

The Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case

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Abstract

Asymmetry is considered one of the most relevant features in today's conflicts. In this article we address one particular type of asymmetry, "structural asymmetry". After introducing the main characteristics and the different phases of these types of conflicts - i.e. conscientization, confrontation, negotiation, sustainable peace - we address the specificity of the Israeli-Palestinian case seen as a typical case of structurally asymmetric conflict. The aim is to explain why, despite the many negotiation phases this conflict has been through, none of them ever led to a sustainable peace. On the contrary, each negotiation has brought to yet another confrontation phase, with a sort of never ending series of loops. The strong imbalance between the two sides, and the scarce reciprocal conflict awareness represent the two main reasons in explaining such a development.

Introduction

With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of intra-state and inter-ethnic wars, the concept of "asymmetric" conflict has come to the fore in conflict theory. In fact, a significant number of today's conflicts are characterized by strong asymmetries.

The term "asymmetric conflict" is used in different senses, to denote situations that, although sharing some commonalities, are often quite diverse. Although we know well that any attempt to frame in rigid taxonomies social phenomena is disputable, still, for the sake of clarity and also to provide an analytical framework for studying these conflicts, we propose here to distinguish among three types of asymmetry: *power asymmetry*, *strategic asymmetry* and *structural asymmetry*. The boundary between these different types of asymmetry is often quite blurred, and in most cases more than one of them is present at the same time, yet this distinction can be of help in analyzing and understanding the development of a conflict. In many cases, the asymmetry of the parties in the conflict - or rather their perception of this asymmetry - is crucial in explaining their different behaviors and attitudes. Here we are categorizing types of asymmetry, not types of conflict: a conflict most often shares

more than one type of asymmetry, possibly with different degrees of intensity.

Power asymmetry occurs whenever there is a strong imbalance in power, a kind of asymmetry quite common in conflicts. Often this type of asymmetry goes together with the other types of asymmetry. However there are conflicts, which are characterized almost uniquely by power asymmetry¹. This is the case for instance of the conflicts studied by Thazha V. Paul², who analyses the conditions under which it is the weaker to initiate the conflict. An extreme but clear example of power asymmetric conflict has been the First Gulf War: a coalition led by the US on the one side, and Iraq alone on the other. US and Iraq were both states, with recognized governments, a regular army, and a political body capable of taking decisions and implementing them. From these points of view, the situation was rather balanced: the asymmetry was in the huge difference in military force, a matter of quantity rather than of quality.

We speak of *strategic asymmetry* when the two parties are asymmetric in their tactical and/or strategic approach to the conflict. This type of asymmetry usually also includes a strong imbalance in power. Typical examples are guerrilla wars and terrorism. Types of war certainly not new³: in modern times, guerrilla war dates back to the American Revolution. In spite of the many studies on asymmetric warfare, the strategic thinking of most military in western countries is still based mainly on “technology” and on “firepower”, while insurgent or terrorist combatants are composed of decentralized cells capable of blending into the population at will⁴. This fact is linked with the development of information technologies: «the information revolution is favoring and strengthening network forms of organization, often giving them an advantage over hierarchical forms»⁵. Typical is the case of the so-called “war on terror”: some terrorist organizations behave as a network in which each node corresponds to a small group of militants, with multiple horizontal inter-node connections⁶. Strategic asymmetry is studied in detail by Ivan Arreguín-Toft⁷.

Structural asymmetry arises when there is a strong imbalance in status between the parties. Here at the root of the conflict there is the very structure of the relationship between the parties. It is this that makes this type of asymmetry quite peculiar and different from the others. In a conflict characterized by structural asymmetry the real object of the fight is the change of the structure of the relations between the parts. Usually one of the parties struggles to change it, while the other one struggles to avoid any change. Sometimes one of the parties is a governmental institution and the other a non-state organization, but this is not always the case. As an example, structural asymmetry is what characterizes most of the «conflicts over access and control over land [which] have been endemic in the agrarian societies of the past and still loom large in a world in which 45% of the population make their living directly from the land»⁸. In these cases the two parties are both non-state organization, although often one of the two enjoys the support of governmental institutions. Other typical cases are the decolonization conflicts. It is the domination relation between the colonizers and the colonized to be the very object of the conflict. In this type of conflicts, one of the parties is a state and the other a non-state actor, such as a political organization or a

liberation movement.

A relevant feature that differentiates the three types of asymmetry concerns their behavior over time. The first, *power asymmetry*, is quite static and it unlikely changes swiftly: a weak country cannot become strong overnight. *Strategic asymmetry* is a matter of choice, depending on the actors' decisions; at least in principle, a switch in strategy can be made in relatively short time. Still, as observed by Arreguín-Toft, «the actors [...] are not entirely free to *choose* an ideal strategy»⁹. Finally, *structural asymmetry* is the one that presents the most dynamic behavior. The structure of the relation between the parties and their characteristics may change strongly during the development of the conflict. As an example, in a conflict over landownership, at a certain point the land-less peasant movements may obtain the approval of a land reform law. That changes the legislative framework, but does not end the struggle. The issue at stake is now the concrete application of the reform. The asymmetry is still there although with a diminished imbalance. This is what happened in Brazil with the 1985 National Agrarian Reform Plan.

«Although asymmetric conflicts are the most common type of conflict, they are among the least studied by international relations scholars»¹⁰. This is particularly true for conflicts whose most relevant asymmetry is the structural one. In fact, conflicts of this type have always been present and have been widely studied, but rarely structural asymmetry has been used as a theoretical frame to analyze their features and dynamics. A remarkable exception is an old paper by Johan Galtung, whose insights on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are still of great value¹¹.

In this paper, we will first present the main features that characterize structurally asymmetric conflicts and the dynamics that are expected to unfold in these conflicts. Then, the concepts introduced will be used to cast new light on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a typical example of structurally asymmetric conflict. Finally, a section is dedicated to the loop negotiation-confrontation, which has characterized the conflict since the failure of the Oslo peace process.

