' its own borders. This outlook leads to adopting an all-encompassing nation of a 'security threat' that eliminates other political works. The influence of this belief of the 'enemy-within' is visible from exploiting peace opportunities to being a convenient pretence for occupation and oppression. A number of controversial measures have been implanted in the name of security. Measures include the Israeli Supreme Court decision to allow torture, house demolitions and sealings, curfews and closures, the construction of settlements in the territories, administrative detention, deportations, closure of educational facilities, disconnection of electricity, telephone and water supplies, targeted assassinations, and the "security wall" between the West Bank and Israel.[108] The only reason given is 'security concerns'. While in every conflict territory, security concerns are valet, many of the measures that Israel has put in place and employed seem to go beyond what is permitted by international human rights law.

The last narrative we can call the 'Victim Narrative'. This narrative takes two forms. On the one hand, Zionism attempted to distance itself from the image of the Jewish people as victims and helpless. Here comes the idea of David and Goliath in play. The view of Israel as the tiny David versus the Arab Goliath has been a popular image from the start of Zionism. Within a conflict situation, it is eventrations to cast oneself as the victim. The Victims (or the David weak underdog) generally gain public sympathy, giving them more international support.[109] But, perhaps, the more important effect of casting oneself in the role of the victim is diminished responsibility because of the victim's powerless position in the control of events.[110] Presenting oneself as the victim gives claim to the moral ground; all actions taken from this

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[107] Lesch, A.M., 'Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-1977', *Journal of Palestine Studies 7:1* (1977), 26-47.

[108] Darcy, S., 'In the Name of Security: IDF Measures and The Laws of Occupation', *Middle East Policy* 10:4 (2003), 57-68, at 57.

[109] Vollhardt, J.R., 'The Role of Victim Beliefs in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Risk or Potential for Peace?, *Peace and Conflict* 15 (2009), 135-159, at 138.

[110] Markiewicz T., Sharvit, K., 'When Victimhood Goes to War? Israel and Victim Claims', *Political Psychology* 42:1 (2021), 111-126, at 115-116.

position is on the ground of 'self-defence', 'security', and 'persecution'. The historical narrative is used to reinforce this victimhood and the idea of self-defence. An example of reinforcing this narrative is the ad of the Israeli non-profit organisation 'Mishpaha Ehat", which ran on the website of the Israeli newspaper Ha'aretz. In this ad, the ongoing historical cycle of Jewish suffering was underlined; the ad said, 'In every generation, they rise against us, to annihilate us'.[111]

The memory of the Holocaust (or Shoah) plays a role in the 'Victim Narrative'. The destruction of seven million Jews and Jewish life in Europe while the world did nothing to help them is held as a demonstration that Jews are only save in their own nation. Amir claims that Holocaust victim narratives dominate Jewish thought and have been subjected to political manipulation, using it to legitimise Israel's regional and external politics.[112] Another historical narrative that plays into the victim narrative is the number of civilian attacks during the First and Second Intifada and the multiple wars fought with Israel's neighbouring countries.

All of the above-mentioned narratives are interwoven with one another. Especially the victim narrative seems to be a trend of thinking that is evident to some extent in all the narratives. They see themselves as the historical victim, which also becomes clear in their historical interpretation. It is the red line in their story that connects them together as Jews and Israelites. The reason a safe state was needed for the Jewish people and the reason they need to defend themselves to this day. But because of this powerful system of narratives that all feed into their idea of defending as the victim instead of attacking as the perpetrator, Israel has no space to reevaluate their own narratives.

Societal Narratives in Palestine.

The narratives in Israel are very clear to even an outsider. It is more complex when looking at the narratives in Palestine; the narratives there do not seem as articulated. We can provide a few explanations for this. Where Israel has, for the most part, a central school system where their historical interpretations are taught, Palestine does not have this. Many schools, especially in and around Jerusalem, are forced to educate with the Israeli system of history and topography.[113] Making that people only learn their own history at home. This divide in education within the Palestinian community makes it more difficult to unite. The same goes for the weak political system, limited Palestinian media, and land fragmentation in areas A, B, and C. All these things cut up the Palestinian people into

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[111] Ochs, J., *Security & Suspicion: An Ethnography of Everyday Life in Israel,* (Philadelphia: 2011), 69.

[112] Amir, *Who is Afraid of Historical Redress?*, 12-13, 18, 81.

[113] Mahamid, H., 'History Education for Arab Palestinian Schools in Israel, *Journal of Education and Development* 1:1 (2017), 37-47, at 37, 43.

fragmented groups, making it more difficult for clearly articulated national narratives to develop. Still, there are three that we can distinguish.

The first narrative we are focusing on we will call the 'Only Us Narrative'. This idea that the Palestinians need to stand up for themselves because the rest of the world will not help goes back to the beginning of the conflict. As was explained in the historical part earlier, the Palestinian historical narrative is that of the betrayal by Britain with Balfour and the Nakba. The Palestinian narrative views the Zionism movement of the past as European colonialism that exploits the land for its own purposes.[114] According to the Palestinians, the Nakba was the result of a well-prepared Western plan for ethnic cleansing.[115] The history books might describe the Nakba as an event in the past, but this is not the case in the Palestinian narrative, where the Nakba is seen as an ongoing process.[116] Every new generation is compelled to face identical trials and challenges. No help will come from the West as the West created part of the problem.

An other part of this narrative is the idea that there is no support of the Palestinian cause. Many Palestinians hold the narrative that only the Palestinian people can stand up for Palestine. The book *In Your Eyes a Sandstorm,* by Neslen, gives multiple interviews with Palestinians about how they themselves would answer the question of who the Palestinian people are. In the interview with Hala Salem, she talks about the Palestinian refugee's outlook on help; she says the following:

> *"They didn't wait for European countries because they knew no one would help them. Palestinians don't need money. We need to continue to help ourselves and take care of our families."[117]*

She is not the only Palestinian who shows these sentiments. During my stay in Jerusalem, beginning in the summer of 2023, I talked to a man who is head of the tourist department of the Al-Aqsa Compound. He gave maybe the best comparison to clarify how Palestine looks at its place in the conflict. The conflict is described in a metaphor of the animated children's show Tom and Jerry, where Palestine is Tom, the misunderstood cat that gets wounded and humiliated by Jerry (Israel), only because he defends his house and the property of his family. In the meantime, Jerry takes what he wants, lives in Tom's house, and is even protected by the neighbour's dog Spike, Amerika, and his pup Tyke, Europe, in his actions.

There is a prominent feeling in Palestine not to trust the West for help, especially with the war in Ukraine, where human rights violations are loudly broadcast in the world, while the same violations are

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[114] Milshtein, M., 'The Memory that Never Dies: The Nakba Memory and the Palestinian National Movement', in: Litvak, M., (ed.), *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity*, (New York: 2009), 47-69, at 50.

[115] Abu Lughod, I., 'Al-Yawm al-akhir qabla sukut Yaffa', *al-Karmil* 55:56 (1998), 117–29, at 118.

Nimer, S., 'The Nakbah in Palestinian Folk Literature', *Palestine-Israel Journal* 5:3 (1998), 153–60, at 153.

[116] Neslen, *In Your Eyes a Sand Storm,* 162.

[117] Ibidem, 100.

seldom internationally mentioned and addressed in Palestine. The congratulatory speech made by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for celebrations of 75 years in Israel[118] created a lot of outrage among the Palestinian population about the perceived colonisation of their land. Palestinian Twitter accounts blew up in response to Von der Leyen's speech in the following days. Showing what Palestine has come to expect from Europe.

