

Keynote Address

Tactics of oppression in the 'peace negotiations' between Israel and The Palestinians: A feminist perspective

Presented by Dr. Ruchama Marton
President and founder, Physicians for Human Rights, Israel

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Introduction

The Camp David peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians show the futility of the militaristic mode of negotiation. Such power-centred conduct contradicts the possibility of respect for one's partner, since the heart of respect is the willingness to share power. The Oslo agreements, from the time of their formulation until the breakup of the talks at Camp David, lacked the component of respect between partners. As some saw already at the beginning and many found out at the end, Israel's goal was to amplify its control as the strong partner over the weak partner, the Palestinians.

According to the stereotype of masculinity, the masculine style of communication is aggressive and competitive, centring on power, status and hierarchy. What is most important in this way of speaking is not to show weakness.

In the peace talks the Israeli negotiators set the tone. It is not surprising that men whose background is in the military and the political fields most closely conform to the masculine stereotype. Consequently, the form and the contents of the negotiations expressed and reflected the 'masculine mode'.

As a therapist, what happened in these peace negotiations resembles closely what I have seen time and again, in the psychotherapy of couples, heterosexual and lesbian. In these situations one person, ordinarily the man, is in the role of an oppressor and the other, generally the woman, is oppressed. Under these conditions the pattern of communication between the couple does not serve to solve problems, but rather to replicate the inequality between them.

The peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians took a form similar to that used by domineering men toward dominated women. The Israeli negotiators wanted to dictate the terms of the agreement.

In this paper I analyse the oppressive negotiating tactics used by Israel in these talks. They are:

- Giving partial and deceptive answers or no answers at all.

- Withholding the material requirements for independence.
- Setting schedules unilaterally.
- Acting in ways which contradict declarations, promises and agreements.
- Not acknowledging wrong- doings.
- Concealing the oppressor's bad face

In the peace negotiation process, the psychological dynamics of oppressor and oppressed came into play most significantly with regard to the three issues of the utmost importance:

The Palestinian refugees: The issues of responsibility for the refugee problem, the return of the refugees and reparations to the refugees.

East Jerusalem, including the Muslim holy sites, as the capitol of the Palestinian State.

The delineation of borders between the two states so as to enable a viable Palestinian state. This required that Israel give back the lands it occupied in 1967 and return its settlers into Israel.

While talking highly on the level of declaration about peace and coexistence, on the level of reality Israel emptied these talks of their content of hope for a true and just peace. It thus humiliated the Palestinians and brought about in them a constant state of disappointment. This was achieved by the variety of characteristic oppressor's tactics.

Giving partial and deceptive answers or no answers at all

The oppressor will avoid giving answers to crucial questions. If there are answers they are partial, avoiding the main issue, or deceptive. This causes the weak partner to ask the same questions or to pose the same demands again, taking on the role of one who is never satisfied. The strong partner counters with condescending accusations such as "you're never satisfied; nothing is good enough for you. No point in giving you an answer"

The refugee problem "was never discussed seriously at Camp David, since Prime Minister Barak declared that Israel has no responsibility at all for creating the refugee problem or for solving it" (A. Eldar, Ha'aretz 24.7.01).

Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas), Chairman Arafat's Vice President, stated in an interview to the Palestinian newspaper El 'Iyam (31.7.2001) that at Camp David Israel refused to take responsibility for the tragedy of the refugees, refused to agree to the principle of the Palestinians' right of return, and refused to agree to the principle of reparations. "The Israelis wasted time with regard to this issue from the third day of the meetings at Camp David until the last". Barak stayed away from direct contacts, avoiding negotiation: "Barak would send the Israeli delegations (to us) and they would waste time."

In the same line, Prime Minister Netanyahu, during three years in office, never referred to any of these three major issues.

While avoiding with issues important to the Palestinians, Israel also pretended to be engaged in serious negotiations, whereas it consistently gave only partial or misleading answers to Palestinian questions.

Israel made 5 proposals with regard to the refugees 1. To let the refugees stay where they are. 2. To let the Palestinians go to a third country. 3. To let the Palestinians settle in Palestine. 4. To let some of the Palestinians settle in a strip of desert close to 5. To let a tiny number of Palestinians be admitted to Israel for humanitarian reasons.