Structurally asymmetric conflicts. A definition

Although different types of asymmetry usually coexist within the same conflict, still in most cases it is possible to single out one type of asymmetry as the one that best characterizes the conflict. For instance, all the conflicts studied by Paul¹² can be best characterized as “power asymmetric conflicts”, while the ones analyzed by Arreguín-Toft¹³ can be denoted as “strategically asymmetric conflicts”, without downplaying the presence of relevant power asymmetries.

In this section, we will analyze the main characteristics of “structurally asymmetric conflicts”. These are situations in which «the root of the conflict lies not in particular issues or interests that may divide the parties, but in the very structure of whom they are and the relationship between them»¹⁴. This definition applies to a variety of conflicts, each different from the others, each bearing its own peculiarities

and characteristics.

Typical examples of structurally asymmetric conflicts are the decolonization conflicts. The domination relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is at the root of the conflict. It is a relationship characterized by a large power imbalance, with the consequence that the dominated usually resort to guerrilla warfare or to terrorism¹⁵.

While in the decolonization conflicts the two actors are usually a state and a non-state organization, this is not always the case with other relevant structurally asymmetric conflicts, such as the rural conflicts for access to land present in many Third World countries¹⁶, or the intra-national conflicts involving ethno-nationalities¹⁷. In the former case, we have peasants against landlords. The first are poorly, if at all, organized, with scanty support from political or judiciary structures. The others are much more organized, with powerful economic means, and often counting on the support of strong political forces, of the judiciary and of the police. In the latter case, most often there is the confrontation between a community controlling the political and administrative system, on the one side, and one or more communities (often, but not always, minorities) with limited or no political or military power, seeking recognition, identity and security, on the other side.

Finally, a conflict where the structural asymmetry is self-evident is the gender conflict, a conflict rooted in the culture of a society, in its economic structure and in its history. Francis takes it as a paradigm of structurally asymmetric conflicts¹⁸.

The structural type of asymmetry has been studied in details within the context of intra-state and ethno-nationalistic struggles by Christopher Mitchell. He enumerates a number of key dimensions that characterize structural asymmetry¹⁹:

1) *Legal asymmetry*. It has to do with the legal status of the parties. Typical is the case in which one of the parties is the government of a State and the other is an ethnic minority whose rights are denied – or undermined - by the government (e.g. the case of Turkey and the Kurd minority). This type of asymmetry affects the parties in their perception of the conflict and in the strategies available to them.

2) *Access*. It involves the ability of the parties to have their concerns and goals put onto the political agenda. Minority communities have often little capacity to voice their concerns and to have them dealt with. An example is South Africa, where the black majority had no access at all to the political agenda, due to the *apartheid* enforced by the white minority.

3) *Salience of goals*. An «important way in which parties in protracted conflicts are likely to be highly asymmetric, especially in the early stages of any cycle of conflict, is in the importance that the adversaries attach to the issues in the conflict»²⁰. For example, compared to the American colonizers, the native inhabitants of northern America had a less clear perception of the main issue of the conflict, the exclusive possession of the land.

4) *Survivability*. It is not rare that what is at stake is the very existence of one (or

both) of the conflicting parties, or at least that this is the perception they have (often perceptions are not less relevant than concrete facts). An example is the decade-long war waged in Nepal by the Maoist guerrillas against the government. There, the monarchy itself was at stake, and actually the peace deal did eventually lead, in May 2008, to the abolition of the monarchy.

5) *Intra-party cohesion*. It may happen that one of the adversaries is more cohesive and better organized than the other. A role here might be played by the presence of rival organizations contending the allegiance of the constituency in one or both parties. As an example, the inter-fight in the rebel camp in Darfur weakened the resistance against the Sudanese government, and derailed the Darfur Peace Agreement, signed in May 2006 by only one faction of the Sudan Liberation Army/Movement.

6) *Leadership insecurity*. This «issue concerns how secure the leaderships of the two sides are likely to be and what effect symmetric or asymmetric levels of insecurity might have on the conflict, particularly on any termination process»²¹. An example is that of Kosovo: the non-violent struggle led by the LDK leader Ibrahim Rugova lost strength due to the growing support for the armed resistance of UÇK, leading to increasing levels of violence.

The dynamics of structurally asymmetric conflicts

Having reviewed the main characteristics of structurally asymmetric conflicts, we will now focus on the dynamics of such conflicts.

The type of relationship, which is at the root of the conflict, can be defined as a *domination relationship*. Usually there is a dominator and a dominated. These terms are used in a neutral and value-free sense. In saying that someone is in the dominator position, we refer to the objective fact that he/she belongs to the stronger side in the relationship, without necessarily attaching to this fact a value or an ethical judgment. Take for instance the relationship between a colonial power and the colonized people. The individual citizens of the colonial state might be in favor of the self-determination of the colonized population, but from an objective (structural) point of view they are part of the dominator side and from this they benefit.

Since the domination relationship is the *contradiction*²², it is this relationship that needs to be substantially changed. Following Curle and Lederach²³, a possible path that may lead to the suppression of the domination relationship and hence to the end of the conflict consists of the four phases shown in Figure 1:

I) *Conscientization*: the dominated become aware of the unjust imbalance in status and in power of the situation in which they live.

II) *Confrontation*: the dominated start to demand a change in the situation and the recognition of their rights. This phase may involve violence.

III) *Negotiation*: a negotiation process starts with or without the involvement of third parties.

IV) *Sustainable peace*: the relationship between the parties is restructured, so as to become more balanced, leading to collaborative and peaceful relationships.