> *"You have 'literally made the desert bloom'? Spare us the colonial rhetoric! It's like Lord Balfour himself is speaking. Europe's attitude towards the 'Orient' remains unchanged. Even Israeli historians have exposed these myths, but the power of racism prevails."[119]*

> *"Ursula von der Leyen celebrates 75 years of occupation of Palestine, yet has the nerve to accuse Russia of occupying Ukraine. What a shameless racist hypocrite."[120]*

> *"In other words, 75 Years of supporting illegal entities built on the ruins of a nation through killing, massacres and constant human rights violations. Shameful and Gross statement by a Top European Politician!"[121]*

But not only the West in this narrative has deserted the Palestinian case. The establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 unified the Arab countries. History tells us that during this period, many Arab nations were amid their own anti-colonial struggles, making the liberation of Palestine a common goal.[122] Over the last 75 years, the other Arab countries gained their direct independence, becoming more established. The drawn-out Israel-Palestine conflict slowly lost direct help from their neighbours. Many Arab regimes are or have been dependent on the United States, Israel's biggest supporter, for a long time.[123] Palestinians believe that the Middle East condemns Israeli Violence but that it will take little action.

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[118] EU in Israel (@EUinIsrael), "Today we celebrate 75 years of Israel's independence and friendship with Europe.", Twitter, posted 26/04/23, https://twitter.com/EUinIsrael/status/1651088583644594177, visited on 27/04/23.

[119] Abusalim, J., (@JehadAbusalim), "You have 'literally mad the dessert bloom'?", Twitter, posed 26/04/23, https://twitter.com/JehadAbusalim/status/1651246005692628992?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1651246005692628992%7Ctwgr%5Ebd10d4f7045e06f5ca63a6eaef60dafcecb29f96%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.aljazeera.com%2Fnews%2F2023%2F4%2F27%2Feus-israeli-independence-message-rebuked-in-palestine, visited on 28/04/2023.

[120] Hassan., M., (@thatdayin1992), "Ursula von der Leyen celebrates 75 years of occupation of Palestine", posed 26/04/23, https://twitter.com/thatdayin1992/status/1651218737520062464?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1651218737520062464%7Ctwgr%5Ebd10d4f7045e06f5ca63a6eaef60dafcecb29f96%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.aljazeera.com%2Fnews%2F2023%2F4%2F27%2Feus-israeli-independence-message-rebuked-in-palestine, visited on 28/04/2023.

[121] Abdul, R., (@RamAbdu), "In other words, 75 Years of supporting illegal entity built on ruins", posed 26/04/23, https://twitter.com/RamAbdu/status/1651296945460195328, visited on 08/07/2023.

[122] Rubin, B., 'Pan-Arab Nationalism: The Ideological Dream as Compelling Force', *Journal of Contemporary History* 26:3/4 (1991), 535-551, at 543-544.

Eppel, M., 'The Arab States and the 1948 War in Palestine: The Socio-Political Struggles, the Compelling Nationalist Discourse and the Regional Context of Involvement', *Middle Eastern Studies* 48:1 (2012), 1-31, at 26.

[123] Lewis, B., 'Free at Last? The Arab World in the Twenty-first Century', *Foreign Affairs* 88:2 (2009), 77-88, at 77-78.

The second narrative influencing the Palestinian identities is the 'Victim Narrative'. When looking at this narrative, we see similarities and differences with the 'Victim Narrative' in Israel. Palestinian victimhood refers to the historical injustices after the Second World War—focusing on the forced evacuation of their lands and ethnic cleansing of the indigenous Palestinian population by the Israeli military. This narrative is deeply embedded in the cultural discourses within Palestine. Listening to the vocabulary chosen in the Palestinian discourse shows a representation of their victimhood. Going back to the official beginning of the conflict, where the Israelis talk about Israeli Independence, the Palestinians use the term 'Yawm al-Nakba', meaning 'The Day of Catastrophe', showing a base in a sense of injustice. The term used demonstrates how the Palestinian identity stresses its beginning in its victimhood. From the start, the narrative victimisation of the Palestinians in 1948 was even clear before the term Nakba became the standard. The events of 1948 have also been called al-'ightiṣāb (the rape), al-hadith (the events), al-hijra (the exodus) and lammā sharnā wa-tla'nā (when we blackened our faces and left).[124] This type of vocabulary keeps evoking memories of suffering, pain and injustice, working to maintain the victim narrative.

This vocabulary is also evident in people who lost their lives at the hands of Israel. Travelling through Palestinian villages, posters and banners can be seen with faces of the men, and sometimes women, who lost their lives at the hands of Israeli violence. These victims are referred to as 'martyrs'. The posters of these martyrs are also displayed in the houses of family members or worn as necklaces. In an interview with *Al Jazeera,* a group of teenagers living in Jenin Refugee Camp described the 'martyrs' in Palestine as all the people who were killed by Israel. It is important here to understand that the 'martyr' does not have to be a person who fought back; one can be martyred as young as eight months.[125] By using the religious-based word 'martyr' for all the victims of Israel violence, the message is given that each Palestinian is inherently part of a resistance against occupation by Israel and that they are the victims in the battle against evil.

Statistically speaking, nowadays, Palestinians are more often victimised in this conflict than Israelis.[126] Organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have published lists of human rights violations by Israel against Palestine.[127] These violations, like administrative detention, house

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[124] Ahmad, H., Abu-Lughod, L., (eds.), *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory,* (New York: 2007), 253-254.

[125] Aisha, N.A., '8-month-old Laila al-Ghandor: Gaza's youngest martyr', The Peninsula, published 16/05/18, https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/16/05/2018/8-month-old-Laila-al-Ghandour-Gaza%E2%80%99s-youngest-martyr, visited on 11/07/2023.

[126] 'Data on Casualties', United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties, visited on 28/05/23.

[127] Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2022/2023: The State of the World's Human Rights,* (London: 2023), 206-211.

demolitions, restriction on the freedom of movement, forced evictions, and settler outposts in the West Bank, are feeding more and more into the narrative. Emphasis is placed on the restrictions and violations Palestinians experience at the hands of the occupation. Their victimhood is promoted in graffiti on the Separation Wall. Much of the graffiti shows Palestine as the weaker victim facing unjustified violence.

Picture 3: Palestinian boy looking at Israeli soldier wiht KKK hood, Taqi Spateen, May 2021.
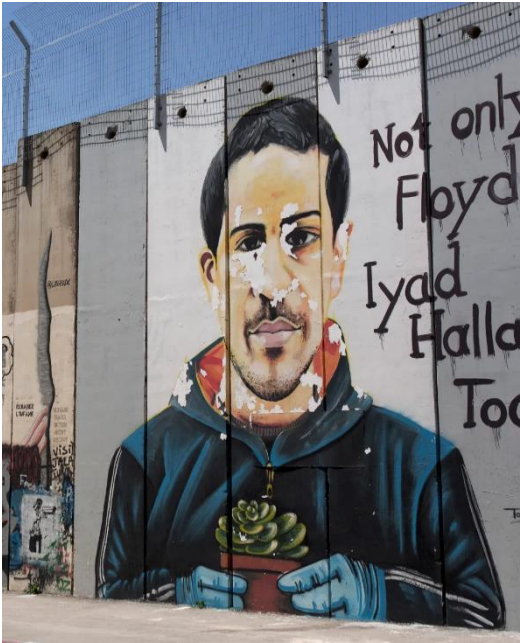
Picture 3: Mural of Iyad al-Hallaq, Taqi Spateen, June 2020.