Each and everyone one of these proposals was misleading, since they avoided the main issue of the refugees' right of return, offering solutions at the expense of everyone except Israel. None of these proposals counts as an answer to the refugee issue and none takes account of U.N. Resolution 194 which requires Israel to take responsibility for solving this problem.

In the encounter between strong and weak partner, when the powerful side gives such non-answers, the weak partner keeps repeating his demands, becoming exposed to the accusation of being insatiable while actually getting nothing.

A clinical example:

She: You always go out by yourself. You never tell me where you go or what you do. I've asked you a hundred times and you never answer. You're out and I'm stuck at home.

HE: *doesn't answer*

She: Are you cheating on me?

He: *doesn't answer*

She: I'm suffocating at home. I want to go out and to have a good time too.

He: You have to take care of the kids and the house. I'm working so hard and so late.

She: On the weekends? Stop cheating on me.

He: Stop asking these stupid questions. You're intolerable and I can't stand your nagging.

She: I have to keep asking because you never answer.

He: *doesn't answer*

She: Why can't I do what you do? I want to go out on the weekends too.

He: In the summer I'll take you to Spain.

She: You never do what you promise.

He: You see? Whatever I give you is not enough. You're never satisfied. There's no point in giving you anything.

Withholding the material requirements for independence

The powerful partner will not give anything to the weak partner. If anything is given it is given partially, too little, too late and without respect to the weak partner. The oppressed side will of course keep demanding that the negotiations will lead to a fair resolution of major demands.

As stated above, one of the three major demands the Palestinians made concerned East Jerusalem. Barak consistently insisted that the Palestinians will not get any part of it: "Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people, will be united under our sovereignty forever". The Palestinians continued to demand negotiations on this matter: The Israeli negotiators got a clear-cut instruction from Barak--not to have any talks with the Palestinians about Jerusalem. "It's amazing how much effort was made by Barak and his people to strangle any discussion about Jerusalem" (Drucker, 2002, 211-2).

Only when the Camp David negotiations were about to end in a fiasco, Barak made some 'generous' offers, which deceitfully avoided dealing with Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem:

The Palestinians would be given a few neighbourhoods at the periphery of Jerusalem to be under their sovereignty, as part of a Palestinian capital to be called al-Quds. The other Palestinian neighbourhoods would remain under Israeli sovereignty, while being municipally administered by the Palestinians. In the Old City and in the Holy Sites, Barak decided to establish a 'special regime'. What this meant was never made clear. (Drucker 213). On the same occasion Barak put forth the idea that Abu Dis, a small Palestinian village near Jerusalem, should be the capital of the Palestinian state. No Palestinian leader could ever accept such an offer. But Barak did not consult them. He managed to get this offer ratified by the Knesset, and at the first opportunity of a Palestinian attack within Israel he withdrew the offer.

These offers were too little, too late, and showed no respect to the Palestinians. The fact that no Palestinian negotiator was prepared to consider such offers did not bother Barak. Arafat said to Barak, during the negotiations "A man who does not understand what Jerusalem symbolizes for me, and how important it is to me, is an impractical man" (Ma'ariv July 2000). Why would the weak partner think that what is important to him matters to the oppressor? Indeed, it did not.

Between collectives or between individuals, when the strong partner ignores the other's wishes, refusing to hear what to the weak partner is of the utmost importance, the weak partner has two options: To give up or to explode.

A clinical example:

A wife who works outside the household wants to open her own bank account in which to deposit her own paycheques. This signifies to her a measure of independence and is extremely important to her. She raises the issue many times with her husband and asks him to discuss it with her, but he always ignores it. One day she screams at him that she's sick and tired of his not talking with her. His 'generous' and deceitful answer is: "Why are you shouting? Stop nagging. I'm going to give you \$100 each month. Just don't forget to remind me every month. And stop ruining our marriage with your unreasonable nonsense or I don't know what I'll do."

His threat is clear. She now has to decide whether to risk his violence or to give up her wishes, accepting his humiliating offer which denies her autonomy. Again all decision making remains in his hands, at her expense. In her position, divorce is only an imaginary option.

Another clinical example:

She: You never make love to me. We haven't made love for a long time.