Figure 1, a re-elaboration of the Curle-Lederach model²⁴, helps in understanding the possible development of this type of conflict. As indicated by the vertical arrow, at the beginning of the conflict, there is a maximum of power imbalance²⁵, and, as the process goes on, the imbalance decreases. The horizontal arrow refers to the *awareness*²⁶ that the parties (mainly the weaker) have of their objectives and of their legitimacy. When the weaker is not aware of the domination relationship, but, either through culture or ideological conviction, considers it as something “natural”, then there is no conflict. The *confrontation phase* cannot start unless the conflict awareness reaches a certain level and the imbalance is not too high. This point is generally reached during the *conscientization phase*. Later, each side starts becoming aware of the opponent's objectives and of their legitimacy, and that is when the *negotiation phase* can start. Some empathic understanding of the opponent's objectives and basic needs is necessary for the parties to find a constructive way out of the conflict, and to arrive at a *sustainable peace*²⁷.

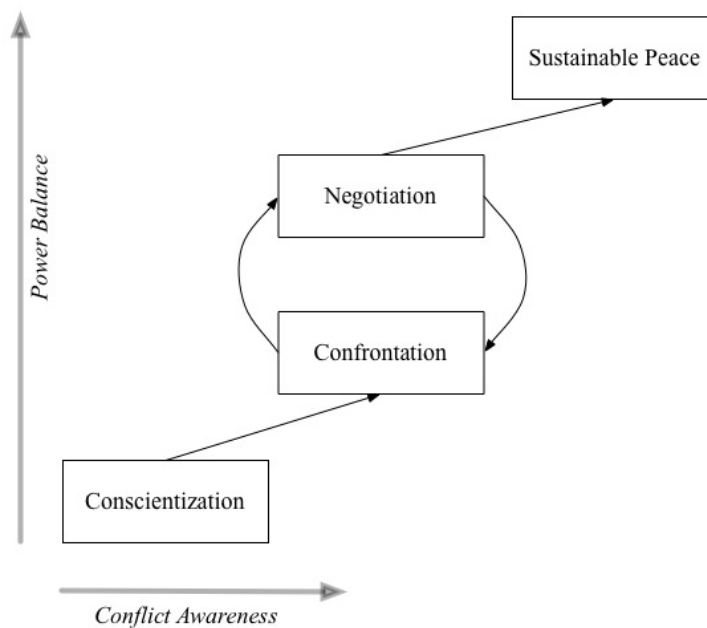


Fig. 1: The phases of a structurally asymmetric conflict

It must be made clear that in the process of Figure 1 nothing is deterministic. The process of reaching sustainable peace may be quite lengthy and costly, with some cycling between successive phases of confrontation and negotiation. It might be the case that the negotiation leads to an unstable condition of appeasement, followed, after some time, by a new outbreak of violent confrontation. This is for instance the case with the decolonization conflict in Zimbabwe, where the settlement of the conflict set the conditions for the recent outbreak of violence and of political

instability.

Let us examine the different stages of the process in more details.

1) *Conscientization*. With this term borrowed from Freire²⁸, we mean the process through which dominated populations or individuals become aware of the structural injustice that characterizes the situation in which they live, and they realize the need to resist the domination. This process has four main aspects: *conflict awareness*, *group identity*, *mobilization* and *organization*. Growth of conflict awareness and building of group identity are basic components of the process. Without them, no mobilization can occur. They are distinct but intertwined. The growth of awareness often has the effect of strengthening the group identity: by gaining awareness of the domination relationship, the dominated see themselves as a group with common interests/needs and with a common adversary. This fosters mobilization and organization. This is usually a non-linear process: feedback often leads to reinforcing loops. Organization fosters mobilization, and the growth of mobilization calls for more complex forms of organization, which in turns strengthens and enlarges the organization itself. Moreover, no mobilization can happen without some level of awareness of the domination structures and of the group identity. But, at the same time, mobilization attracts more participants to the struggle, widening and deepening the level of awareness and strengthening the group identity.

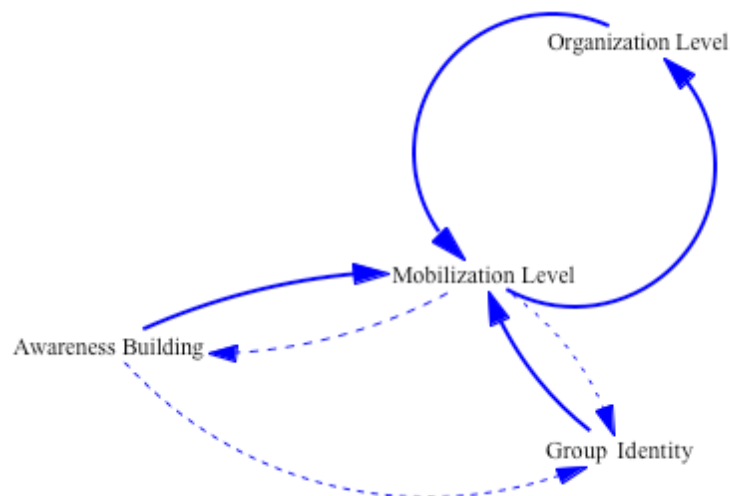


Fig. 2: The conscientization subsystem

Figure 2 presents the main components of the *conscientization phase* and their interrelation. Solid lines represent stronger relationships. The arrow indicates the direction of the relationship. For instance, the solid arrow going from “group identity” to “mobilization level” represents the fact that the effect of strengthening the group identity is to make the mobilization level grow, while the dotted arrow in the opposite direction states that the construction of the group identity is helped by an increased

level of mobilization, although this relationship is often weaker than the former one.

The subsystem of Figure 2 is not a closed one: variables not included may have a relevant impact on the process. One example is international support, whose role may be crucial in organization building. Another example is the interplay between repression and group identity: while in the short term repressive actions might reduce the mobilization capacity of the dominated, it is often the case that in the long run group identity, and henceforth mobilization, are strengthened²⁹.