Both of these graffiti works compare the Palestinians with innocent victims of needless violence. On the right side, an Israeli soldier is depicted as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, giving the impression of racist violence against the innocent. The other picture shows Iyad al-Hallaq, a 32-year-old autistic Palestinian man who, on 30 May 2020, was shot dead by Israeli police in East Jerusalem on his way to his school for people with special needs. Making the comparison with George Floyd shows that Palestinian place themself in the same line of victims of bigoted and racist violence that took George Floyd's life.

We can call the last narrative to discuss the 'There is No Israel Narrative'. This narrative is not as strong as the other two mentioned above. The narrative is not focused on denying the existence of Israel, like the similar narrative in Israel, but it is focused on discarding Israel as something permanent. The historical narrative focuses on the ongoing inhabitation of the land by Palestinians since the Canaanites settled there. The societal narrative does not negate the Jewish presence in the land and the ancient Jewish history. It stipulates that the Jewish population should not be the main power. This

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Human Rights Watch, *Born Without Civil Rights: Israel's Uses of Draconian Miliary Orders to Repress Palestinians in the West Bank,* (United States of America: 2019).

understanding is mostly based on religion. During my stay in Palestine, I spoke to Palestinian Muslims about the future of Palestine, and they told me that the Qur'an does not predict the end of Palestine; if anything, it predicts the end of the Zionist occupation referred to as Israel. Verse 17:4-8 has been quoted multiple times to me in this context. Qur'an Al-Isra says:

> *"[17:4] And We warned the Children of Israel in the Scripture, "You will certainly cause corruption in the land twice, and you will become extremely arrogant.*
>
> *[17:5] When the first of the two warnings would come to pass, We would send against you some of Our servants of great might, who would ravage your homes. This would be a warning fulfilled.*
>
> *[17:6] Then ⌜after your repentance⌝ We would give you the upper hand over them and aid you with wealth and offspring, causing you to outnumber them.*
>
> *[17:7] If you act rightly, it is for your own good, but if you do wrong, it is to your own loss. "And when the second warning would come to pass, your enemies would ⌜be left to⌝ totally disgrace you and enter the Temple ⌜of Jerusalem⌝ as they entered it the first time, and utterly destroy whatever would fall into their hands.*
>
> *[17:8] Perhaps your Lord will have mercy on you ⌜if you repent⌝, but if you return ⌜to sin⌝, We will return ⌜to punishment⌝. And We have made Hell a ⌜permanent⌝ confinement for the disbelievers.""[128],*

The understanding is the *Children of Israel* have returned to sin because of the Zionistic movement that oppresses the Palestinian people. This verse provides hope for the Palestinian people, hope in a foretold cosmic ending of the conflict similar to the two earlier times when the Jewish people fell to sin and corruption. In the end, the state of Israel will only cover a few pages in the final history book of Palestine.

Linked to the 'There is No Israel Narrative' is the modality through which many Palestinians choose to resist. Their form of resistance is known as '*sumud*'[129], meaning steadfastness. By staying on the land of their ancestors and rebuilding their houses when they are demolished, they show that they see their land as Palestine, something that will not change.

Comparing the narratives of both sides, a few aspects became clear. First, we can notice some similarities between the societal narratives. It can be stated that these narratives mirror each other, making the clash between them more evident. The inherent truth is that because of the similar focus in the narratives, people can not claim one set of narratives without judging the similar narrative as inferior

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[128] Qur'an Al-Isra 17:4-8, *Saheeh International*, https://quran.com/17, visited on 18/06/2023.

[129] *Sumud* is the word for Palestinian peaceful resistance. Directly translated to English, it means steadfastness and perseverance. It is the act of proclaiming your homeland and not leaving it despite the difficulties inflicted by the occupation.

and manipulative. The diametrically opposed narrative in this conflict feeds into the process of 'we' against the 'other' polarisation. Creating clear lines and boundaries that form the groups identity are made up out of the societal narratives. The narratives reinforce the image of the 'other'. Where the 'we' has the true and good narratives, the 'other' automatically has the evil and false narratives.

Terminology that is used within the narratives plays a further role in the creation of 'we' and 'them' thinking between the two sides. It plays a part in shaping the perception of how people think about their place within the conflict and the place of the other. People construct their framework out of specific terms to understand their situation; this framework makes the patterns by which we form our thinking process. Within the Palestinian and Israeli narratives, this is clear at certain points. The most evident example of the role that terminology plays is visible at the start of the conflict. Where the Palestinians use terms to describe the events of 1948, like al-Nakba or other strong terms (like the rape, the calamity, the catastrophe, the disaster), to recognise their national tragedy and victimisation, Israel calls the same events the '1948 War', the 'War of Independence or Liberation'—directly opposing the Palestinian narrative. The role of terminology also becomes clear in de-humanising the 'other'. Take, for example, Israel's use of the word Arab instead of Palestinian. Specific terms can also describe a higher moral value to its people, like the use of the word martyr within Palestine.

In short, the narratives that are in play in Palestinian and Israeli society are a driving force in creating the two communities as totally separate groups. It plays a big part in the group formations on both sides. Creating a strict border between the group's idea of 'we' and the 'other'.

The narratives are a part of creating the collective identity in Israel and Palestine. Both groups were promised by the British that they would have the space to become independent countries after the Second World War. With the war ending, Israel was given the land and the right to become an independent state. Almost directly after declaring its independence, Israel was attacked by its neighbouring countries, starting off the story of Israel as a story of being victimised. For Palestine, it is the same; their story of modern Palestine also started out by being victimised, massacred and kicked off land that they had owned for generations. From that point onwards, the victim narrative has run through both societies as a forming factor.

Both groups' victim narratives have been ongoing since 1948 and are interwoven with most societal narratives. In Israel, we see it in the 'National Homecoming Narrative' in the belief that only a Jewish state can keep the Jews safe, in the 'security narrative' that claims it is only reacting to threats and is protecting itself. The Palestinian 'Only Us Narrative' describes the powerless position Palestine finds itself in comparison with Israel; in the 'There is No Israel Narrative', the belief is built upon the understanding that Israel is only temporary and is a tyrant regime.

Since the conflict started more than 75 years ago, both groups have been victimised and have seen themselves as the victims. But can we say that this important narrative has formed a part of the collective identity in Israel and Palestine?

Tami Amanda Jacoby proposes five stages that victims can undertake, from the act of victimisation to the recognition of victim-based identity. The epistemological starting point is that victimisation is a harmful, violent act against a person or group; victimhood is a socially constructed identity built upon this victimisation.[130] Victimisation can reoccur repeatedly throughout the process of building a victim-based identity, bringing adherents back to the beginning over and over again. To create a victim identity, first, victimisation begins with an act or omission that causes harm to a person or group.[131] Second, the victimised party must see the harm as wrongdoing and want to gain redress.[132] Thirdly, the harm must be translated into the societal narrative to mobilise.[133] Fourth, the victimised group mobilises to influence power structures, which can be done within existing structures, like politics, or outside of them.[134] Lastly, victimhood can follow two avenues. On the one hand, victimhood can integrate themselves from this point onwards; victims will start to identify themselves as survivors at this point.[135] The other avenue is when victims remain trapped in the fourth stage, the victim's identity will hold strong; these groups are often unable or unwilling to move to the last stage because of the ongoing hurt or benefits they get because of their victimhood.[136]

The first four stages are evident in Israeli and Palestinian society. It is clear that both groups have been harmed by one other in the form of bombings, shootings, repossession of resources, etc. Furthermore, both parties see the violence against them as wrongdoing; they want back their freedom, land, safety and recognition of harm. It has become clear that victimisation has been translating into societal narratives since the start of the conflict. Victimhood on both sides influences the power structures. In Israel, it plays a part in political decisions, and in Palestine, it is clear in movements like BDS.[137] Victimhood has become one of the main identities in these societies. The ongoing conflict and violence are only feeding into this.