He: I can't stand your smell when you smoke. I can't have sex with you until you stop smoking. The moment you stop smoking everything will be fine between us.

She: *stops smoking.*

He: You're too fat. How can I have sex with you when you're so overweight? I can't feel attracted to you when you're like this. We'll have sex right after you lose weight. Lose weight and then everything will be fine between us.

She: *loses weight*

He: You're too flabby.

Gradually, the woman in question stops seeing herself through her own eyes. She begins to see even her own desires through his eyes, and she finds herself losing the ability to care for herself and to look after her own interests. She blames herself for the failure of the relationship.

A veteran journalist linked to the Ministry of Defense wrote that the Israeli Chief of Staff, the Minister of Defense and the Prime Minister, all believed that "Israel should not go far in concessions to Arafat, since no concession will satisfy him"(A. Oren Ha'aretz 14.12.01). The Israeli decision-makers used this rationalization (psychologically, an unconscious defence mechanism whereby the subject presents a logical explanation based on false arguments) in order to defend themselves against unpleasant inner truths. The argument that nothing will satisfy the Palestinians is used in order to feel good about giving nothing.

Setting schedules unilaterally

The powerful partner will overlook the weak partner in setting important dates and schedules, as if he alone he is in charge of the situation.

The dimension of time is definitive of life. If in the process of setting the times for mutual actions, one partner takes upon himself the scheduling decisions at his own convenience, he takes control of the other's life. In effect he is saying that only his own life and interests are important. The other's life and interests have no significance. To the partner this is extremely disempowering.

The timing of the Camp David summit was forced on Arafat by Barak with Clinton's support, although Arafat thought and said that it was premature and insufficiently prepared for. At Camp David, Barak suddenly presented Arafat with an ultimatum to sign the final agreements within two weeks. There was no way the Palestinians could accept this. An ultimatum requiring their signature at this stage, when Israel had not withdrawn as agreed, threatened to annihilate their future as a state. Palestinian lands had been divided into unconnected cantons which could not make up a viable state.

Abu Mazen said to Barak: "With no preparation, the negotiations will not succeed, and a catastrophe will follow" (Abu Mazen, El Iy'am, July 31, 2001).

As to the delineation of borders, Israel unilaterally postponed at its convenience ('until we feel safe') its withdrawals from Palestinian territories as agreed upon at

Oslo. P.M. Rabin claimed that there are 'no sacred dates'. The Palestinians were forced to accept this premise. Given their powerless position, what else could they do?

In the Oslo Agreements, specific dates were set for certain Israeli withdrawals from the OT. As each of the expected withdrawal deadlines approached, Israel unilaterally declared that it will not carry out the actions as scheduled: 'We do not feel safe. We'll do it we feel safe enough'. Only the Israeli side's need for security mattered. The Palestinian side's needs didn't count.

In the same way, according to the Israeli side the right time never came for opening safe passages between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as agreed on at Oslo, or for releasing Palestinian political prisoners.

The imbalance brought about when one side makes all the decisions while the other's needs are ignored distorts both sides' ability to think rationally and realistically. The more that the powerful partner exercises this kind of unilateral time dictation, the more he becomes convinced that his own might makes him right. In reality, the injustices he inflicts become greater and greater, as his own blind-spots regarding these injustices grow.

In the dynamic of such a relationship, as the strong side becomes increasingly self-righteous, the weak partner increasingly experiences acquired helplessness. The consequences of this helplessness are distortions in reality testing and in assessing his/her own capabilities, leading to mistaken and self-defeating decisions and conduct.

The Palestinians, instead of advancing their own interests, took on the role assigned to them by Israel, of being responsible for Israeli security. Instead of investing their energies and resources on struggling against the expansion of Israeli settlements, they acted as security forces on behalf of Israel--something between subcontractors and hired guns. They also neglected to act toward the release of political prisoners by Israel, and to work toward the guarantee of safe passages.

Unilateral decision-making is abusive:

A clinical example:

Two women in a couple were in an abuser-abused relationship conforming to their socioeconomic differences. At some point the abused woman moved to another town because of her work, unhappy as she was, considered to try separation.

After a few weeks her partner called.