II) Confrontation. Increasing awareness of latent conflicts, together with growing mobilization, usually leads the dominated party to confront the dominating one. *Confrontation* may take different forms: passive resistance, political mobilization, non-violent struggle, military actions, terrorist attacks. Usually more than one of these types of actions coexist. This may happen due to the existence of a political and a military wing of the same movement, the two being quite independent of each other, one operating openly and the other one in hiding. This is what happened with the IRA and Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland. But it also happens when the intra-party cohesion of the dominated party is loose, with different groups and organizations fighting for the leadership. This phase is often strictly intertwined with the previous one. Forms of confrontation may appear quite early, as soon as the dominated party starts becoming aware of the unjust domination relationship. In fact, the confrontation itself accelerates the conscientization process, extending it to new sectors of the population, giving origin to a reinforcing loop. Repression, the most common response of the dominating party, in the short term might weaken the resistance movement, but in the long run it most likely strengthens the adversary's resolve and fosters the conscientization process. This results most often in an increase in both power balance and conflict awareness. The weaker side (the dominated) becomes stronger, and challenges the stronger side (the dominant). At the same time, both parties increase the awareness of their own objectives, and, possibly, also of their opponents'.

III) Negotiation. The negotiation stage is reached when the two parties arrive at the conclusion that the cost of the struggle is becoming unbearable, or when a third party is able to convince or to force them to negotiate. Usually, the party who needs to be convinced the most is the dominating one, as the *status quo* is in its favor. A fairly necessary condition for arriving at a negotiation stage is the reduction of the parties' imbalance. This is especially true for the "legal status" and "access" dimensions of structural asymmetry. The negotiation is a way to make each side confront the opponent's objectives, and to recognize the legitimacy of at least part of them. In particular, it is the dominating side – which is no longer that dominant, since the power balance has increased - that has to adjust to the new reality and to renounce some of its own objectives. Thus, the conflict awareness reaches its highest point³⁰.

IV) Sustainable Peace. Once an agreement has been reached, a new process starts: building a sustainable peace. This implies restructuring the relationships between the parties; dismantling the stock of hatred, prejudices, frustration and reciprocal mistrust that years of oppressive domination and violence have created; deconstructing and reforming the domination structures. That cannot happen at once; it requires

painstaking work, also involving cultural transformation. In South Africa, the end of *apartheid* did not bring peace once and for all. Although the more evidently unjust and oppressive structures have been dismantled, most of the people in the black townships have as yet seen little improvement in living conditions, and economic inequalities are still appalling. Frustration by the disadvantaged sectors of the population might lead to a renewal of the conflict, possibly with new and more radical claims. Of the four phases of the process represented in Figure 1, this is the most problematic. The other three are in some sense the ‘natural’ consequence of the asymmetric conflict. Almost all the conflicts of this type pass, at least once, through these phases. This is not the case for the *sustainable peace* phase, which may or may not happen, and often it does not. It is not simply the end of the conflict, but it is itself a long and demanding process. Returning to the South African case, the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” chaired by bishop Desmond Tutu has been a paradigmatic example of action going in the direction of *sustainable peace*³¹. Other examples of structurally asymmetric conflicts that led to a situation similar to a sustainable peace, as far as the relation between the parties is concerned, are the Indian struggle for independence, the decolonization war in Algeria, and the anti-segregation fight in North America. In the first case, a non-state actor – the Indian National Congress – through a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience forced a state actor – the British Crown – to retreat in 1947. After the independence, India and UK have been able to build and maintain rather friendly and cooperative relations at economic, cultural and social level. More problematic is the case of Algeria and France. After the violent war that once again saw a non-state actor – the National Liberation Front – opposing a state, Algeria got independence from France in 1962. The relationship between Algeria and France had ups and downs. Still, the strong ties between them, at economic, social and cultural level, have persisted despite periods of "disenchantment" and strained relations, and they have even grown. As for the last example, notwithstanding all the problems that still afflict the black minority, the election of an Afro-American president clearly represents a turning point in the racial relations in the United States. These three cases are quite different one from the other. Still they bear some commonalities: in all cases the starting point of the conflict has been the structurally unequal relationship between the parties; through conscientization and mobilization, the conflict awareness grew up to a point that the stronger part was forced to insert the issue in its political agenda and, at a certain point, to accept the elimination of the structural unbalance via either international agreements or internal legal reforms.

In Figure 1 the four phases are depicted as sequential. In reality, this is rarely the case. Most often, there is an overlapping of some of the phases. Moreover - as pointed out by Lederach - at any one point the conflict may jump back to one of the previous phases, with loops that may last for a long time. In complex social, political and economic systems, processes are hardly linear, and most often involve reinforcing loops.

Loops involving the two central phases, *confrontation* and *negotiation*, are

particularly important. It may happen that a failure to reach an agreement leads to a new, and possibly more violent, confrontation. Decisions are rarely taken by a single decision maker: most often, in both camps there are multiple actors, sometimes with different agendas, and some of them may gain from negotiation failure. Failures may happen even if there is a true willingness on both sides to reach an agreement. Sometimes, groups not directly involved in (or excluded from) the negotiations put into place actions that are finalized to derail them.

Sometimes it happens that the party that has more to lose from a change in the *status quo* uses the negotiation as a way to slow down the transition towards a situation of sustainable peace. This can be done in many ways:

- *Feet-dragging*, i.e. making the negotiations to last as long as possible, and, in the meanwhile, allowing the situation in the field to change, so as to make a solution in the terms of the other party more difficult if not wholly impracticable.
- Trying to divide the other camp. For instance, the stronger party may provide privileges to some chosen persons or groups in the other camp, in order to make them more willing to agree to its terms.
- Putting in place actions which will likely prompt violent reactions from the more radical groups of the other party, so as to justify freezing the negotiations or, in the case where a provisional agreement has already been reached, halting its implementation.