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[130] Jacoby, T.A., 'A Theory of Victimhood: Politics', 512.

[131] Ibidem, 520.

[132] Ibidem, 521.

[133] Ibidem, 523.

[134] Ibidem, 525.

[135] Ibidem, 526.

[136] Ibidem, 527.

[137] Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) is a Palestinian movement promoting boycotts, divestments, and economic sanctions against Israel. For more information see: https://bdsmovement.net/

Both historical narratives agree that the conflict between Israel and Palestine started as a conflict rooted in competition over territorial control. However, as discussed, the antagonism between the groups is fed through the conflicting narratives. Both groups have formulated their societal narratives so that they are not to blame, either calling on historical, religious, or social righteousness. Built into these narratives are social beliefs that enforce their call on victimhood. Victimhood has become embedded into society's understanding of themselves and is leading their actions. The Israel-Palestine conflict has transformed into a battle for victimhood.

Chapter 2 | Cosmic War – changing the setting

"A country is not just what is does – it is also what it tolerates"

– Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935)

The historical narrative that both sides see as true, states that the conflict between Israel and Palestine is a conflict over land. I would argue that this was never the only reason for the conflict and that the conflict has transformed. Analysing the things happening in the name of this conflict out of an understanding of taking and losing land is not satisfying. I would argue that the narratives on both sides promote a conflicting understanding that goes further than a simple conflict about land or political power but instead is a conflict about identity and maybe even human dignity. This is based on the narrative understanding of the two groups. If we take into account the actions and ideas that the narratives promote, we have to reset the lens through which we analyse this conflict, if we want to understand the conflict.

What, then, should we use to analyse the conflict? For this, I draw on Juergensmeyer's influential work, *Terror in the Mind of God,* specifically his concept of a 'cosmic war'. What is a *cosmic war*? Why can the Palestinian-Israel Conflict be seen as one?

Where a holy war can be described as an earthly battle between rival religious groups or ideologies and takes place only on a secular plane, a cosmic war, in its simplest expression, refers to the belief that God is actively engaged in human conflicts on the behest of one side and against the other. The battle is not only acted out on earth, between purely human forces in the form of soldiers or armies, but at the same time, a believed moral battle is fought in the metaphysical world. A cosmic war partitions the world into black and white. It is between metaphysical forces of good and evil, Us and Them, truth and falsehood.[138] Fighting a cosmic war brings material and spiritual benefits. Juergensmeyer argues that by endowing warfare with a sense of 'transcendent moralism' and 'ritual intensity', the sacralising and legitimising of violent acts becomes easier for both groups. [139] In such a conflict, there is no middle ground, and everyone is involved by devoid.[140] People work with a simple equation: if you are not Us, you must be Them. If you are Them, you are the enemy and must be destroyed. And so, the ultimate goal of cosmic war is not to defeat an earthly force but to vanquish evil itself.

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[138] Juergensmeyer, M., *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence,* (3red ed. Berkely, Los Angeles, London: 2003),169.

[139] Ibidem, 149.

[140] Aslan, R., 'Cosmic War in Religious Traditions', in: Juergensmeyer, M., Jerryson, M., Kitts, M. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence,* (New York: 2013), 260-267, at 264

Juergenmeyer only outlined three characteristics that increase the likelihood of a conflict becoming a cosmic war. First, the struggle must be perceived as a defence of basic identity and dignity.[141] Secondly, losing the struggle would be unthinkable.[142] Thirdly, the struggle is blocked and cannot be won in real time or in real terms. [143] The presence of any of these characteristics increases the likelihood that an early struggle will be conceived in cosmic terms. It is quite easy to find one or more of these characteristics in most conflicts. For this reason, Reza Aslan argues for ten characteristics:[144]

1. *When the struggle is perceived as being fought not over territory or political concerns but rather over identity and human dignity.*

2. *When the goals of the conflict become reified to the point that what is at stake is the survival of one's faith, culture, or way of life.*

3. *When the struggle cannot be won in real or material terms, either because the enemy is too strong or the goals are impossible to achieve in this world;*

4. *When the notion of losing the conflict becomes synonymous with loss of faith or identity, leading to the impossibility of compromise, negotiation, settlement, or surrender;*

5. *When victory is perceived as being achieved not through article or strategy but rather through the power of faith;*

6. *When the conflict is believed to be a participatory drama controlled by God, leaving no room for human conceptions of morality;*

7. *When acts of violence become ritualised, allowing fighters to be transformed into soldiers sanctioned by God and victims—particularly non-combatants—to be viewed in sacrificial terms;*

8. *When the symbols and metaphors that provide meaning and purpose to the conflict are derived from and linked to the mythological conflicts found in a community's sacred scriptures;*

9. *When opponents become dehumanised or demonised so that the battle is waged not against opposing nations or their soldiers or even their citizens but against Satan and his evil minions;*

10. *When the ultimate goal of the confrontation is not to defeat an earthly force but to vanquish evil itself, ensuring that a cosmic war remains an absolute, eternal, unending, and ultimately unwinnable conflict.*

When comparing these characteristics to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, we can see all of these characteristics being present—especially the first four points and points eight and ten. These can be summarised as the struggle is mainly over identity; the goal is to preserve one's culture, and to lose

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[141] Juergensmeyer, M., *Terror in the Mind of God,* 161.

[142] Ibidem, 162.

[143] Ibidem, 162.

[144] Aslan, 'Cosmic War in Religious Traditions', 261.

means the loss of the collective identity. Furthermore, religious metaphors and texts are used to provide meaning and justification for the conflict. Lastly, winning is impossible because of the unattainable goals.

The role of religious metaphors is evident on both sides. The narratives show us that mundane actions and politics of the state of Israel, by many Israelis, are interpreted through the lens of a historically promised land by God where the Jewish people would be free and saved from the enemies of God's chosen people. As was discussed earlier, God's promise of land, as well as the quest to clear the Holy Land of all foreign elements, still plays a part in the 'National Home-Coming Narrative' in how the Israelis identify themselves; first to the land, promised by God, and then to the State as created by Gods people. This narrative and the Palestinian 'There is No Israel Narrative' affirms point eight. Israel's claim on the land is based on religion, a promise by God. The Palestinians see God's control in this cosmic drama in the promised end of the conflict.

