The No State Solution

A Dialogue with Palestinian sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh & Israeli political scientist Uri Gordon

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Welcome everyone to our conversation with Palestinian sociologist, Mohammed Bamyeh and Israeli political scientist Uri Gordon, who is joining us from the UK. Thank you, Jason and Sunset Labs for hosting this event. Also shout out to Camas Books, University of Victoria's Anarchist Archive and ANVI for helping put this event together. We acknowledge we are holding this event a stone's throw from a clam-bearing inlet within the home territories of the Lekwungen peoples represented by the Songhees and Esquimalt nations.

These territories once featured old growth forests and meadows where Indigenous peoples cultivated the flowering camas plant whose bulbs are a key food source. Colonization, fueled by white supremacy, capitalism and state power has been dedicated to dispossessing the Songhees and Esquimalt nations from their lands and culture. In the face of this, we are in solidarity with the resistance, resiliency and cultural revitalization of the Songhees and Esquimalt nations, and we rededicate ourselves to interrupting structures of colonial violence and fostering decolonization at home and abroad.

Professor Mohamed Bamyeh from the Department of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh is the author of "Anarchy as Order: the History and Future of Civil Humanity."

Dr. Uri Gordon, author of "Anarchy Alive!: Anti-Authoritarian Politics From Practice to Theory" is an independent scholar now based in the UK.

Thank you, Mohammed and Uri. Currently, we have a single state in Palestine, the state of Israel, which oppresses and displaces Palestinians. Were a Palestinian state established, do you think it would solve this problem?

Mohammed Bamyeh: When it comes to the solutions that have been proposed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I think, it requires moral complexity. So there are several solutions, of course, that have been proposed in the past. Now, I think, and I've said that before, that the two-state solution, impractical as it may be, would be preferable to the status quo; to the occupation. It is not ideal, of course, and may not even be practical at this point, but it is better than the occupation.

Better yet is the one-state solution, which actually adjusts to the reality that we already have. But also that too seems to be impractical at this point.

Then we have the No State Solution, which in my view is better than the previous two solutions. So in a way, we have orders of preferences. It's not as though I want a No State Solution and I am not going to accept any other solution until I get that. I don't think that's actually a practical way of going about solving problems, especially when we have a genocide confronting us. There are orders of preferences.

So in a way, a two-state solution would solve some problems, but it might continue to be a colonial situation, under the guise of some other kind of a structure.

The two-state solution happens to be a statist solution that has some kind of a diplomatic, international consensus on it. That does not mean that it's going to happen. Ultimately, what we have is a settlement policy. That means that you do one of two things. Either you expel populations on both sides in large numbers, or you have two states, each of which have to accept that a substantial number of their citizens are from the other community with equal rights.

If that happens, that would be a vast improvement to what we have right now. But that is not what is on the table. Of course, as we know, even this solution (two-states) has never been accepted by any Israeli government, and not just by Netanyahu, not even after the Oslo Accords. Even then the two-states was never formally acknowledged as the end of the road.

Currently, we have one state, which is an undemocratic apartheid state in which half of the population that lives in the territory it controls has no rights at all. So there is a liberal, democratic kind of a principle that can be invoked here in favor of the one state solution. Of course, it hits another obstacle, namely that it goes against a fundamental Zionist image of a Jewish homeland. but when we talk about a No State Solution, I don't think we are actually talking about something that is a fancy idea. And we're not talking about something that is unrealistic because the solutions that are being proposed are being argued to be realistic, but in fact are not so at this point. So we have to look beyond the existing reality.

Uri Gordon: Again, not much to add here. One sort of halfway house, again, not more or less practical than any of these other diplomatic solutions is the idea of a confederation, some kind of two-state confederation where citizens of each state can live in the territory of the other state and vote for parliament in their citizenship state and vote for municipal in the other state and that will enable absorption of refugees in 48 Israel and for settlers to remain.

You can talk about a three state confederation with Jordan, you can talk about turning Jerusalem into an international area and moving the UN headquarters to Jerusalem. I mean, all of these are, you know, are plausible diplomatic solutions, but right now there is not the political will to implement them and no pressure on Israel from the superpowers to concede to a situation which would mean redressing the imbalance and inequality and asymmetry on the ground.

And so I agree with Mohammed that the No State Solution is no less plausible than the other two, just because all of them seem so far away at the moment. But to me, the No State Solution is a horizon, the only horizon that includes the decolonization of social relations on the ground. Because even one state, would still be a capitalist state and we would still be imagining it along some kind of line, and some kind of by national class society. I mean, it's kind of impossible to imagine anything very positive right now. Naturally this takes me back to the immediate need to just stop what's going on and enable things to at least reach a level of tolerability for the Gazans at this point.

What would collective liberation for Palestinians and Jews look like?

Uri Gordon: What is collective liberation? Well, removal of the borders, destruction of the weapons, erasure of all the money, a classless society, the abolition of patriarchy, all the rest of that good stuff. I mean, you know the solution to the Israeli Palestinian question ultimately is the same solution to the social question. But that's our utopian horizon, right?

That's at this point, this is something that is informing us and informing the way we organize in anti-national and anti-fascist fronts. It informs our attempt to have horizontal structures in what we do to, I don't like the word, but to prefigure or to have a concrete utopia as much as we can in whatever we do currently in terms of our efforts.

Collective liberation looks different everywhere and it looks the same everywhere in this sense. It's something we feel at the moment that we are so far away from, that the most we can hope for is like gleanings of that vision in our everyday efforts, even if they're on a very kind of human rights or even humanitarian level.