It is important to highlight that a new outburst of violent confrontation after a failed negotiation phase may have significant effects on the mobilization and organization levels of the weaker party, thus requiring a new phase of *conscientization* and organization building. Needless to say, negative effects may occur also in the stronger party, whose population may get more radicalized and less willing to accept any change in the status quo.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a structural asymmetric case

Clearly, symmetry is only one of the points of view from which a conflict can be analyzed, although in some cases it is a crucial one. In general, more than one perspective is needed to fully understand the characteristics and the dynamics of a conflict. Nevertheless, the structurally asymmetric conflict paradigm presented in the previous sections can be of great help in analyzing conflicts. In some cases, it appears particularly effective in providing new insights into the reasons why a specific conflict has followed a given behavior over time, and possibly also in providing novel ideas about how to act in order to reach the end of the conflict sooner.

For this reason, in the next section of the paper, we will focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in order to shed light on the reasons why, despite so many *negotiation* phases that have taken place so far, not one of them was able to achieve *sustainable peace*, and, after more than fifteen years since the first negotiations started, the conflict is still trapped in a never ending negotiation-confrontation cycle.

First of all, it is important to highlight what type of asymmetry exists between the two parts, in order to demonstrate the reasons why we believe that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a typically “structural” asymmetric one³². Therefore, let us analyze what elements that characterize a structural asymmetric conflict are present in the Israeli-Palestinian case.

The first one is the *legal asymmetry*, and this is probably the element that characterizes this conflict the most. From 1948 onwards, Israel has been a state, with its own territory, internationally recognized borders, a clear political agenda, a defined foreign policy, and a powerful and well-organized army. On the contrary, the Palestinians had to fight hard to move from a situation of “non-existence”³³ - if not as “refugees”³⁴ – to the recognition of being a nation, with their own right to a national state³⁵. Also during the years of the British Mandate (1922-48), despite the fact that both Jews and Arabs were living in Palestine under British power, legal asymmetry was evident. Jews were recognized as a nation whose rights were guaranteed by the text of the Mandate³⁶, while the Palestinians were not. On the contrary, this asymmetry did not exist at the beginning of the conflict (1880-1920) when some Eastern European Jews started to immigrate to Palestinian territory, at the time under the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire. During those 40 years, real asymmetry did not exist, because the two sides had a similar legal status: the Arabs living in the territory that was starting to be perceived as Palestine were Ottoman citizens, but they were marginalized in terms of political power, while the Zionist immigrants were mainly Russian Jews who were escaping from anti-Semitic pogroms and who migrated and settled despite Ottoman suspiciousness³⁷. In any case, had there been any asymmetry between the two parts, it would have been to the advantage of the Arabs.

After the Basel Congress of 1897, the structural asymmetry between the two parts started to appear. In terms of what Mitchell defines as *access*, the Zionist movement’s political agenda, notwithstanding the existence of different parties³⁸, was not balanced by a similar attitude to the opponent, since the Arab Palestinians had not yet developed a specific political program. At the same time, the international powers were aware of the Zionist agenda, thanks to Herzl’s diplomatic efforts. Things even improved after his death. The Balfour Declaration was definitively a turning point³⁹, because Zionism received the support of the major power in the World, Great Britain, thus demonstrating the *access* the Zionist movement had been able to gain. On the contrary, the Arab Palestinians could not claim anything similar. Even Faysal, the later-to-be *emir* of Iraq, despite being the “champion” of Arab nationalism, had not taken into any consideration Palestinian national aspirations, when he signed the famous agreement with Chaim Weizmann on January 1919.

The Zionist *intra-party cohesion* was by far more advanced than any form of cohesion among the Arab Palestinians⁴⁰. For example, despite the differences existing between David Ben Gurion’s political ideas and those of Ze’ev Jabotinsky, there was a basic consensus in the way Zionists behaved in order to create a Jewish state in Palestine and in the attitude they had towards the Arab Palestinians⁴¹.

Also, in terms of *salience of goals*, despite the existence of an Arab Palestinian

élite, which was aware of the risks represented by the Zionists⁴², Jews were perfectly conscious of what they were fighting for, much more than the fragmented Arab Palestinian society.

Finally, as to *survivability*, anti-Semitism, which had spread all over Europe in the Thirties - and of course the tragic events related to the Shoah – played a fundamental role. The Jews living in Palestine and those survivors who decided to move there were extremely committed to the end result, because the birth of Israel was perceived as a life-or-death chance; on the contrary, the Arab Palestinian community did not perceive the conflict in such a way, at least not until the 1947-1948 events. But, in that period, the asymmetry between the two parts was so strong that there was no chance for the Palestinians to succeed.

A different evolution. From *negotiation* back to *confrontation*

Given its generality and idealization, Figure 1 does not necessarily present the behavioral pattern of every single conflict. Each one has its own peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. And the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no exception. This is the reason why in this section we will analyze in detail the dynamics over time of this conflict, which are best represented by Figure 3.

At the beginning of the conflict, in the 1880s, there was an almost perfect power balance. But it decreased during the 1881-1948 years (downward arrow), up to a point in which the Palestinians became completely powerless. In these seventy years, we can single out a phase of *conscientization*, characterized by growing levels of conflict awareness (on both sides), intertwined with some episodes of violent *confrontation*, especially in the second half of the period, after the birth of the British Mandate in Palestine in the early 1920s. While conflict awareness increased, the balance of power radically decreased, and the Jews (later the Israelis) became a much stronger party compared to that of the Arab Palestinian's.