This cosmic understanding of the actions behind the whole conflict is also evident in other Palestinian narratives. It is reflected in the explanation of the Palestinian 'Victim Narrative', with the most direct example being how people killed by Israeli violence are granted the title of martyr, alluding to being the victim in a struggle against evil and blessed by God for their services. It is a conflict focused no longer merely on a struggle over land but on a struggle over the group's identity as the victim. Centring on the understanding that there is only good and evil, both groups believe they have the moral high ground with the only option to defy the evil 'Other' if their way of life and identity should be preserved. This stance is being used to justify acts of violence. To protect one's role as God's chosen marginalised group in this cosmic play, the role of the victim should be protected by all means, playing further in the separation of the two groups. Israeli poet Etgar Keret once criticised this negligence of accepting the suffering of the other by saying: "It's dehumanising; to protect your victimhood, you must ignore others' pain."[145] In the Palestine-Israel cosmic drama, both parties see themselves as David, the victim blessed by God, and not Goliath, the evil aggressor, even though both are guilty of violence as instigators.

A characteristic two is also clear in the narratives. Especially in the Israeli 'There are no Palestinians Narrative'. The actions taken by Israel to clear the land of Palestinian influence are a direct threat to the survival of the Palestinian faith, culture, and way of life; take, for example, the relocation and movement restriction of the Bedouin communities.

There is one element that seems to differentiate from the description of a cosmic war, as discussed earlier. Where a cosmic war is described as a conflict over identity and not as a conflict over land, the Palestine-Israel conflict is both. Both Palestinians and Israelis link their identity to the land. Their

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[145] Jaggi, M., 'Life at a louder volume', The Guardian, published 17/03/07, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/17/featuresreviews.guardianreview11, accessed 18/07/2021.

relationship with the land plays a huge part in their culture and thus their identity. It is not possible to say that these two groups will not lose a part of their identity when they lose the land. Israel link the land with their identity through religion and history. Palestinians link it to ancestry and way of life like farming or herding. Losing the land also means losing access to specific food. Food is often used as a means to relate to ones cultural identity. People from different cultures and backgrounds eat different. In 1977 Israel included za'atar on the list of protected plants, forbidding the Palestinian traditional practice of picking wild za'atar. It was seen as a direct attack against the Palestinian culture.[146]

The last characteristic states that a conflict has to be unwinnable before the battle can become a cosmic war. Only looking at the long list of failed political negotiations between the two parties can serve as evidence that coming to a peaceful resolution is seemingly impossible.[147] Winning the conflict seems even further out of reach for both groups. There are almost always multiple goals in a conflict, and winning a conflict goes hand in hand with achieving set goals. The historical narratives tell us that one of Israel's main goals was to create a safe space for its people. This is a non-measurable goal; it is impossible to create a country that is completely safe from violence or threat in every form. Palestinians are asking for the same; they want to live in freedom on their ancestral land without fear of their rights being taken. Both groups want safety, security, equality and freedom.

Speaking in an earthly understanding of winning, this characteristic seems to match Aslan's outline of a cosmic war. But looking at the 'There is No Israel Narrative, ' Palestinians seem to believe that there is an ending cosmically promised. Still, this characteristic is applicable to the Israel-Palestine conflict. It is important to recognise the dual nature of a cosmic war, where at the same time a real physical struggle is fought in this world as well as an imagined moral encounter in the world beyond.[148] The Palestinian narrative proclaims a belief in a cosmic win but not a realistic earthly win.

What does it mean for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict when we analyse its use of violence through a cosmic lens? Juergensmeyer argues that cosmic traditions in conflict can 'normalise violence' by translating the struggle against the presence of evil—onto society by creating an out-group or 'satanising' the enemy.[149] The cosmic struggle will give more opportunities for extremer acts of violence,

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[146] Bishara, M., 'For Muzna Bishara, Za'atar Is the Scent of Winter: My Palestinian Kitchen: Stories of Family & History', Asif, published 17/02/22, https://asif.org/for-muzna-bishara-zaatar-is-the-scent-of-winter/#:~:text=In%201977%2C%20za'atar%20was,by%20law%20under%20heavy%20penalties, visited on 10/09/23.

[147] Thrall, N., Israel-Palestine: the real reason there's still no peace, The Guardian, published 16/05/17, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/16/the-real-reason-the-israel-palestine-peace-process-always-fails, visited on 20/07/2023.

[148] Aslan, R., How to Win a Cosmic War: God, Globalization, and the End of the War on Terror, (New York: 2009), 5.

[149] Juergensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God, 108.

which are given more meaning by the perpetrators.[150] Such violence will be 'theatrical' and 'symbolic' displays due to participants' beliefs in the waging of a divine struggle in which their identity needs to be protected and evil defeated.[151]

When looking at the characteristics of a cosmic war, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict seems to have them all. If we look at this conflict from a Cosmic War idea, then our view of the meaning of the violence being displayed changes. A cosmic war is about defeating evil, making the 'other' become less human. This can only be done with the understanding that one's own group is good. These symptoms of a cosmic war created circumstances in which greater degrees of violence can be condoned. At the same time, cosmic war threatens collective identity. This must be incorporated into how violence is performed and how it is responded to.

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[150] Ibidem., 114.
[151] Ibidem., 121-125.

Chapter 3 | David and Goliath

*"A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it a superficial appearance of
being right" – Thomas Paine*

As described in the last chapter, the Israel-Palestine conflict can be seen as a cosmic war. This influences the way the violence used in this conflict should be studied. The cosmic war normalises violence. The violence will be 'theatrical' and 'symbolic' marked by extreme violence due to participants' beliefs in the waging of a divine struggle against evil. The symbolic nature of the violence is especially evident in the throwing of stones. Stone-throwing is one of the most iconic images people have when they are thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict. From violence during the Intifadas, protests, and meaningless hurting, the throwing of stones is a type of violence that occurs on a daily basis in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Both sides are using the stone as a weapon. This leads to questions: When, where, how and by whom are the stones thrown? What meaning is given to the action of stone-throwing?

To find an answer to these questions, we have to start with the comparison made when people talk about throwing stones in the Israel-Palestinian context, the biblical story of David and Goliath.[152] The comparison of David and Goliath has been used over the years to describe the violence but also the state of mind both sides of the conflict have. It is not surprising that the story resonates with Israelis and Palestinians.

David and Goliath is one of the best-known stories about the victim underdog resisting the monster Goliath. It is a popular trope used in news media when describing the unequal positions between opposing parties. The biblical myth is built on the basic juxtaposition of "we" (the few and marginalised) and "they" (the many and powerful), where David is the Servant of God and the hero overcomes great odds by defeating Goliath. This is the myth of the few, the isolated, the victimised, and the degraded, who face and rout a mighty army by force of faith and will. To understand the role the story of David and Goliath plays in the cosmic drama that is the Palestine-Israel conflict, we must know where the story comes from and what place it takes in both societies.

The story of David and Goliath can be found as a cornerstone in both societies. Both societies are socially and culturally influenced by religion: for Israel the main influence is Judaism, and for Palestine,

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[152] 'Events and Speeches, *PM Netanyahu's Interview with Die Welt'* Prime Minister's Office, gov.il*,* published 05/12/2012, https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/news/interview_diewelt051212, visited on 08/09/2023.

Simmons, S., *David & Goliath: The Explosive Inside Story of Media Bias in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* (Los Angeles: 2012), 75-81.

BDS (@BDSNationalCommittee, 'David and Goliath: Student BDS Organizers VS Israel's Repression', posed 04/10/17, https://www.facebook.com/BDSNationalCommittee/videos/1699719350072918/, visited on 06/09/23.