Mohammed Bamyeh: I agree with Uri about this. I just would like to add that one form of emancipation that I imagine and I consider to be ideal is when we emancipate ourselves from this commitment to a national identity that, due to oppression and resistance to it, has become our primary defining feature. There is a reason for that, of course, because we have a situation of conflict and where rights are denied or granted on the basis of nationality. So that actually redoubles people's commitment to their nationhood, as well as to the principle that rights should be granted on the basis of nationality–exclusively.

An ideal solution would be to make it possible for people to distance themselves from this commitment to nationalism. And that means solving the problem that causes this attachment to nationalism. We had some historical attempts at this before 1948. And when you look at the larger region of the Middle East, ultimately, the one time that region actually functioned well historically, was when we had open or minimal borders, when you had the free movement of populations, and where you had Jewish communities as part of the natural fabric of the region, not in Palestine, but in Iraq, in Egypt, in Yemen, in North Africa, and so on. You had Jewish communities living for centuries in various Arab territories and doing relatively well.

This historical reality came to an end gradually with the colonial direct or indirect creations, which are all states in the region. All these states have in the long run proved themselves to be failures in the sense that the only way they can live in the region is by generating conflicts with each other and vying for hegemony for no reason other than that this is the logic of the state as its rulers understand it. This is a logic of states that know that they lack legitimacy, so they generate legitimacy by constructing an enemy, which in turn allows each state to mobilize population under the banner of a common identity against an external enemy.

Emancipation is getting ourselves away from that straitjacket of modern rule and modern violence implanted in the region through colonial processes. The removal of the colonial inheritance in Palestine is especially urgent, but all around Palestine as well.

Mohammed, you have argued that throughout history, people have constructed anarchic systems of mutual obligation, solidarity, and trust that are integral to our collective well-being. Do you see paths towards mobilizing these values so as to end ethnic conflict in Palestine?

Mohammed Bamyeh: I do. One important thing about the Palestinian historical experience is that Palestinian society continued to exist after being significantly damaged through settler colonialism, and persisted in the diaspora as well after 1948. It recreated itself in the refugee

camps, but also elsewhere in the diaspora. Palestinian society then reconstituted itself by repurposing social traditions it already had.

For example, if you look at the refugee camps, in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, elsewhere, and how they survived between 1948 until the late 60s and beyond, you would note that one factor that had helped a great deal was the survival of Palestinian village culture, of mutual aid, support and generosity. Property rights, for example, in the camps were recognized informally without any documents, without any papers, without any government telling people who owns what. People like Nadya Hajj have done a lot of research to document how a traditional culture and traditional links actually allowed society to continue to exist under extreme conditions without the government and without any enforcing mechanism. Now I am not arguing that those were the only kinds of traditions that had helped people survive. But these traditions had become more voluntary in the new environment of refugee camps, but they remained mutually recognized by everyone, even as they were joined by another culture by the late 1960s: revolutionary culture.

So here you have modern revolutionary organizations that work across the refugee camps, that advance principles of leadership not tied to being a member of a notable family, that are generally meritocratic, and that work across all refugee camps. That revolutionary culture lived side by side with the traditional village culture among the refugees.

I am not proposing that social traditions alone can resolve ethnic conflict. That is, I think, asking too much of them, and that is not what they do. What they do is keep society in a state of existence and solidarity under unfavorable conditions. In Gaza, for example, and because of the hardships not of today but of those preceding October 7th by decades, the extended family institution became a lot stronger, precisely because it had become more crucial for the survival of the population.

So you have actually a social institution, the extended family, that gained in importance in proportion to the degree of suffering necessitating activating all other institutions of mutual aid in society, including the creation of modern revolutionary organizations that, too, assumed social service roles. But the family institution was always there and conditions of hardship reinforced people's commitment to it. So when I talk about these traditions, actually, that is the value that I see in them, even though sometimes they do foster a conservative mindset. But conservatism does not come out of nowhere; it becomes more solidly established when people see something in it that helps them continue to live together and to be able to count on each other in predictable ways.

Uri, you have been involved in solidarity actions to defend Palestinian lands from Israeli incursions. The refusal to serve in the Israeli army is one such action. Can you discuss other kinds of activism and how they disrupt state domination?

Uri Gordon: I wish there was a lot to discuss in the Israeli-Palestinian context. I know that since October and the start of the war, the Refusnik Support Organization "New Profile" has received hundreds of phone calls from young people seeking advice about refusing, evading. I mean, you know, we… We support what's called gray refusal, as much as public refusal. There have been beginnings of demonstrations against the war by Israeli Jews. Demonstrations of Palestinian citizens of Israel have been much more harshly repressed and prevented.

Yesterday, there were a few dozens of demonstrators in central Tel Aviv. There were five arrests, and this was an explicitly kind of demo against the genocide, against the war, unlike previous ones that were under the guise of returning the hostages or maximum kind of trying to rekindle the civic uprising against the Netanyahu government. There are some accompaniment

and monitoring efforts that are going on where volunteers are present, especially in the West Banks of the Brown Hills in the Jordan Valley that are recently suffering. I am sad to say that what we could say existed of an Israeli radical left perhaps 20 years ago has become much weaker. A lot of people have left the country. And right now I can't really point to a lot of very sort of inspiring stuff. I mean, there are still, of course, Israeli-Palestinian joint struggle networks going on, but we really are at the low point in this respect.