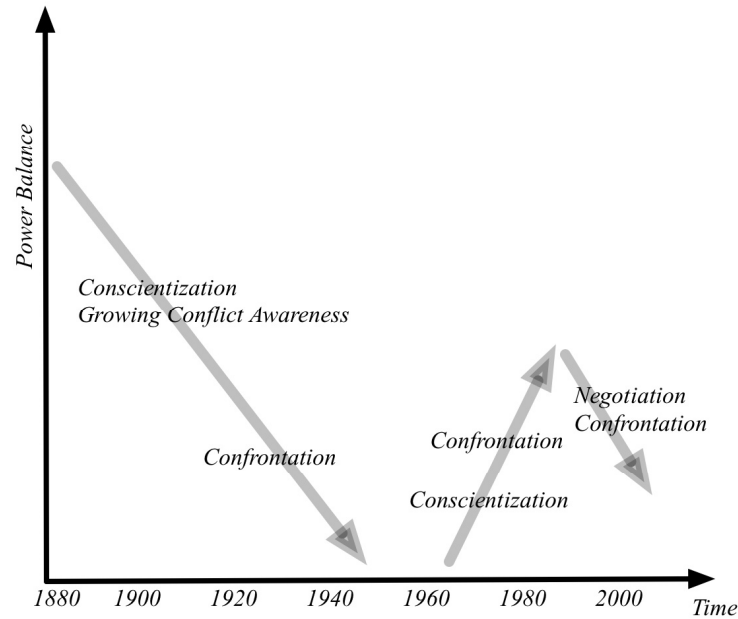


Fig. 3: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A different development.

The main reason why the Zionists were able to succeed and to create the state of Israel - while the Palestinians were not - lies in the weakness of the latter compared to the strength of the former in terms of *conscientization*⁴³. After the Balfour Declaration, and during the '20s and '30s, the Zionist movement became much stronger than the Palestinian one, both for internal and external reasons⁴⁴. In terms of economic parameters, human capital, urban-rural distribution, political awareness, and social structure, the Jews had a relevant advantage over the Arab Palestinians.

The power balance kept on decreasing during the '30s and '40s, when episodes of *confrontation* between the two sides took place, and it reached its lowest level when the *confrontation* involved the newly born Israeli state against the Palestinians, who were completely disoriented, and split in different groups. Conflict awareness, on the contrary, kept increasing in both parties, among the new Jewish immigrants who were actively involved in the Israeli army, and among the Palestinians, in particular among the circa 700,000 refugees spread all over the region.

During the '50s and '60s, the structural asymmetry between the two parts was an extremely relevant characteristic of this conflict. While the state of Israel was able to build the strongest and best equipped army of the Middle East, the Palestinians - who had become refugees spread all over the Middle East - could only create armed groups, which carried out resistance actions, sometimes of terrorist nature, both inside the territory of Israel and against Israeli (but also Jewish) targets abroad.

During these two decades, the Palestinians almost disappeared from the conflict, both from a military point of view, and an ideological-political one. They re-emerged only after the 1967 Arab states' defeat, thanks to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and *Fatah*, the political faction that dominated it, led by Yasser

Arafat. He managed to present the Palestinians as a nation that deserved a state as much as it was happening all over the world. On the military side, after the Arab armies' defeat in the Six Day War, it was mainly up to the Palestinians to fight against Israel, through guerrilla actions and terrorist attacks conducted either by the related-to-*Fatah* organization *Al-'Asifah* (the Storm), or by other more leftist groups, such as the *Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine*. In particular, after the *Yom Kippur* war – apart from incidents on the border with Syria, the clashes between the Syrian army and the IDF during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the war against *Hizballah* in the summer 2006 – Palestinians have been running the only confrontations with Israel. On the ideological-political side, the Palestinians became the main actor of the conflict and presented themselves to the international public opinion as a self-confident and mature national movement that was aiming at creating their own state.

The First *Intifada* (1987-1993), in particular, led to extremely relevant developments⁴⁵. First of all, it was clear that Israel and the Palestinians were the only two relevant protagonists of the conflict. No solution would be reached, unless the Israelis were willing to consider the Palestinians as a political community with national political rights, and unless the Palestinians would accept the existence of the state of Israel. Secondly, partly in response to the First *Intifada*, partly because of the frustration of the inefficacy of armed violence, an official Palestinian compromise position emerged, with the statement that the PLO – at that time based in Tunis – made on November 15, 1988, when an independent Palestinian state was proclaimed, and the existence of Israel was implicitly recognized⁴⁶.

Therefore, in the '70s and '80s, as described in Figure 3, the power balance highly increased (upward arrow). Despite bloody events, such as Black September and the 1982 Lebanon invasion, the Palestinians were recognized as a national movement aiming at their own state by the entire international community. At the same time, they created civil society organizations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and a genre of political institutions. Finally, through the First *Intifada*, the Palestinians were able to challenge the incredible superiority of the Israeli military in front of the entire world, with an increasing sympathy towards the Palestinian children throwing stones against the Israeli tanks. The power balance reached its top level at the beginning of the '90s, during the Madrid Conference (October 30 – November 1, 1991), when for the first time Israel sat at the same table with the neighboring Arab countries, and Israelis and Palestinians were “forced” to negotiate.

Why did not this *negotiation* lead to a *sustainable peace*? According to the model we have analyzed in the first part of the article, *confrontation* should have allowed the weaker part of a conflict (i.e. the Palestinians) to strengthen itself so as to force the stronger part (i.e. the Israelis) to start negotiating. On the contrary, the *negotiation phase* represented an interruption in this process of growing power balance. The Israelis succeeded in transforming the negotiations – later the Oslo Agreements - into a never-ending process of bargaining, while the Palestinians failed to create the embryo of a functioning and democratic State. The power balance started to drop off again

(last downward arrow), and things led to a new *confrontation* in September 2000.

What happened? After more than four years of *Intifada*, the left-wing Israeli government created in June 1992 decided to negotiate with the Palestinians, because it was clear to the Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that the only way to call a halt to the First *Intifada* was through negotiations. But two contemporary negotiations started to take place. On the one side, the Israeli government talked to the “winner” of the confrontation, that is to say the Palestinians from the OPT, through bilateral meetings, that were held in the US in 1992-93. On the other side, in 1993 Israel decided to negotiate with the PLO, without the Palestinians from the OPT being even informed. The main reason for such a behavior was that, at the time, the PLO leadership was much weaker than the Palestinian delegation from the OPT. The former had lost the political and economic backing of the USSR and of the communist bloc, because of the end of the Cold War. It had not condemned Saddam Hussein’s behavior in the 1990-91 Gulf crisis, and therefore it had lost the financial support of the Gulf States, mainly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Finally, it was far away from the OPT, and it was at risk of losing its control of the Palestinian population living under the Israeli occupation⁴⁷.