Islam. The historical narratives show the cultural presence of these religions in the societies. David and Goliath's story can be found in both religious traditions. Originally part of the Jewish scripture, it was also recognised as a story of an Allah-sent prophet in Al-Baqara. Below are short excerpts of the David and Goliath story from the book of Samuel, as well as the version of Al-Baqara. The excerpts focus on the strowing of the stone and are as follows:

Excerpts of Samuel 17:1-54.[153]

[17:45] Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

[17:46] This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand, and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee, and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

[17:47] And all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hands.

[17:48] And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine.

[17:49]And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth.

[17:50] So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David.

Excerpts of Qur'an Al-Baqarah 2:246-251.[154]

[2:249] When Saul marched forth with his army, he cautioned: "Allah will test you with a river. So whoever drinks ⌜his fill⌝ from it is not with me, and whoever does not taste it—except a sip from the hollow of his hands—is definitely with me." They all drank ⌜their fill⌝ except for a few! When he and the ⌜remaining⌝ faithful with him crossed the river, they said, "Now we are no match for Goliath and his warriors." But those ⌜believers⌝ who were certain they would meet Allah reasoned, "How many times has a small force vanquished a mighty army by the Will of Allah! And Allah is ⌜always⌝ with the steadfast."

[2:250] When they advanced to face Goliath and his warriors, they prayed, "Our Lord! Shower us with perseverance, make our steps firm, and give us victory over the disbelieving people."

[2:251] So they defeated them by Allah's Will, and David killed Goliath. And Allah blessed David with kingship and wisdom and taught him what He willed. Had Allah not repelled a group of people by ⌜the might of⌝ another, corruption would have dominated the earth, but Allah is Gracious to all.

The excerpts of these religious texts describe a similar meaning to the stone thrown by David. It is a direct attack of violence against a far superior opponent, an attack that, by the grace and will of God, defeats the enemy. The stone is more powerful than all the other weapons because it is weaponised by God to protect innocent and steadfast people. It is important to understand that in the story, the throwing of a stone is not an action taken without provocation. It is done by David to protect his people from being victimised by an evil oppressor. No one questions the rights of a shepherd to protect his

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[153] Samuel 17:1-58, King James Bible online, https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1-Samuel-17-1_17-58/, visited on 04/08/2023.

[154] Qur'an Al-Baqarah 2:246-251, quran.com https://quran.com/2/246-251, visited on 04/08/2023.

flock. The stone itself is the object that indicates who is seen as good in God's eyes—the weaker party has the weaker weapon, but it is a weapon that strikes true because it is thrown against evil, as God is good and there to protect his people from evil.

Even though both religious traditions carry the story of David and Goliath, there is a different significance given to this myth. The Battle between David and Goliath holds an elevated position in Jewish history and culture.[155] It carries with it a profound symbolic meaning in modern Jewish culture; the historical narratives create the idiom and self-image of the Jews as "Davids facing Goliath", the small, marginalised group with God's help steadfast against its oppressors. This founding myth started with the War of Independence. David's myth does not stop at its founding nor in '56 or '67 or '73. Israel has held strong to the belief that they are facing the Arab Goliath. Actions are almost always taken in the name of protecting the safety of the Israeli people.[156] A defence against Arabs and Palestinians became, from the start, the highest priority. For its protection Israel created a strong military and a perpetual readiness for war in the name of safety. Heroic deeds were glorified, and the image of David slaying Goliath became the starting point of the national narrative.[157]

On the other side, Palestine does not seem to have the same emphasis on the David and Goliath myth as a starting point. In Israel, it is part of the founding of its state, whereas in Palestine, the idea that they are David in this conflict seems to be more recent. To be more precise, one of the early mentions of the myth in connection to the conflict can be found during the First Intifada. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) issued a poster titled 'David and Goliath' in 1989. The poster depicts a Palestinian child armed with a small sling and an Israeli soldier armed to the teeth with guns and other weaponry. The idea among the Palestinians that they are David developed out of the growing power imbalance between Israel and Palestine. Israel has one of the world's most modernised armies in the world.[158] On the other hand, Palestinians have no real state and
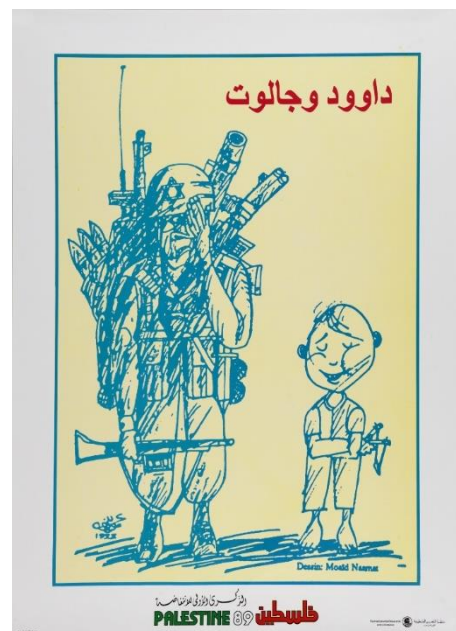
Picture 4: Daoud wa Jaloot, PLO poster (arabic translation David and Goliath, Moaid Naamat, 1989.

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[155] Gertz, 'Social Myths in Literary and Political Texts', 622-623.

[156] Take, for example, the security measures in the West Bank; see: Brinn, D., 'Ben-Gvir isn't being racist: West Bank security is paramount', The Jerusalem Post, Published: 27/08/2023, https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-756430, visited on 27/08/2023.

[157] Rotberg, 'Building Legitimacy through Narrative', 4.

[158] The Israeli military ranks 18th among 145 considered nations on a list of the world's mightiest armed forces according to the 2023 Global Firepower (GFP) index, see: '2023 Isrel Military Strength', GFP, reviewed 19/01/23, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=israel, visited on 14/08/2023.

no army. They see themselves as the true underdog in this conflict, the side no one is supporting, according to their 'Only Us Narrative'. Palestinians find similarities between themselves and David from the religious text. They are the few and marginalised, oppressed by the greater power.

As was mentioned earlier, both Palestinians and Israelis want to identify as David and his way of fighting evil. The throwing of stones is probably the most iconic image of Palestinian violence that people have in their minds about the Palestinian-Israel conflict. Foto and videos of young men and even children standing opposite the Israeli military with stones in their hands are put on social media on a weekly basis. Using the stone as a weapon can be a direct indication of how they see themself. The throwing of stones is mostly used as a reaction to military or settler presence in Palestinian areas, making it a reaction to a perceived threat. Their targets are soldiers, military vehicles, and, to a lesser extent, settlers and settler property and infrastructure. Targets are most often the Israeli military and its vehicles.[159] The throwing of stones is often a direct reaction to military or settler violence against Palestinians or Palestinian property, but it is not always the case. It happens that stones are thrown at settler roads, soldiers, or settlers themselves without being a reaction to direct violence. It is difficult to determine the number of people who throw rocks without violent provocation. The *Jewish Press* cited that the Knesset has more than a thousand cases a year of rock-throwing.[160] However, it is unclear what the circumstances are around these cases.