When we think of and talk about a No State Solution, for us the most compelling model that comes to mind is the Syrian Democratic Council and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria, also known as Rojava. This is a multi-ethnic, multi-party federation of decentralized, self-governing districts that asserts its autonomy on the local level in a manner that spreads organically. Can you comment on this example?

Mohammed Bamyeh: I think this is a great example. I have been hearing, of course, a lot about it over the years, and I regard it as an ongoing experiment. That means that, like all experiments, there are going to be mistakes. People are going to hopefully learn from them. And there are two things I would like to say about Rojava. One has to do with the perception of the outside world of what Rojava is. And second, how Rojava resonates with other movements of what we call the Arab Spring. First, there are representations of Rojava as a Kurdish experiment. I find that is a problematic portrayal. For example, you have German filmmakers who go there and portray how the Kurds are great, the Arabs are bad. There is a certain amount of liberal racism in such a portrayal, which I find really objectionable precisely because it goes against the spirit of what Rojava is. The portrayal I am talking about is not only uninformed. Moreover, it takes what is quasi-anarchist experiment and puts an ethnic kind of a stamp on it, which distorts the reality and also the entire premise of Rojava.

Second, Rojava does not come out of nowhere. It comes out of social traditions plus some organizational capacity. Indeed, throughout the larger region, we see elements Rojava everywhere. If you look at the Arab Spring movements from 2011 and 2019, you see everywhere what I have called an anarchist method of rebellion that seems to be ingrained in familiar social traditions. These were not centrally organized movements; they do not generate a political party to show them the way; they seemed uninterested in leadership; they relied on horizontal coordination, mutual help, and spontaneity as an art of movement. Now those movements were criticized because of these properties, because commentators who wanted to see results or outcome wanted to say, well, the Arab Spring movements have all failed because of their lack of organization, because of their anarchism, etc. But one thing that is actually interesting to me, sociologically, is that the ordinary people who did those revolts, were not interested in organizations or leadership or what have you, and they seem to be expressing something deeper, namely an interest in not being governed.

When you are in the revolution, in the heat of it, that is precisely the point when you are not being governed. And you enjoy that experience, and you want it to be the condition of society to come after the revolution. Now, of course, it is not as though the ordinary people who did the Arab Appraisals have actually read books about anarchism or even used the term to describe what they wanted. But this is more of an ingrained organic anarchism that was always part of the social traditions along with contrary traditions in the same minds of the same person.

On the one hand, there are social actions that ordinary people do in their village that are voluntary, solidaristic and enjoyable. On the other hand, these same people may also think that it would be nice if the country as a whole had enlightened despotism. Two apparently contradictory

impulses In the same mind, the same person. And when you compare the Arab Spring to previous revolutionary movements, you see that the previous ones had a different character that had little to do with organic anarchism. So there is a learning process that is happening across the region that has an intuitive character to it in the sense that it is not organized, it is not actually identified as such by the people who do it. But they seem to have a historical memory of, and consequently a judgment on, how previous attempts at liberation have been conducted.

For example, we had charismatic leaderships in previous revolutions, but we do not have them in the more recent ones. Why? Because we have tried that already, and charisma has not helped us. So now another trick at emancipation is generated out of the same mind. So what is happening on Rojava, I think is not happening in a vacuum, and it is not happening only in one territory. Rojava seems to me to be an expression of a broader sentiment that you see in the whole region, all driven by a desire for a post-despotic, post-tyrannical kind of system that includes somehow not being governed. And again, this is not self-conscious anarchism, but it is an organic anarchism that had been mixed with other ways of thinking in the same mind until now.

I hope that the one thing that Rojava is doing is perhaps clarifying the distinction between these different ways of thinking about social and political order.

Uri Gordon: I have not been to Rojava and I don't know a lot about it. I mean, I think, you know, I think Mohammed's analysis right there was very insightful and I might add one thing, which is, you know, to me, there's not just Rojava, but also the example of the Zapatista communities in Chiapas, which have recently had a kind of further decentralization to their structure. And if you look at freedomnews.org.uk, *Freedom*, the oldest English language anarchist paper that I'm part of the collective of, we did a few features on that. And I think that inevitably all of the modern examples of quasi-anarchist social organization that we have seen have been at some kind of geopolitical juncture that has made them succeed or be able to succeed or not.

If we look at Rojava, I mean, you know, people don't like this to be mentioned, but you know, there is a cooperation between Rojava, at least the armed forces there, and the American military working together against the armed jihadist groups. The situation, in order for them to just found themselves, you know, in a juncture where they're basically more helpful to world powers than not. Similarly, the Zapatistas and Chiapas kind of had the fortune or misfortune of being in one of the economically and geopolitically marginal parts of Latin America where there were enough conditions to allow them to be more or less left alone, except when they weren't now, with the strengthening of cartel activity across the Mexican Guatemala border, we're seeing a lot more threats to them there.

So this is always a combination of the factors that Mohammed mentioned with a kind of external international geopolitical factors. Whether anything immediate can be learned from that for the situation Israel-Palestine, well, you know. We're so far away from that. Like I said in the beginning, right now we just have to halt the war crimes. We have to create a situation where some kind of frameworks, some kind of envelope that we found in order to… start somehow re-building towards some kind of humane situation on the ground. The rest, you know, that's our utopian horizon.

A foundational value that Movement for a Democratic Society promotes is ecological renewal, because when communities recognize this is in their common interest, it reinforces cooperation and solidarity. Could such ecological activism serve as one avenue toward replacing state structures in Palestine?