Abuser: Come visit me for New Year's

Abused: I'm not sure if it is good for me to come.

Abuser: I promise you that everything will change beginning on New Year Day.

Abused: How can I be sure?

Abuser: I promise everything will change. From now on things will be different. You'll see. I swear.

Abused: Can I trust you?

Abuser: Of course you can. You know I love you.

The weak partner made the trip. The abuse during this visit was worse than ever. The abused woman obsessively asked: “What happened to you? Why didn’t you keep your promise? Why did you lie to me?” (Not: “Why did I come, why am I here”). Her obsessive need to understand centred on the other and not herself. After 5 days, she packed and went back to her own town. Not long after, she received another phone call.

Abuser: I want so much to come and stay with you.

I’m coming on Tuesday next month. I have work-things to do starting Wednesday.

Abused: I’d like it if you’d asked me if I want you to come, if I want you to stay with me, and if the time is convenient for me.

Abuser: True. So I’m asking you, and I’ll call you in two days. .

Abuser *doesn’t call in two days*

Abused *calls a day later*

Abused: Why didn’t you call as you said?

Abuser: I was too busy, including buying the tickets to come to you on Tuesday.

Abused: You did? But we decided to talk about it and we didn’t.

Abuser: With all the pressure, and with all my need and desire to come to you, I decided by myself.

The oppressed woman, for reasons unclear to herself, in spite of her affection for the other and in spite of wanting the relationship, suddenly understood that she is invisible to her partner. She saw that her partner doesn’t care about what she wants or doesn’t want. She felt how this annihilates her. With terrible pain and huge relief she decided not to invite her partner. She felt that she is finally dealing with her own self-preservation.

The Palestinians experienced repeated disempowerment, violence, un-kept promises, and violations of agreements by the powerful partner. But as in this clinical example, the Palestinians’ need to nurture high hopes and expectations was so strong, that in spite of their accumulated experiences they tried to preserve the belief in sincere intentions and good will which they attributed to Camp David.

The depth of the Palestinians’ disappointment matched the height of their expectations. When there is such disappointment, there must be space for expressing the consequent pain. No such space is available in negotiations in the militaristic mode. .

Not acknowledging wrong-doings

The oppressor will ignore the oppressed side’s need to receive acknowledgement which is based on understanding of the wrongs and damages done to him; to receive an apology and a request for forgiveness; and lastly to repair the relations and receive compensation.

The emotional need of receiving acknowledgement for wrongs done to me is most basic: Without it the wound cannot be healed.

The next necessary step is for the oppressor to ask for forgiveness. But this is not enough. The oppressor also has to take responsibility for tikkun (repair and reparation).

What characterizes the Israeli approach to the Palestinians is ‘blaming the victims’ and overlooking their pain, their mourning, their distress and their humiliation. As in interpersonal relations, with such an attitude there is no way of finding a bridge and creating a positive relationship between the partners.

According to the Palestinians, Israel’s admission of its wrong-doings in 1948, 1967, and all along the way is crucial.

This does not mean that the Palestinians are always innocent and the Israelis always guilty, or that the Palestinians have not caused much pain to the Israelis. Nevertheless, Israel is the strong side in this equation, and therefore is obliged to more efforts.

Most people know, without necessarily referring to psychotherapeutic space, what typically happens between partners when one of them betrays and the other is betrayed. A few prefer not to know so as not to suffer. But the vast majority cannot help feeling the burning need to deal with the pain, with the broken trust, and with the desire to maintain the relationship through demanding an acknowledgment of the wrong done to them. They need to be asked for forgiveness, to grant an apology, and to be offered repair. Reparation alone will not do.

Acknowledgment of wrongdoing, asking forgiveness for it, and taking on responsibility for Tikkun are all actions of the wrongdoer, which the other has to accept if the process is to continue. The form and the substance of reparation, on the other hand, have to be mutually agreed upon.

In spite of their crucial emotional importance, none of these needs found any kind of expression at Camp David or at any other occasion when official Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met. In the militaristic mode of negotiation, speaking of emotional needs is typically out of range.