Even though Palestinians are more often shown to throw rocks in the media, it does not negate that it is also an action undertaken by Israelis.[161] Israeli settlers in the West Bank are also well known to throw stones. The one big difference is that the slinging of stones here is almost never done as a reaction to

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[159] Eye On Palestine, "Palestinian Youth confront the Israeli occupation", Facebook, posted 16/07/23, https://www.facebook.com/reel/946464886629330, visited on 14/08/2023

Eye on Palestine, "From the confrontation that followed", Facebook, posted 18/11/22, https://www.facebook.com/eyeonpalestine.offical/posts/pfbid02R5uW7P9ViR9SBzPQkfwL1vNiSuj8ZnBRCqy5mNdCx8urGA8z LUj1mCz8muFcnG1tl, visted on 14/08/23.

France 24 English, "Shocking footage shows Israeli soldiers disguised as Palestinian protesters firing at stone-throwers", YouTube, posted 08/10/15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZ4ppVnBjM4, visited on 14/08/23.

AP Archive, "Stone throwing youths clash with Israeli soldiers", YouTube, posed 28/08/03, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=isgN3dSKTB0, visited on 14/08/23.

Pressman, J., 'Throwing Stones in Social Science', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52:4 (2017), 519-536, at 524-525.

[160] Tazpit News Agency, '95% of 7,143 Cases Involving Rock-Throwing Terror Attacks Were Closed, Knesset Survey Shows', Jewish Press, published 04/02/22, https://www.jewishpress.com/news/police-news/95-of-7143-cases-involving-rock-throwing-terror-attacks-were-closed-knesset-survey-shows/2022/02/04/, visited on 16/08/2023.

[161] A view examples of linking stone-throwing to the Palestinians can be found in the TIME or the ABC News. I was not able to find similar articles that link Israelis and stone-throwing:

Macfarlane, J., 'Why Palestinians throw stones: A reporter's notebook', abc News, published 16/05/18, https://abcnews.go.com/International/palestinians-throw-stones-reporters-notebook/story?id=55200067, visited on 19/07/23.

Wallace, V., 'The Stone Throwers of Palestine', Time, published 22/07/12, https://time.com/3789625/the-stone-throwers-of-palestine/, visited on 16/09/23.

violence from the other side. There are, of course, escalations during demonstrations when both parties show this type of violence, but most of the time, it is not. This does not negate that it can be seen as a reaction out of fear or as a reaction of protection against the people who are, in the settler's view, occupying the promised land; it can be argued that it is not an action instigated by direct violence against them. Furthermore, when stones are thrown, it is often done under the protection of the IDF. Stones are also only thrown outside of settlements and in Palestinian areas. Targets are the Palestinian citizens themselves, their property (like houses and cars), and animals. Stones are often used in areas settlers wish to expand to. All this is visible in a video posted by B'Tselem, where a group of about 20 settlers are visibly gathered on a rooftop throwing stones at Palestinian homes, passersby, and cars under the protection of the IDF near the Beit Hadassah settlement in Hebron.[162]

From the description of the circumstances in which rocks are thrown in by both groups, we can detect a few similarities and differences. Although for the Palestinian people, it seems more evident that they react to an intrusion into their land, this can also be argued for settlers who believe that the West Bank is part of the promised land. Understanding it from this point, right to the land, both Israel and Palestine can see themselves as David in this aspect. But looking at it more closely, the overall picture changes. Whereas Palestinians use rock-throwing in their own areas, settlers are not showing this behaviour. To my knowledge, there is not a case of Palestinians throwing rocks in Israel (excluding Jerusalem)[163], but there are accounts and video evidence of settlers throwing rocks in or near Palestinian communities.[164] Furthermore, when settlers throw stones, it is usually the weaker weapon they have. Often, settlers are protected in their actions by the guns of the IDF and their own firearms; the stone is often only a less powerful part of the arsenal used. For Palestinians, the stone is often the main weapon. This does not mean that Palestinians are not using other weapons like knives, guns, or Molotov cocktails. It only means that Palestinians fight more often with only stones. The lack of availability of weapons plays a part in this.

Both Israel and Palestine identify with David and not Goliath; Israel sees itself as a beleaguered David confronting the Arab Islamic Goliath, and Palestinians see themselves as David against an Israeli Goliath.[165] Going off on their perceived victimhood, both parties have a claim on the role of David. But

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[162] B'Tselem, "Israeli settlers throw stones at Palestinian homes in presence of soldier in Hebron city center", YouTube, posted 06/08/22, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqGbz-9zcHc, visited on 14/08/2023.

[163] Bornstein, A.V., *Crossing the Green Line Between the West Bank and Israel,* (Pennsylvania: 2002), 9, 45.

[164] See for video examples:

B'Tselem, "Settlers throwing stones at Palestinian homes in Hebron, soldiers look on", YouTube, posted 21/10/15, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQXTEV-nXNU, visited 08/09/23.

B'Tselem, "Settler Children Throwing Rocks", YouTube, posted 23/09/07, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tloob_hijac, visited 08/09/23.

[165] Sucharov, M.M., *The International Self: Psychoanalysis and the Search for Israeli-Palestinian Peace,* (New York: 2005), 57.

considering that an important aspect of the story is that David is weaker and less powerful, modern Israel loses its claim to the role of David in this cosmic play. The current state of the conflict shows that if we cast Israel as David, the Palestinian Goliath can only be a dwarf. Even if we consider Israel as David in a battle with the whole of the Arab world, the official peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, as well as its military supremacy, make such a comparison quite untenable.[166]

Taking this into account, Palestine seems to have more direct commonalities with the biblical David in their action of throwing a rock than Israel. The role of David is to go to Palestine. What does this mean for Israel?

As was earlier concluded, the rock thrown by David is more than just a rock. It symbolises the positions the parties are taking in this cosmic play. The cosmic war brings the conflict to a pure battle between good and evil.[167] The stone is the symbol of conquering the oppressor. By Palestine taking the role of David, Israel is by default selected as Goliath, which is in direct conflict with the Israeli societal narrative and belief of their actions as being taken out of self-protection and their victimhood. In their social narrative, they are the good moral victims of the conflict, not the evil perpetrators. The simple stone is a direct religious metaphorical sign that shakes Israelis' understanding of their place in the world. It is an attack on their identity. As was described in chapter two, in a cosmic war, the protection of one's identity becomes one of the main focuses. Protecting their social understanding as victims and their cosmic place as good is important to maintain the collective identity. The simple throwing of a stone becomes a much bigger threat to Israel than violence with any other type of weapon.

Taking this into account, together with the understanding that cosmic war, as Jurgensmeyer argued, easily legitimises violent acts, it is not a surprise that actions against stone throwers are harsh. Israel uses the term 'terrorist' loosely and broadly to describe any Palestinian acts of dissidence, making that the throwing of a stone is placed into the same category as gun violence on soldiers or civilians and suicide bombing. In 2015, the Knesset indirectly acknowledged how big of a threat they saw in the throwing of stones. Nissan Slomiansky of Habayit Hayehudi presented a bill seeking stricter punishment for Palestinian stone-throwers. The Knesset passed an amendment to the country's civil law, which established a minimum prison sentence of three years and punishment for parents of children convicted of throwing stones at Israeli troops, civilians or vehicles. Nissan Slomiansky justified the new amendment

Eisenberg, L.Z., 'The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Precess, 1967-1993', in: Peters, J., Newman, D., (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,* (London, New York: 2013), 81-91, at 82.

Neslen, *In Your Eyes a Sand Storm*, 122.

[166] '2023 Military Strength Ranking', GFP, https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php, visited on 21/05/2023.