Given these premises, it was quite obvious that the PLO would have been a weaker and a softer negotiator compared with the Palestinians from the OPT. This is exactly what happened. With the Oslo Agreements, the PLO ended up by relinquishing at least two fundamental demands: the Israeli recognition of the existence of a Palestinian state, and the interruption of the construction of new Israeli settlements in the OPT. In exchange for such a renunciation, the PLO leadership was allowed to go back to the OPT and to establish the Palestinian Authority (PA), and it was given a relevant economic and political power that it would have never been able to achieve otherwise.

The entire negotiation was destined to fail - as the Palestinians from the OPT had understood from the very beginning - because what the PLO got, in exchange for the recognition of the State of Israel, was only temporary autonomy. It did not get what the Palestinians had been asking for, that is to say an independent state or a formal commitment to that⁴⁸. The many agreements signed during the 1993-2000 years did not challenge the basic assumption Oslo was built on. The fundamental issues – i.e. settlements, borders of the Palestinian state, Jerusalem, refugees – were never part of the negotiation, until the Camp David summit of July 2000⁴⁹.

Therefore, from the point of view of the contents, it was clear since the beginning that *negotiation* could not lead to a *sustainable peace*.

Concretely, during the Oslo years, it took place what Yitzhak Shamir had planned for in the October-November 1991 Madrid Conference⁵⁰, that is to say what we have previously referred to as “feet-dragging”. Between 1993 and 2000, there were never ending negotiations, many different and very detailed agreements, but in the meanwhile the situation on the ground was changing, thus making it more and more difficult to obtain a solution to the conflict. The Israeli governments did not freeze the “settlements industry” in the OPT; on the contrary, the amount of Jewish population living in the illegal settlements behind the Green Line almost doubled between 1993 and

2000, and the “land grab” went on, making the birth of a Palestinian state with a territorial continuity and clear borders almost totally unfeasible⁵¹.

On the Palestinian side, those groups that had not accepted the Oslo Agreements – mainly *Hamas* and the *Islamic Jihad* – challenged the PLO leadership’s authority and carried out suicide attacks among the Israeli civilian population. As we stated in the previous pages, it may happen that the intra-party cohesion of the dominated party is loose, with different groups and organizations fighting for the leadership of the resistance movement. The Palestinian case is a typical example of such a trend. Arafat was either unable or unwilling to claim what Weber defined “monopoly of violence”, by letting *Hamas*, the *Islamic Jihad*, and other military groups act independently from the PA control. At the same time, the PLO leadership completely failed to behave in a different way compared to the traditional performance of the Arab states in the region. Not only did the PLO not succeed in building effective para-state institutions - those of the PA - that would represent the embryo of a Palestinian state, ready to be functioning once (if ever) Israel had accepted its establishment. But also, the PA became an authoritarian, corrupt structure, with no accountability, and with a long roster of human rights violation. This ended by increasing the level of displeasure and dissatisfaction of the Palestinian population towards the PA, which was often perceived as backing Israel in its occupation policy, instead of fighting against it. Finally, Israel did not miss any opportunity to undermine the PA authority, by not respecting the timetable and the contents of the Oslo Agreements, further dividing so the Palestinian political and civil society⁵².

The *negotiation*, therefore, was followed by a new *confrontation*, the so-called Second *Intifada* (2000-2004), characterized by a new cycle of violence. The PLO leadership thought it could transform the Palestinian disappointment into a military confrontation against Israel, in order to force the Israeli government to be more “generous” during the following negotiation round.

Yasser Arafat made a terrible mistake. Israel did not miss the opportunity of inflicting a hard blow to the PA and the Palestinian institutions almost completely collapsed. Given the hard situation Israel had to face due to the wave of suicide attacks carried out in February-March 2002, and thanks to a favorable international situation⁵³, Israel used an iron fist to crush the Palestinians: the PA infrastructures were targeted with extreme violence, not only the *Muqatas* in Ramallah and other West Bank cities, but also Ministries, governmental buildings, even registry offices⁵⁴.

How can such behavior be explained, given that – at least formally – the PA was still an Israeli ally?

If we think back to the 1982 Lebanon invasion, it is possible to identify a sort of *fil rouge* connecting the behavior of Ariel Sharon when he was Defense Minister in 1982 and the one he had when he was Prime Minister in 2001-04. The main aim of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was to sweep the PLO out of Lebanon. The excuse was that of diminishing the attacks against Israeli territory, despite the border having been safe for almost a year. In reality, by so doing, Israel was aiming simultaneously at two

results. First of all, at destroying the para-state institutions that the PLO had been able to create in Lebanon, so as to inflict a major blow on the Palestinian attempt to provide themselves with an embryo of state structures. Secondly, at severing the contacts between the PLO and the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza, in order to weaken the Palestinian leadership in the OPT.

The same happened in the 2002-2003 campaign carried out by Israel in the West Bank and in Gaza. By destroying the Presidential compounds, the Ministry buildings, and the police facilities, Israel was “simply” attacking the para-state institutions the Palestinians had created in the OPT until that time, thus pushing the PA back years in its attempt to create a Palestinian state.

At the same time, there is another pattern that is worth noticing. Since the Mandate period, Israel tried - and actually succeeded – in strengthening the divisions existing among the Palestinians. This was part of a clear strategy: splitting the Palestinians into different groups, so as to diminish their strength, and then negotiating with the weakest actor.

After 1948, the Palestinians were divided into four groups: those who remained in Israel and became Israeli citizens; those who either remained in (as residents) or moved to (as refugees) the West Bank and Gaza, under the rule of Jordan and Egypt respectively; those who moved to the neighboring countries as refugees, such as Egypt (apart from Gaza), Lebanon, Syria, Jordan (the territory east of the Jordan river); finally those who moved to far-away countries, either Europe, or American States, or the Gulf countries, and constituted the Palestinian Diaspora.