Mary Robinson UN Commissioner of Human Rights and General Secretary of the Global Committee against Racism has said that:

We cannot avoid beginning with the past. If we don’t find a way to talk about the abysses of human hatred, if we don’t carry on a dialogue in which the profound pain of individuals and of peoples can be expressed, we shall return to the damaging silence which intentionally and arbitrarily excludes other human beings from the realm of humanity. (Herald Tribune, August 200!).

I can personally testify that through all my years of human rights work in the West Bank and Gaza I met thousands of people, and my ongoing impression has been that the Palestinians’ talk on this matter is mostly on the emotional level, rather than on the practical level. To my mind, no reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians is possible without honest and decent dealings with the traumata of the past.

Acting in ways which contradict declarations promises and agreements

The powerful side voids the negotiations by determining ‘on the ground’ facts which increase the absolute power of the oppressor and the consequent weakness, frustration anger and hurt of the oppressed.

While the negotiations were going on, Israel doubled the number of settlers in the West Bank since Oslo, expropriated more Palestinian lands, and built 50% more housing units for these settlers. Palestinian houses were increasingly demolished, more trees were uprooted than ever and a growing number of people were defined targeted terrorists and assassinated by the Israeli army without due process. Disruptive sieges and closures, falsely justified as necessary for Israeli security, were actually designed to decompose the fabric of Palestinian society.

These sieges and closures block the connections between villages and town and inflict daily humiliations on the Palestinians. Villagers have no access to health services in the towns, and doctors and ambulances cannot reach them. Workers do not have access to their own agricultural fields, and to places of employment. Students cannot go to schools or to universities, and families cannot visit each other, not even to attend weddings or funerals.

As you might remember, soon after their first separation the Abuser invited her partner the Abused to visit her for New Year’s. The morning after her arrival, the strong partner told the weak one that she decided to take a trip to visit her first lover from 15 years ago, who lived 2 hours away.

A clinical example

Weak partner: How come you’re going to visit her when I came to be with you? You asked me to come. And here I am.

Strong partner: That relationship is very important for me. I’ve kept it up for more than 15 years. I want to do this today, because for the next few weekends I’ve made plans for important things to do, so I won’t be able to see her.

Weak partner: But you haven’t seen me for a few weeks

Strong partner: Sorry. I’m going. I’ll see you when I get back in the evening.

The next afternoon, the weak partner finds a few of her strong partner’s friends invited for tea. She wasn’t consulted. One of them speaks rudely to her, and her partner does not say a word.

The strong partner here determined ‘on the ground’ facts contradicting her declarations as to what would happen on the visit and in the relationship. In this way she effectively voided the visit. She intentionally hurt her partner, re-asserting her own powerful position and control.

In this relationship it is clear that the strong partner, even when she declared that she will stop being mean to her partner and will treat her lovingly, did not for a moment intend to give up any of her power. Her ‘on the ground’ conduct undercut the

possibility of her promises being fulfilled, and spelled out that what was most important to her was to continue to be the strong, controlling partner. The weak partner in this case was accepting and forgiving, both in deciding to visit and in trying to make the visit successful. The strong partner did not show her any appreciation.

The Palestinians, along the process of negotiations, made serious efforts to meet the Israelis demands for security. They made efforts to refrain from responding violently to most of the Israeli lack of regard for what was agreed on, and to the violations of human rights. Israel did not express appreciation of this contribution. The end result was that Israel accumulated land, water and settlements, while the Palestinians accumulated hurt, frustration and anger.

Israel's accumulation of power led to a psychological intoxication with power expressed as arrogance. The arrogance of power made the Israelis 'see' Palestinians as 'invisible'. For individuals as well as for a collective, feeling invisible is unbearably painful and makes one want to be seen and heard. Violence is very commonly a means of being seen and heard. Not surprisingly, the second intifada began.

Concealing the oppressor's 'bad face'

It is not enough for the oppressor, in this case Israel, to be powerful and mighty. The oppressor must hide his 'bad face' from himself and from the world. In order to feel good about himself he must demonstrate, inwardly and outwardly, his 'good face'. At the same time and for the same goal, he will try his best to present the 'bad face' of the weak partner.

