

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES (II): Israel

Geo-confederacy: The Single-Space Solution for Multi-ethnic Communities

THE ETHNIC clashes in Israel and Palestine, Northern Ireland, Kashmir, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo are a struggle to control land. When two or more groups want to control the same area of land, there are several ways to resolve it. Unified rule by one of the parties leaves the other in an inferior position and leads to conflict. Expulsion is morally unacceptable. The just solution is to either split the land or share the land in equality.

The land obtained by the Palestinian authority constitutes a partition. But a division of the land can also involve conflict, and it is not sufficient when the populations are mixed, when the economies are intermingled, when a minority after partition resists being ruled by the other party, and where one party is deeply attached to sites occupied by the other. In Kashmir, partition has not been accepted by either side. A just resolution can involve partition, but needs to also go beyond it.

The basic moral question in such conflicts is, who is the morally proper owner of the land? The ownership of land is really two types of claims:

- ✧ rights of possession, and
- ✧ rights to the benefits of the land.

Typically, both sides present a case for the legitimacy of their claim. In Israel-Palestine, the Palestinian Arab claims are based on generations of residency as well as historical origins going back to the Canaanites. The Israeli Jewish claim goes back to the ancient Hebrew times as well as continuous residency.

JUSTICE is based on equal treatment. This implies that all the people in the disputed land should be recognized as having an equal right to exist on the land and an equal historical and moral claim to the benefit of the land.

An efficient modern economy works best with an individual possession of land, but the benefits of the land can be shared. The land rent (excluding the value and returns on the buildings and other improvements) reflects the benefits of the use of the land, since this is what a tenant is willing to pay for the rights of possession.

Common ownership of the land rent can be implemented by having each title holder pay the market rent in exchange for possession. This would include all government agencies which hold land. The nations and ethnic groups would each have their own governments, which would be united under a confederation or federation that would collect



the rent, which would serve as its source of revenue. The rent would be collected on real-estate space as well as on the economic rents of water, minerals, and other natural resources.

The concept of a confederation based on the equal sharing of the rent could be called a "geo-confederacy," the "geo" referring to the commonly owned land rent. Each person and land-title holder could choose which government to affiliate with, so that nobody would need to be displaced from his home.

THE confederation would spend some of the rent for services involving the whole territory, and then transfer the remaining rent to the constituent members of the confederation. Having to pay rent in order to hold land would transform the political and military conflicts over land into a market for land in which no individual or social segment

A PEACE PLAN



By FRED FOLDVARY

would lose. The rent would compensate the others for not having access to that land. Making it costly to hold land would reduce the demand for land that served socially-divisive nationalistic and emotional purposes.

A geo-confederacy resolves the problem of independence versus autonomy. Many Palestinian Arabs desire an independent state rather than autonomy under Israeli rule. But the Israelis fear that an independent Palestine could become an enemy. One Israeli justification for occupation has been *ein breira*: no alternative (Kerr, 1975: 4). Security, it is said, requires it.

Confederation provides an alternative, bringing both parties under one common government, which not only provides common services but also provides courts to resolve disputes.

Each party is autonomous for its own domestic affairs, such as education and money, which reduces the fear that the other side will become dominant.

This model – based on the principles of self-governance and rent-sharing – can be applied wherever there is ethnic conflict. Rent-based public finance and the elimination of taxes on productive activity also promotes a prosperity that itself reduces social stress and promotes harmony.

- ✧ In Kosovo, there is a potential clash between the ethnic Albanians who desire independence and the Serbs who want to retain Kosovo for its historic connections to Serbia. Federation could provide a way out, in which Kosovo becomes a republic within Yugoslavia but separate from Serbia, while Serbs in Kosovo may remain Serbian citizens and some enclaves remain part of Serbia.

- ✧ In Bosnia, too, sharing the land by paying rent would compensate the others for the exclusion from possession. Bosnia could be a confederation with Muslim, Serb, and Croatian governments, the confederation collecting the rent.

- ✧ In Northern Ireland, the conflict involves independent countries as well as the local ethnic groups. The peace process in Northern Ireland would be strengthened if each side could have its own ethnic self-governance under a federated assembly, and the landholders had to pay rent. The land could also be declared under the joint sovereignty of both the United Kingdom and Ireland, allowing each person to choose his citizenship.

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This method respects ethnic diversity. If applied in Kashmir, each resident could choose to be an Indian or Pakistani citizen, while India and Pakistan had joint sovereignty, and each landholder, including governments, paid the economic rent to a federated government in Kashmir.

THE principle of self-governance under a federation funded by the land rent should be applied universally. It provides for self-determination and an equal ownership of the land, the key elements of social justice. There will be extremists who reject equality, but most people would accept it both as a fair solution and to avoid further conflict.

It is in areas of ethnic conflict where the remedy is most urgently needed. The situation is especially critical in Israel-Palestine today, where a declaration of a Palestinian State would lead to a clash with the government of Israel. Prime Minister Ehud Barak would be wise to propose a confederation as a way to defuse the conflict. He would be even wiser to declare a jubilee in which the land of Israel and Palestine is restored to all the people, as is written in Leviticus 25, verse 24, "And in all the land of your possession, ye shall grant a redemption for the land."