Mohammed Bamyeh: I think that is without saying. There are also some Israelis and Palestinians who have highlighted that kind of ecological consciousness. Right now, however, this war is leading to an enormous amount of environmental degradation. I just saw a study that discusses the greenhouse emissions that have resulted just from this war, including explosives as well as the military transportation associated with them. I forgot what the exact figure, but there has been a huge increase in CO2 emissions since October 7th until today. So this war is not doing any good to the environment. Also, the way water resources are used has always been really a crucial part of the conflict, in an area where water shortage is acute, and the fact that the settlers have a lot more rights to water than the Indigenous population.

When Gaza was under Israeli occupation, for example, there were 7,000 Jewish settlers in Gaza and 1.5 million Palestinians back then. The 7,000 settlers had rights to as much water as the 1.5 million Palestinians. If you look at the West Bank, the situation is not that much better. So we are facing an area that is suffering from global warming, that already had water shortages before the current climate crisis, and the problem is going to get worse. The only way it can be resolved is by regional cooperation. It cannot be resolved any other way. One dimension of this conflict is going to concern who gets more of the same scarce resources. I do not see the environment benefiting all from this, only that the conflict is contributing to the global environmental crisis.

Uri Gordon: Both pollution and solutions don't know borders. The effects on the water table and the whole situation with effluence and everything else is connected immediately to the water management practices and to the unequal power and unequal allocation of water resources in the region. There was a time when, you know, during the Oslo years, it was thought that environmental cooperation could be a route. What often took place was that these projects have taken and still take place within very asymmetric power relations, and without the Palestinian side getting the kind of resources or power that would enable it to be an equal partner in these situations. One thing that connects to what Mohammed was speaking about before is the idea that, you know, thinking ecologically, thinking in terms of watersheds, in terms of biomes, in terms of climate regions, is one way to wean ourselves off nationalist thinking and that it's potentially possible through that type of angle to achieve a different outlook that is no longer wedded to those things. But for that to happen, there first has to be a political equality, there has to be human dignity acknowledged equally for Palestinians as for Israelis.

We can talk about these things as very positive sort of potentials, but like diplomatic solutions, like everything else, none of this is going to go anywhere until there is a massive international pressure and a much stronger international movement to force the hand of the Israeli government.

Given the increasing influence of ultra-orthodox Judaism and fundamentalist Islam, for lack of a better term, how do you envision building a secular society in Palestine?

Mohammed Bamyeh: OK, well, that's easy. [Audience laughter.]

This is something I have worked on a lot, namely modern religiosity. And my perspective on it is that what we call fundamentalism is not the problem. It is a symptom of a problem. Let us take Hamas as one example. In 1948, there was no Hamas. In 1967, there was no Hamas either. But there was, in fact, a Palestinian resistance movement that was entirely secular. Resistance movements throughout the region as well against other governments were almost entirely secular until the late 1970s. What we call fundamentalism is a later outgrowth, which means that we have to ask ourselves where did it come from? It did not come from existing social traditions, even when most people could be regarded as "conservative." The religious interpretation of the

conflict entered this theater of conflict very late. Hamas came about in Palestine only in 1987, nearly 40 years after the disenfranchisement of the Palestinians. Then "fundamentalism" offered itself up as a solution to a problem that no one else was able to resolve.

In the rest of the region, you can identify other social pressures, social problems and dislocation out of which what we call "fundamentalism" emerged in the manner of "the last option we have." Whatever you think of it, fundamentalism expressed in religious terms the radicalism of the opposition to the existing status quo. And that worked because religion essentially was the discourse that was freely available to anyone to use. No one had monopoly over it and so it became a kind of universally available political language to the lay person, and generally to the apolitical segments of the population. If you look at where fundamentalism has become a political force, you see similar things. Fundamentalism in the United States and the West has a different story that I can talk about if there is time. But when we look at the region that we are talking about, what we have is basically this kind of radical Hamas/Muslim Brotherhood anti-colonialism, responding in kind to the uncompromising radicalism of the colonial project itself.

Now, fundamentalism also is a program that is flexible, even though it does not look like it. And you can see that if you look at the history of movements that we call fundamentalist. They do not stay with the same program over decades. They change. Sometimes they want to overthrow the state by violent means. Other times they participate in elections. Hamas in 2006, for example, ran for elections like any other political party, and its electoral program barely mentioned religion. They took that completely out. And their electoral campaign back then in 2006, which they won, was entirely focused on combating corruption in the Palestinian Authority. And they were elected because most people perceived them to be actually cleaner. Not because they were more religious, but because they were perceived to be less corrupt than other organizations.

So in a way, I think when we just focus on fundamentalism itself as a frame of thought, we miss a lot of what fundamentalism is doing in society. These are people I think you can talk to. They do want conversation partners, I know that from personal experience, but they are typically dismissed by people who think of themselves as being more enlightened and educated than the fundamentalist. That kind of attitude leads to the fundamentalists becoming secluded and talking only with each other. Basically, I think it is wrong to focus on fundamentalism itself as a problem rather than on what is it a symptom of, what kind of collective problem is generating it.

Uri Gordon: I would strengthen this by saying that, you know, I think it's a mistake also to build this dichotomy between fundamentalism and secularism, or to take it for granted that we won't necessarily build a secularist society. I mean, I would certainly, if I have to live under a state, I want to live under a secular state, but not another religious state. I think we need to acknowledge that religious frameworks and faith frameworks, for better or worse, are a very sort of ingrained part of people's self-perception, especially the working class. I'm talking about both Jews and Palestinians in this respect. And so I think that the idea of sort of, you know, needing Israel or Palestine to be a secular Western country, has an imprint of a colonial mindset on it.