[167] Jurgensmeyer, M., *Terror in The Mind of God*, 146.

by explaining the great physical threat a thrown stone can be.[168] Even though thrown rocks can indeed be a physical threat to people, the actions taken by the Knesset seem overproportioned, taking into account that this amendment also punishes children who have less physical strength to severely hurt someone else. No Legal Frontiers reported that in their study of 89 cases of stone-throwing, physical injury was caused in one case, and damage to a vehicle was caused in three cases.[169] Still, approximately a thousand Palestinians, adults and children, are charged with the offence of throwing a stone a year.[170]

The throwing of a stone by Palestine is a threat to the national identity of Israel. The idea that Palestine is the aggressor needs to be enforced to maintain the social narrative. Israel needs to show a heavy hand in dealing with Palestinian stone-throwers because they are a direct threat to the Israeli identity.

To conclude, analysing the throwing of stones within a cosmic war view shows that the stone is not a physical attack but a mental one. Using imagery that is so iconic in both religious traditions, David is the one with God's favour and the one who, even though he is the initial victim, will persevere because of his steadfastness. The throwing of a stone by Palestine shows that they are not the Goliath in the cosmic drama. Bringing trouble for Israel, whose identity is partly based on the narrative that they are David, a position that is ingrained in society by their historical and social narratives. Because the cosmic war is a war that is about protecting one's identity, Israel is forced to act upon this threat by enforcing the existing narratives and acting against the Palestinians thrown stones that are a direct attack and symbol against the believed Israeli victimhood. They can not be defeated by David's stone, which will destroy their identity and lose them to the cosmic war.

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[168] Hass, A., 'Otherwise Occupied | For Israel, It Seems Goliath Was the Victim', Haaretz, published 27/07/15, https://www.haaretz.com/2015-07-27/ty-article/.premium/goliath-the-victim/0000017f-f46f-d487-abff-f7ffe7d10000, visited on 06/06/2023.

[169] No Legal Frontiers is an Israeli organisation engaged in research, legal work and advocacy in relation to the legal system in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Their report "All Guilty!" is based on observations of the military juvenile court in Ofer military camp between April 2010 and March 2011. They conducted a large number of observations but focused on collecting longitudinal information of each stage in 71 cases: http://btckstorage.blob.core.windows.net/site11082/ALL%20GUILTY%20report_en.pdf

[170] Tazpit News Agency, '95% of 7,143 Cases Involving Rock-Throwing'.

Conclusion |

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has waxed and waned for several decades. From the moment the state of Israel was declared, the area seemed to be in conflict. What first seems to be a simple battle over a piece of land has much deeper roots that go further than the perceived right by both groups for land and livelihood. From the Israeli point of view, the conflict started as a reaction to the refusal of Palestinians and other Arab countries to acknowledge the state of Israel in God's promised Jewish homeland. Palestinians argue that the start of the conflict was because of the violation of their promised right to self-determination in their ancestral homeland. For at least the last 75 years, the Israel and Palestine conflict has been spoken about in this basic formulation of a conflict over territory.

There are two core arguments made in this thesis. First, based on the historical and societal narratives, both parties have created a victimhood identity for themselves. Because of the extreme similarities, even mirroring, in these narratives, a battlefield is created in which there are only two options for people—it is not possible to stay in a grey area between the two narrative camps. The narratives have been stagnant since the start of the conflict. They play an important role in explaining the origin and positions of the Palestinian and Israeli people. The victim narrative has been shown to be important in this regard. It has been used to explain actions taken and to create an 'imagined community' in which people could identify. Jacoby's outline of the five stages that transform victimisation into victimhood has shown that the victim's identity has become a leading factor in societal and political decisions on both sides.

The second argument this thesis has made is that the Palestinian-Israel conflict can not simply be seen as a 'normal' conflict over land. Where the argument can be made that it started out as a battle of territory, this is no longer the case. The conflict has transformed into a cosmic war. This conclusion was made based on the works by Jeurgensmeyer and Aslan. The characteristics, which, according to these two authors, increase the chance that a conflict becomes a cosmic war, can all be argued for in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Changing the lens through which we understand this conflict brings a change to the meaning of the actions taken by both sides. The cosmic war changes the understanding of both groups of what they are fighting for and who they are fighting. Focus is placed on protecting one's identity, believing that this identity is good and the evil 'other' is set out to destroy them. For Palestine and Israel, this means that both are protecting their victimhood.

Coming together, the power of the victim identity in both societies and the understanding of the cosmic war that is fought between the two parties provide a framework that explains the extreme view Israel has about the throwing of stones. The cosmic war works with the understanding that violence will be 'theatrical' and 'symbolic'. Stone-throwing has become the most symbolic form of violence for Palestinians. Because of the link it has with the biblical story of David and Goliath, the stone itself has

become not a physical but a mental weapon. To throw a stone is to make a statement of who the victim is in this conflict. The throwing of a David stone by Palestinians is a confirming act of their victimhood, for Israel, it is an attack against theirs. The throwing of a simple stone is not only a physical attack but a mental one as well. Israel can not lose their victim identity; the cosmic war pushes people to protect their identity. Losing the victim status in Israel means the loss of their claims of acting out of self-protection and safety.

There are many emotions involved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Maybe the most prominent emotion is fear. During my stay in Israel-Palestine, I spoke to many Israelis who were convinced of the serious danger to their lives if they went to the occupied territories or even visited East Jerusalem. It happened a few times that people who live in West Jerusalem refused to meet me in the Old City. Other times, people expressed their surprise of me visiting Hebron and Ramallah without being hurt. The fear is real. The same goes for Palestinians; they also live in fear of losing their rights, houses, land, freedoms, and families. Looking at the numbers of UN OCHA, the fear of Palestinians seems more rational.[171] It does not negate the fear in Israel is real and a driving force. Even Goliath can be a victim of its own fears.

I have written this thesis not to present a solution to this conflict but to spark a conversation. This thesis wishes to open a new way of looking at the conflict in the hope that, at some point, steps can be taken in the process of peace and reconciliation. Conflict resolution theorists argue that it is possible to transcend conflicts if parties can be helped to explore, analyse, question and reframe their positions and interests. It is my understanding this process in the Palestinian-Israel conflict should start by acknowledging that the idea of victimhood is dangerous. If you preach to people constantly that they are all oppressed, then that primes people to look for that, closing the process of analysing the wrongdoing perpetrated by oneself.

Lastly, a request must be placed for further research into the throwing of stones in the Palestinian-Israel conflict. There is a significant gap in academic texts discussing this phenomenon, where there are multiple articles by people like Jeremy Pressman[172] that speak about Palestinians throwing stones. There is no academic speculation on this action performed by Israeli settlers. Part of this is, of course the lack

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[171] 'Data on Casualties', United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, https://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties, visited on 28/05/23.

[172] Pressman, J., 'Throwing Stones in Social Science: Non-Violence, Unarmed Violence, and the First Intifada', *Cooperation and Conflict* 52:4 (2017), 519-536.

of data. Where we have Israeli numbers of cases involving stone-throwing by Palestinians, this is missing for Israeli settlers.

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Images

Picture 1: Faris Odeh throwing a stone at an Israeli tank in Gaza, 29/10/2000.

Picture 2: Palestinian boy looking at Israeli soldier wiht KKK hood, Taqi Spateen, May 2021.

Picture 3: Mural of Iyad al-Hallaq, Taqi Spateen, June 2020.

Picture 4: Daoud wa Jaloot, PLO poster (arabic translation David and Goliath, Moaid Naamat, 1989.