Verse 17 says: "Ye shall not therefore oppress one another." This should apply also to the relations between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinian Arabs: they should be equal in governance and in rights to the land. Verse 18 tells us that if we keep to God's statutes, then "ye shall dwell in the land in safety." Israelis seek security, but they shall not find it until they establish justice, in accord with the jubilee.

Verse 19 then says: "And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat until ye have enough, and dwell therein in safety." If the land rent is shared and there is peace, then the land will yield plenty for both the Israelis and the Palestinians, and with justice and prosperity will come the true security, safety, that the Israelis have sought all these years.

SOME Israelis may fear that if the Arabs of East Jerusalem join the Palestinian government, Jerusalem would be divided again. However, the city could have a united government across the jurisdictions. In Washington, DC, the U.S. federal government has jurisdiction over some areas and the city government over others; Jerusalem could function similarly with two jurisdictions, just as West Berlin was a united city under the American, French, and British zones.

A settlement of the conflict perceived as just by many Palestinians would remove the major cause of the hostility, the domination,

humiliation, and loss of identity suffered by the Palestinians. Secondly, the economic dependence of the Palestinians on the Israeli economy would make it in the interest of most Palestinians to coexist peacefully. The people in Gaza especially depend on work in Israel.

The confederation would have three main functions.

- (1) It would establish courts to resolve disputes both among the constituent states and the citizens of different states. The confederation would also have a police force for interstate matters and to help in law enforcement in border areas.
- (2) Defense and foreign affairs. Each state could still be considered an international agent, able to maintain diplomatic relations with foreign states, but the confederation would also have its own foreign service to

percentage. This would act as a counterweight to population increases. The confederation would retain the remaining rent for its administration.

The concept of a bi-national state has been discussed in Israel-Palestine, but the proponents have not explicitly called for the common ownership of the rent. Martin Buber in 1921 proposed a "just alliance with the Arab peoples," with "unhampered independent development" for each in a bi-national state. He also favoured (in a 1939 letter to Gandhi) the "communal ownership of land" (citing Lev. 25:23) and "the independence of each individual". With "joint sovereignty," neither people need fear "domination by the other through numerical superiority," hence immigration need not be restricted.

Noam Chomsky advocates a settlement that includes self-government for each nation, the ability of each individual to live where he chooses, and a state which is neither Jewish nor Arab but multinational. However, regarding the specifics, he said, "I will not sketch out details..."

For the Israelis to accept a settlement, they need to regard it not as one in which they yield territory. It is, rather, an arrangement involving a change in governance; not as a withdrawal, but an agreement to share sovereignty; not as the establishment of a hostile neighbouring state, but as the preservation of Jewish autonomy within a common government over which they will have significant control.

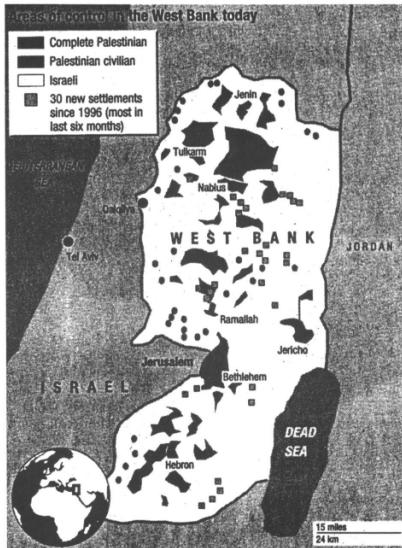
For Palestinians, there would be a Palestinian State. The lack of all desired territory would be compensated for by the possible inclusion of Arabs within the pre-1967 Israeli borders as citizens of the Palestinian state. The confederation would make all of Palestine the common land of the Palestinians, though shared with the Israelites.

This geo-confederate peace plan seeks a middle ground between the unacceptable maximal proposals of independent partition and subordinate autonomy, providing an option which implements principles of justice recognized by the traditions and religions of both parties. The plan, building on the legacy of Martin Buber and the bi-national movements of both parties, is offered for public dialogue so that people of good will may no longer be able to say, "there is no alternative." **L&L**

Sources

- Buber, Martin (1983), *A Land of Two Peoples* (Ed. Paul R. Mendes-Flohr). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 Chomsky, Noam (1974), *Peace in the Middle East?* New York: Vintage Books.
 Kerr, Malcolm H (1975), Introduction, *Evasive Peace in the Middle East*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

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represent the whole territory, just as the European Union is represented. Israel would retain its own defense forces at first, and could, at its option, gradually transfer the military to the confederation as it gains confidence in its viability. The assumption of defense expenses by the confederation would be an incentive for Israelis to transfer the forces.

- (3) Assess all the land annually and collect land rent from the title holders. The confederation would impose no land use restrictions or regulations. The land would include the water beneath the surface, which the confederation would sell at market prices in amounts that would sustain the supply.

The confederation could distribute some of the rent to the governments of the constituent states on the basis of their population and some equally to the states or based on some fixed