If you look at the Jewish working class (mostly right-wing) population, which is more traditional religious, not necessarily fundamentalist or orthodox, this is largely a population coming from, you know, what Mohammed was talking about before, the kind of former I think we can definitely also envision modes of multicultural existence and even radical democracy that are not fundamentally opposed to religious practice or tradition that are moving in ways that are towards more equality, especially gender equality and other aspects. So to me, it's not a question

of rejecting religious faith or tradition, but of detaching that from political power, detaching religious organizations from the status of clientism towards the state, whether those of the colonized or of and don't even get me started on the state client of Qatar, a state client of Israel, a state client of Iran, you know. There are these institutional connections between nationalist power and religion that need to be severed. But I don't think it's to be taken for granted that secularism and sort of the kind of Western enlightenment ideal is what we need to strive for.

[First audience question] **As a Palestinian in America, anarchism helps describe what I see as historic and traditional forms of Arab self-organization. I wonder if either of the speakers see anarchism when they reflect on Middle Eastern history. Are there any other contemporary anarchist thinkers or movements in Palestine, or who are Palestinian?**

Mohammed Bamyeh: I think for me there are really two ways to think about anarchism. There is self-conscious anarchism, which begins its career in the mid-19th century as an organized body of thought, a movement, organizations, and critical mass of intellectuals, although the basic ideas emerge earlier and can be traced back to the Enlightenment. Then There is a larger history of anarchism, which I have called organic anarchism. Other people have different terms for it. Kropotkin has outlined a compelling history of it. We see it as embedded in social traditions around the world.

In my book on anarchism, I included political philosophies from different world traditions, Islamic political philosophy, the Hindu world, and so on. So there is a larger history of anarchism, if you want to look at it that way. And there are differences between these two approaches to the idea of voluntary associational life. The latter one, organic anarchism, is abundantly obvious if we look for it. But it is always mixed with other approaches to social life as well. So one can say it is "contaminated" anarchism, although I do not like the term "contaminated." But if you have a better term. I will use it. Basically we are talking about an ideal conception of social life that is mixed with pragmatic ingredients. And you have to distill it to find the anarchist "pure substance," if you want to express it that way.

There are Palestinian anarchists as well as Arab anarchists as well as Iranian anarchists as well as Turkish anarchists, self-conscious anarchists throughout the whole region. They come and go, so it is not as though this is actually a massive political movement, but it is there. There are people who write about anarchism in Islam and from an Islamic perspective. And I think that can be done as well, and it works if you think of religion as one way by which people try to emancipate themselves from other powers. We also have religious slogans like the Islamic call "Allahu Akbar", which is inaccurately translated as "god is great," but literally it is "god is *greater*." Greater than what? Well, you do not need to actually say it because the implication is that god is greater than any tyranny that you happen to deal with at any given point in your life.

So god, which is an idea that is invisible, that you do not see, you do not have to, does not work like a government, even though we have governments that make use of the idea of god. But for the oppressed, the idea of god has the capacity to provide them with a sense that there is a force out there that is more mighty than tyranny. In my latest book on Islam, I discuss the historical *Sharia* as a quasi-anarchist system. The *Sharia* is typically translated as "Islamic law," although in fact it has nothing to do with the idea of "law" as we understand it today. The historical had three properties that qualify it to be seen as a quasi anarchist system of social life; namely, it has multiple schools, rather than a source. It houses contradictory judgments, in a way that modern

law cannot. And thirdly, it was not outlined by any government or legislatures, but rather by the scholars of religion in civil society.

Of course, that was a system of living a pious life that did not come out of the state and had multiple sources, and you could pick and choose rules as they corresponded to the needs of ordinary life. That allowed people historically to lead what they considered to be a moral life over which they had some control. Of course, that historical *Sharia*, with its anarchist properties, can become an authoritarian system today when someone translates it into state law, which has never been the case historically. So in a way, there are many ways to actually think about the organic anarchism as something that is embedded in our historical traditions.

Regarding the individual who spoke earlier at the beginning of the event, I will ask this question now so you have the opportunity to answer it. The question was: is this event from the perspective of Palestinians or from the perspective of anarchists?

Mohammed Bamyeh: Well, the way I see it, there isn't just one Palestinian perspective and there isn't just one anarchist perspective. There's a variety of perspectives and I think trying to impose a single perspective on a community rigidifies the reality that we have. I can only express my own Palestinian perspective and my own anarchist perspective. But I make no claim that other Palestinians agree with it or other anarchists agree with it as well. What makes us interesting as humans, I think, is that we have this variety of standpoints, as opposed to an entire community having just one viewpoint and one stand.

Combining two audience questions into one: Why is it so prevalent among Israelis to see or believe that the genocide, they are actually the victims of a genocide? Why does such a large proportion of the Israeli population, and even the Jewish population in the diaspora think that they are the victims of genocide, not the Palestinians? A corollary to that question is: Why is it so difficult for both Israelis and diaspora Jews to see, even if they do not believe that what is happening to Israelis is a genocide, why is it so difficult for them to see that it's just fundamentally wrong on a political or humanitarian level?