The oppressor will invest much time and effort to prove that the oppressed, in this case the Palestinians, are the aggressors. It is important for him to claim that they are the ones who refuse to talk, and at the same time to claim that there is no point in talking to them because they will always have further demands. Therefore the negotiations are bound to be an endless fruitless process: "They don't want peace". "There's no partner for peace"

Barak's basic stance toward Arafat was to consistently force him into submission: In Taba, which was the final negotiations event, Barak said of Arafat: "I will shut him into a corner, and from this corner he will emerge only with an agreement--or else I will expose his true face". In these words Barak threatened to expose Arafat as a liar. In Barak's militaristic domineering stance, his focus is on applying criteria of judgment to Arafat, with the goal of giving him the options of either surrendering to Barak's plans or being exposed as a liar .who does not want peace.

It does not occur to Barak to apply the same criteria of judgment to his own 'true face' in the mirror. He rather presents, to the world and to himself, his 'good face', as in "I overturned every single stone on the road to peace".

Another way that Barak attempts to present his, and Israel's, good face is by repeatedly contrasting Israeli civilization with Palestinian savagery, as in: "We're a villa in the jungle"

These presentations of the 'good face' of Israel are based on the common Israeli assumption that 'we' are victims who rightly defend ourselves. We are righteous, blameless and moral, and our weapons are pure. Israelis have held on to their own victim status long past its salient historical time. Being a victim in one's own eyes can serve as justification for every wrongdoing. I see this psycho-dynamic in individuals in therapy. Seeing oneself as a victim a person feels entitled to be mean, cruel and unjust, deriving his energy from fear, anger and hate, and creating similar feelings in his partner.

A clinical example

In a couple in which one partner controls the other, the weak partner desires intimacy. She wants to be able to express her emotions toward her partner, and to share in what is happening to her and to both of them. The other isn't interested and avoids conversation of this kind. After many attempts, the dominant partner says: Fine. We shall talk, but I can do this only in the early mornings.

As it happens, this partner likes to get up early. For the other this is difficult. Nevertheless she gets up early for this purpose. But just about every morning, the strong partner has a habitual agenda: Running, shower, reading the newspaper, a phone call to a favourite sister, obligatory phone calls regarding errands. Meanwhile, she offers her partner a friendly face, casual comments, mentions of things to talk about later, and promises to come home early so as to have time to talk.

Controlled partner: When will you come home?

Controller: 5 o'clock. I promise.

Their morning is over. The controlling partner comes home at eight in the evening too tired to talk. When things come to a head, the dominant partner has these complaints and accusations:

Controlling partner: So what if I promised to come back early? Why are you trying to control my life? Why do you keep setting times and limits for me?

Why do you keep making me have to choose between either work or coming home? You're constantly demanding intimacy, and when you don't get what you want your demands always bring out my bad face. It reminds me of sitting at the table with my mother. For hours I sat with her, while she expected me to eat and to talk with her, and told me that she cares about me. The more she pushed me, the more I shut up and felt hostile. It was hell for me. I never recovered from that trauma. You make me feel like I'm sitting at the table with my mother again. I'm trying so hard to meet your needs and you don't appreciate it. I want to be with you. I want you to be happy with me. I love you. But nothing is good enough for you.

For the dominant partner in this relationship, being in control of the weak partner was of the utmost importance. . Being a victim, she felt, was license for not seeing anything that she did as wrong. As a consequence, anything in the relationship that didn't express her own wishes was seen as threatening, eliciting aggression and hostility. As she became more hostile, she became more accusing.

Controller: "You don't really care about me. You don't listen. You don't bring into my life the things that I want in them.

Controlled: What is it you want?

Controller: I want you to fix up the bad relationships between me and the people I work with, and between me and my so-called friends.

In time, the weak partner's attempts to forgive her partner's abuses only earned her the label of 'dishrag'. As the insults and abuses increased, the weak partner's trust in her partner diminished. She began to think that things will only get worse. She felt that she's being pushed to the limit of her own tolerance, and stopped trying so hard to please her partner.

The strong partner now insisted that she doesn't love the other and never loved her. While she said that she thought highly of her partner, what she wanted now was to separate. 'By the way', she added, "I don't think that you ever loved me.'

Similarly, after the years of peace negotiations, Israel now reverts to its primal conception of the Palestinians as bad, guilty for the failure of coexistence in a spite of Israel's good will.