Uri Gordon: I don't know that most Israelis or Jews think that they are currently victims of genocide. I mean, I think there's obviously an overemphasis on the Hamas atrocities and sometimes a tendency to minimize the ethnic cleansing and war crimes in Gaza. I think that's happening because of a sustained effort over the past 20+ years of what has become essentially a kind of hostile takeover or not so hostile takeover of Jewish public institutions in the diaspora, not just of the Israeli state, but by Republican-aligned, if not outrightly fascist forces who have sought to identify the state of Israel with the Jewish people to place Zionist blinkers on Jews' self-perception and to paint any and all criticism of the Israeli government as anti-Semitic.

The fact that here and there are also indeed, you know, anti-Semitic voices or just kind of black and white, 'my enemy's enemy' stupidity in the Palestinian solidarity movement does not help that. But fundamentally, it is the result of a very established by now propaganda line that has been pushed by the Israeli government, by its allies in the American Republican Party, and which has kind of gained traction within public discourse that has to do with identifying criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, and which sort of works by way of constantly inflamed notions of Jewish collective trauma from the Holocaust in ways that are then skewed to be misapplied to the current situation.

There are also situations where I understand that Jews around the world may feel threatened by **some** of the expressions of outrage at what the Israeli government is doing. But I think that the way in which some Jews have come to feel threatened by any and all opposition to Israeli

government practices is the result of a long-standing kind of propaganda effort that's been going on, and it's very heavily entrenched. And, you know, there is also a sort of concerted silencing of alternative Jewish and Israeli voices in the mainstream media, which I think feeds into that problem.

Can you discuss what you each mean by a No State Solution? What specifically would that look like? How would you explain it to someone with no background in anarchist thought? And can you recommend any works to help us think through the possibility of a No State Solution in Israel, Palestine, and around the world?

Uri Gordon: Like I said before, I mean, this is a question of what we place as our utopian horizon. What is a No State Solution? I mean, how is there a 'no state' that has borders with other states around it, right? I mean, the No State Solution is something that encompasses the Middle East. It's something that encompasses the world. It's as, you know, as liberated and equal and has no borders, is a classless society, you know it's not as if there's a kind of blueprint. It's more that we are still able to somehow connect within this in this extremely dark time and how that might reflect on our concrete methods of organizing and doing politics together in the present day.

Mohammed Bamyeh: In anarchist thought historically, there was an imagination of kind of an ideal world consisting of a world federation of self-governing communes or small entities. And that goes all the way back to one of the original ideas of democracy as possible only on a small scale, as opposed to the large states that we have right now. So the idea is there, of course, the reality is that we have a world map that is governed by states, and the state form of political life is the only form that has become familiar to us. Therefore, we imagine emancipation in the form of one state replacing another.

But the No State reality, if we ever have it, is something that transcends the limits of the possible today. It is something that can be established only by persuasion. It is the one political program that cannot be done by force. You cannot force a 'no state' on people who want a state. And this principle applies to anarchy in general. It is built into the very logic of anarchy that you cannot impose on those who do not want it.

This is what I think is what makes anarchy ethically superior to a perspective, in that only persuasion is its force. We are talking about an enlightenment project, if you want to call it that, that gains more resonance out of the sense that the reality we have is not working. **The states that we have are generating conflict on an ongoing basis because conflict is the only way by which they can continue to live.** And this is something that is becoming more and more obvious, especially today. So in a way, the validity of the No State Solution comes from the experience with the existing states and their continuing failures. And this is something that one has to advocate for. Now, how that actually comes into being, it comes into being when there are enough people who are persuaded with the validity of the idea. And then of course, you have a structure that emerges out of that conviction.

So we are talking about a pragmatic process of adjustment to reality. That is not something that you can propose in a theoretical form before it begins to take shape out of the multiple failures of our current reality, the spread of social agreements on the no state as the solution to the problem of the state, and the incapacity of the current, imposed order to do anything other than generate constant wars and unspeakable suffering.

Now, I wanna say just a couple words about realism here. Ultimately, **the world has typically been changed by people who are unrealistic. That includes Zionism, by the way, because**

at the beginning of Zionism as a movement did not appear to be a realistic proposition at all. But yet, here we are. If you look at many revolutionary movements, if you look at the Bolshevik revolutions or others, they were started by dreamers who had no connection to reality at all, whose revolution did not depend on an "accurate analysis of reality." People who are realistic, who thought within the existing paradigm and within the structure of power as it is, tended to maintain the structure as it is because that is what "realistic analysis" leads you to. You understand the situation as it is, as a structure, meaning that it cannot be changed because you have understood it to be necessary and inevitable.

So when we talk about the 'No State' Solution, we are also talking about the perspective that does not just reject existing reality, but also rejects realism as a perspective. If you look at the Palestinian resistance movement and its history, its greatest episodes corresponded precisely to conditions that were "not suitable" for it. The general strike in 1936, the mobilization in the camps in the late 60s, under completely desperate conditions after a defeat. The first Intifada emerged out of conditions where the entire world had forgotten about Palestine, and so on. So we do have actual movements that are remarkable, that we have witnessed in our own lifetime, that happened precisely because people rejected realism as a perspective. And that is actually what we're talking about right now: the inadequacy of the realistic perspective to prevent genocide.

Audience question: What can we be doing internationally to organize resistance to war and domination in West Asia?

Uri Gordon: Each one with their local context. I'm a big believer in 'think global, act local.' I think that any anti-militarist action you take, any action you take against the arms trade is in some knock-on-way automatically a Palestine solidarity action, is in some knock-on-way automatically a climate action. is an anti-capitalist action and so on. The very immediate, sort of not particularly radical or revolutionary thing that people can do is, put the resources somewhere helpful. And I know that there has been a slide with a few options for donations, right? That has gone with this event and perhaps we can show that and maybe the moderators would like to just highlight those afterwards and wherever we can find a Palestinian movement that is seeking out allies, accomplices, call it what you want, that aligns with how we see things, and that's worth working along with.

It's up to people to look at their their very local conditions and to look at who is already organizing on the ground and do stuff with whatever facet of that is closest to their views and closest to where they can put their energy in addition to just immediate sort of support for those destinations that are mentioned here on the slide.

Mohammed Bamyeh: I just want to emphasize one thing about what Uri said, which is the importance of boycotts. That is, it is one thing that we can do as individuals without even being part of any movement. The apartheid system in South Africa collapsed largely because of this global boycott, which was based on the global realization that this is a racist, unethical system that should not exist in the modern world.

The Israeli government is very aware of the effectiveness of boycotts, and it devotes a huge amount of effort to quash the boycott movement. Politicians in the US, as well as in Europe, are being lobbied in order to pass laws to ban boycotting, to ban people from being able to simply call for boycotting institutions that terrorize the world, including shopping at specific companies! But that shows you exactly that this is a serious movement, which is also nonviolent. Its effectiveness lies in its persuasive and communicable nature.

You mentioned there's more than one school of thought among Palestinians and more than one school of thought in solidarity organizing. One such example we've seen here today is anarchistic. Another example that comes to mind is with the Palestinian youth movement in the US that has been organizing side by side with the Party for Socialism and Liberation, the PSL or ANSUR or the People's Forum, who are largely Marxist-Leninist communist groups that have had questionable takes and rhetoric on the struggles of Syrians, of Afghans, of Uyghurs, and Ukrainians, and so on, which further demonstrates a lack of mutual internationalist solidarity. With that in mind, what has the global Palestinian solidarity movement done right, and where can it improve?

Mohammed Bamyeh: I do not think that we need to insist on uniformity of viewpoints.

Palestinian society is diverse, just like any other society, but Palestinians suffer from occupation and denial of rights. Their problem is uncomplicated. You do not really need to write a philosophy book to explain why this kind of oppression is bad. It is self-evident. For me, the solidarity movement works best when it uses direct, easy to understand language that highlights the idea of justice as something that is intuitively understandable, and that uses whatever language of rights that everyone can understand. Human rights, for example, right to water, sustenance, dignity, citizenship rights. We are able to agree on all these things at the theoretical level.

I think that we shoot ourselves in the foot when we make the story more complicated than it needs to be. It is a simple story.

Speaking of boycotts, what has been the effect of the international BDS movement on the radical left within Israel?

Uri Gordon: The radical left in as much as, you know, still standing has been and continues to be supportive of BDS. I am part of a group that was set up already, I think within a year of the original callout coming out, which is called Boycott From Within, has kind of course overlapping membership with Israelis Against Apartheid and so on. And so, you know, there are, there is support for that within Israel.

But again, the Israeli radical left is very small and fighting a retreating battle. The oppositional movement in Israel is in much better conditions than in Russia, for example. I think certainly for Israeli Jews, there is still, uh, a space of, of permitted protest and everything else. But, um, the society, Jewish-Israeli societies, siege mentality, the very ingrained militarism of the society, the sort of perpetuated sense of existential threat that is embedded in public discourse in media, everything else, has meant that at least the emotional reaction to Israeli radical left is always as to essentially people who "support the enemy." For you "Canadian" organizers, imagine how they might think of you in Alberta, and you'll have a sense of what it might be to be a radical in Israel. [Audience laughter.]

I believe that any solution to the Israel-Palestine problem starts and ends with the US government. Fundamentalist Christians hold a huge amount of sway in the US and strongly support Israel, as well as being anti-Semitic themselves. How do you see dealing with this issue and problem?

Uri Gordon: Good luck, yeah. I think they're gonna get the White House soon and we're in big trouble.

Mohammed Bamyeh: If I may just say one thing about this, it is that we cannot rely on the US, although of course, if the US does the right thing, the problem will be solved. But it is not going to do it. And no other state is going to do it, by the way, even though everyone knows that if you talk in terms of the international relations paradigm, you have a conflict where one

party is very strong and the other party is very weak. Which means that the stronger party has no incentive to give up anything, and the weaker one has no power to actually get the absolute minimum it could live with. When you have an equation like that, you need a third factor to come in from the outside and impose a solution. That typically would have been the US, but Palestine is not the priority for any mainstream US politician. It is not the priority for the Europeans either, and it is not a priority even for Arab governments.

Therefore, the only third factor we have is a resistance movement that actually changes the equation. And that is the only thing that has always worked–not in the sense of solving the problem, but in the sense of putting the problem back on the map. So every time there was an interest in resolving this conflict at the level of states, that happened *only* because Palestinians did something dramatic that upset the status quo. Only then do states pay attention and say "oh, there's a problem there, we have to do something about it, or at least pretend to do so." The same thing today is happening. No one before October 7th was talking about the Two State solution. Everyone was talking about the so-called "Abrahamic Accords," which meant peace between Arab governments and Israel and forgetting about the Palestinians. That was where we were heading until Hamas, whatever you think of Hamas and whatever it did, at least put Palestine back on the map.