Conclusion

Intimacy and sharing, in the interpersonal arena, are similar to coexistence and peace in international relations. Words like 'I love you', or 'We want peace', can be meaningful or empty. In the case of the peace negotiations as in the clinical case above, these words were unfortunately empty.

During the first 21 years of the Occupation, the oppressor-oppressed relationship was very bad for the Palestinians, who were controlled, exploited and abused, and quite good for the Israelis. Then the oppressed side had had enough. The Palestinians started to resist the abusive conditions, fighting for freedom. Thus began the first intifada.

Before the intifada, P.M.Rabin, as others before him, declared that there are 'Three No's' that Israel was definite about: No to talks with the PLO. No to a Palestinian state and No to return to the 1967 borders.

Suddenly, after six years of intifada, Israel was willing to talk, saying to the Palestinians things it had never said before about good neighbourly relations, coexistence, and peace. Like the abused partner in the above clinical example, the Palestinians got a phone call: "Honey, come home. Everything will be alright from now on." That was Oslo.

The weak partner fell for it, believing to a great extent in the oppressor's good intentions. It took all the years of the Oslo negotiations in which Israel applied the various negotiating tactics of oppression mentioned above, for the Palestinians to understand that they were cheated, and that the performative language used by Israel was empty.

The depth of the Palestinians' disappointment matched the height of their expectations. When the abuse is great and causes great helplessness in an ongoing process, what happens to individuals and to collectives is that the abused side acts

along two irrational routes: Attempting to please the abuser and trying to hurt him. The common denominator of both is that the oppressed side sees itself through the eyes of the oppressor, failing to focus on its own self-interest.

The Palestinians tried to please by cooperating with Israel in guarding Israel's security. They tried to hurt through lethal strikes against Israeli citizens and army. As happens in acquired helplessness, neither of these routes served the Palestinians' own interests of freedom and independence.

The American 'therapist' invited by both sides to intervene in the crisis and help in the negotiations provided the wrong kind of therapy. He empowered the 'favourite' patient at the expense of the 'unfavoured' one, instead of focusing on the relations between the partners. His therapeutically incompetent intervention, which accepted and supported the empty benevolent Israeli declarations while ignoring the reality of oppression, helped blow up the crisis to its present dimensions. The less favoured patient lost trust in the therapist, and the favourite became even more entrenched in his domineering concepts and conduct. The relations that should have been worked through and were not, reached a crisis.

The Israelis have become angrier the more they felt hurt. When Palestinian resistance continued, Israel--like the abuser in the example above--decided that what it wants is separation through building a fence.

The difference between the interpersonal and the political levels is that a couple could separate, but Israel and Palestine cannot. This separation is based on deceit since according to this plan Israel remains present and in control of both sides of the fence. Unfortunately, it will cost much money and many lives before Israel realizes that this unilateral separation is doomed to fail.

A decent therapist would have helped the Israelis gain insight into the gap between their declarations and their conduct as oppressors.

Psychological schools of thought determine the limits of our modes of listening as therapists--what we hear and don't hear, as well as our interpretations and reactions. To some extent the patriarchal Freudian model of psychotherapy can be compared to the stereotypical masculine style of negotiation. Both are power-oriented, stressing status and hierarchy, and both are based on the inequality of subject and object. The terminology of subject and object at the core of the Freudian school represents the impossibility, within that system, of equal place for the two voices.

In the new school of feminist psychotherapy the concept of inter-subjectivity is at the core. Rather than subject vis-à-vis object, we talk about two subjects facing each other. It gives the human experience of both subjects equal weight. This undercuts the structures of power and hierarchy.

The feminist mode of communication is defined as cooperative, centring on responsiveness, sharing and equality. What is most meaningful in this way of speaking is mutual consideration and empowerment. These would have set the stage for an outcome successful for both sides, rather than polarizing the two sides as winner and loser.

If in the peace negotiations the principles of inter-subjectivity were to be applied, there would be space for the mourning and the pain resulting from the loss the refugees' experience. There would be space as well for the feelings which the Israelis experience in facing that pain, and with the agony of dealing with their own bad face. With this kind of basis for negotiation, it would be possible to reach an emotional understanding that could enable respect.