And then all of a sudden Biden is talking about the two-state solution, in a completely insincere way, I believe, because ultimately he is not doing anything to actually make it happen. And you can tell that important European governments, such as Germany, have no real commitment to a solution either and were happy with the status quo before Oct. 7th, even though they claim otherwise. But that claim is pure hypocrisy. Other European powers that are more sincerely interested in a solution do not have the influence required to make it happen. So Palestinians, along with the solidarity movement, have only themselves to rely on–as has always been the case.

So the only dynamic you have right now, is basically the only dynamic that has historically worked out, which is that the people who are oppressed take matters into their own hand, and continue to struggle or resist in ways that catch international attention, and put themselves back on the map. This is not the first time this has happened in Palestinian history. It is a repeated pattern where oppressed people become agents in a process of struggle, as opposed to being objects of colonial rule.

What do you think would be the strongest force to counteract the tendency among Jewish Israelis to dehumanize non-Jews and especially Palestinians?

Uri Gordon: The fish stinks from the head. [Audience laughter.] The problem is the mainstreaming of the theological supremacist and racist discourse by the Israeli leadership. As well as the level of kowtowing to the far right that we have seen, not just by Netanyahu, but also by what is now shown as the centrist alternative. People aren't born to dehumanize, right? People dehumanize because A, it comes at no cost, and B, because they are given frameworks of thinking that encourage them to do that. I think we should think about it the same way as you know, maybe a lot of the American mainstream public was dehumanizing Afghans and Iraqis earlier this century, to me dehumanizing mentalities are a sort of discursive symptom of actual power imbalances. It's a mechanism for people to self-legitimate, to give themselves some kind of way of reconciling their desired self-image as good people with the fact that atrocities are being committed in their name. And the way to reconcile that is to portray the victims of those atrocities as uniformly threatening, menacing, dangerous enemies who are forever ill-disposed

to agreement and motivated by hatred and by anti-Semitism and the rest of it, which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, of course.

I mean, you know, we saw how… support for Hamas skyrocketed in Palestinian homes, because of that sort of element of agency that Mohammed was talking about, whereas you know **this situation that has been created by the refusal of the Israeli side to move anywhere really for 15-20 years or more.** So I don't think demonization as a discursive issue can be solved at that level, I think it's symptomatic of the very kind of material power relations that exist.

In order to envision a different discourse, we need to envision a different leadership, we need to envision a different sort of prevalent ideology, we need, I mean, and I don't know if, you know, Israel and Palestine is going to have something like it, a South African moment. I mean, who knows, that would be a very sort of positive thing to happen and something that nobody really could foresee a year or two before the collapse of apartheid. So the fact that the collapse of apartheid or the collapse of the Soviet Union were things that happened without any kind of major expectation for it to happen, that still gives me hope. But it's a very, very thin sliver.

Mohammed Bamyeh: Just briefly, I agree with Uri mostly. I just say for change of public opinion to happen, you need two things, or one of two things.

First of all, a process of persuasion. We can talk about what this means in terms of how people talk about security and all that. More importantly, and more effectively is to reveal that the situation that we have is very costly, that the occupation is not free of cost. That is something that I think should happen on an ongoing basis. The fact that the Palestinian cause was on its way to be completely forgotten before October 7th, had to do with the perception in Israel and outside of Israel among other governments, that the occupation does not matter because it is not costing any government anything. What happened on October 7 added a cost to the occupation. But basically, any other way of increasing the cost of occupation, including boycotts, for example, can have a similar effect.

What are some good resources for what Mohammed was saying about fundamentalism and secularism?

Mohammed Bamyeh: There is a lot of literature on that right now. If I may, I would recommend my own book. [Audience laughter.] *Life Worlds of Islam* (2019) where I do go into the origins of this movement and how it should be read and what could we learn from that kind of analysis. Sorry about this self-promotion. But it is based on works that other people have done prior.

Uri Gordon: For me it's also not quite self-promotion, but I did support Mohammed Abdou in producing the book *Anarcho-Islam*, which you mentioned before and I think is even present in that room right now. So that's out from Pluto Press and has a lot of quite fine-grained discussion of the possibilities of Islamic Anarchist jihad, what he calls this kind of anarchistic grappling with the sources.

Our last question is for Uri. Does the painting behind your head represent this conflict? [image of painting?]

Uri Gordon: God, no. Yeah, I mean, I know that it says coexist and shit. This is a poster that I picked up maybe 20 years ago at the Museum on the Seam, which is a Jewish-Arab kind of shared gallery that used to exist on the border between East and West Jerusalem. It's actually a… portrait by a German artist. And no, first of all, because I don't believe in coexistence, **I believe at this**

point in joint struggle and in a shared fate of Jews and Palestinians on the ground and anywhere else.

And I don't believe in erasing any asymmetries that exist. That's the first time I've actually been asked about this, it's something that my ex picked up and it kind of stayed in the house. But no, it's not. I wouldn't go too far with that.

We thank Uri and Mohammed's point about how we can help most directly on everybody's chair as a flier for how to engage in direct action and help the people of Palestine. So please do what you can. And thank you very much for a wonderful afternoon.

Mohammed Bamyeh & Uri Gordon
The No State Solution
A Dialogue with Palestinian sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh & Israeli political scientist Uri Gordon
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This zine is a transcription of The No State Solution: A Dialogue with Palestinian sociologist Mohammed Bamyeh & Israeli political scientist Uri Gordon, a live and recorded event which took place on January 22, 2024 in unceded Lekwungen territory in so-called occupied "Victoria, BC, Canada." While a few grammatical errors have been fixed, we did our best to stay true to the original transcript of our speakers. **It is not to be confused with Shuli Branson's** *No State Soluton (2023)***.**