After 1967, this division was further strengthened, because of another split: the Palestinians living in East Jerusalem became “permanent residents” and were given more civil and political rights compared to the Palestinians living in the rest of the OPT. In the 90s, after the First Gulf War and even more with the beginning of the Oslo Agreements, the temporary rule not to allow non-Jerusalemites to enter the Jerusalem municipality area was strictly implemented. In such a way, East Jerusalem became a completely different world, and East Jerusalemites ended up by being totally separated from the “other Palestinians”. Soon after, Gaza too was separated from the West Bank, since it became a closed area to the West Bankers. After the so-called Oslo II⁵⁵, another split was introduced, between Palestinians living in A/B areas and those resident in C areas. Finally, after June 2007, things became even more complicated, because of the split between Gazans, ruled by the *Hamas* government who won the Palestinian Legislative Council in the January 2006 elections, and West Bankers, who are ruled by the *Fatah* emergency government created by the PA President (elected on January 2005)⁵⁶.

The division among so many different groups (the Palestinian citizens of Israel, the Eastern Jerusalemites, the Palestinians living in Gaza, those living in the West Bank, the refugees living in other Arab countries) has serious consequences on the *negotiation* process, because it is obviously difficult for a single body (the PLO) to negotiate for the entire Palestinian world. On the one hand, it means that the

negotiating team has too many different interests to take care of while negotiating; on the other hand, there are too many groups on whom to impose the enforcement of the agreement, once reached.

This is what happened during the Oslo process, and in the aftermath of the November 2007 Annapolis peace conference. In fact, Abu Mazen, despite being the PLO President, represented “de facto” only the Palestinians living in the West Bank. The Gazans had their own government, with a much more radical stance than the *Fatah*-led PA; the Eastern Jerusalemites were not represented because Israel considers East Jerusalem as part of Israel; the Palestinian citizens of Israel were of course external to the negotiations⁵⁷; finally, there are serious doubts that the Palestinian refugees living abroad are really represented by the PLO any more. This means that Israel has reached its objective of dividing the Palestinians into several weak groups in order to maintain its superiority.

Therefore, the power balance has been decreased once again during the last fifteen years: starting from the first *negotiation* phase (Oslo, 1993-2000), passing through the new *confrontation* (the Second *Intifada*, 2000-2004) and the new *negotiation* phase (Annapolis and its aftermath, 2007-2008), and ending with the new *confrontation* (the “Gaza” war, in January 2009). The final consequence is that Israel is once again much stronger than the Palestinians.

Conclusion. What next?

According to the structure of the asymmetric conflicts we have been analyzing so far, low power balance and scarce conflict awareness – i.e. reciprocal awareness of the goals and of the living conditions of the other side - mean a very slight chance of successful *negotiation* and henceforth of reaching a *sustainable peace*.

This indicates that unless power balance between Israel and the Palestinians increases, and unless each side considers the other partner at its own level in terms of status, rights and needs, there is no realistic chance to reach a phase of *sustainable peace*. The two mistakes of Oslo, as we said, were that Israel chose to negotiate with the weaker partner - the PLO and not the Palestinians from the inside – and that the core issues of the conflict were not addressed, in particular the main objective of the Palestinian side, the creation of a sovereign state.

From this point of view, the situation on the ground at the moment is not very promising. In terms of power balance, Israel is still much stronger than the Palestinians. Despite diplomatic attempts to create a national unity government between *Fatah* and *Hamas*, the two parts are still very far from reaching an agreement, and the separation between Gaza and the West Bank is more evident than ever. Clearly, the lack of unity has negative repercussions on the Palestinian capacity to fill the gap with the Israelis in terms of power balance. As to conflict awareness, the strong support that the government’s decision to attack Gaza in December 2008-January 2009 has received from the Israeli population, on the one side, and the

understandably increasing anti-Israeli feeling among the Palestinian population, on the other, have further deepened the distance between Israelis and Palestinians and have decreased the reciprocal understanding of the opponent's requests.

Therefore, according to the model this article focuses on, the main question remains how to increase the power balance and the conflict awareness. It would be too naïve to present a “package of instructions” to reach such a result. Yet, there are two major events that would certainly make it closer: re-establishing the unity of Palestinian factions, and addressing the core issues of the conflict, such as the borders and the capital of the Palestinian state (i.e. the future of settlements and the status of Jerusalem) and the refugees' problem.

The first step to move along this direction would be to involve *Hamas* in any negotiation regarding the situation of the Gaza Strip. In fact, without an agreement between Israel and *Hamas* there is no way to address the two fundamental issues: ending the Israeli siege of the Strip, and assuring the security of the Israeli population living in the south. The second step would be creating a national unity government between *Fatah* and *Hamas*. Only later, after having re-established the unity within the Palestinian political authority (at least of those living in the OPT), Israel and the new unity government would start a negotiation, dealing with the core issues of the conflict. No negotiation should take place without them on the table, as it happened in Oslo, in the *road map*, and in the negotiations following the Annapolis conference. Both Israelis and Palestinians should be forced by the international community to start the negotiation with the immediate recognition of the existence of two States, whose details should be discussed simultaneously.

There are too many variables involved to make it possible to foresee what might happen in the near future. The actual behavior of the Netanyahu-led government, after the decision – in November 2009 – to announce a 10-month freeze on the West Bank settlement construction; the quarrel among the different groups inside *Hamas*, between the political and the military leaderships in Gaza, and between the “insiders” and the leaders based in Damascus or Beirut; the outcomes of the power struggle within the *Fatah* leadership and its effect on the PA; the regional stability; last and most importantly, the role that the new American administration is ready and willing to play in the area. In particular, this last element represents an important challenge, whether President Obama would be able to exert a pressure on Israel and to strengthen the PA, in order to increase the power balance between the two sides.

As Ziad Abu Zayyad states in an article published on the Israeli liberal newspaper *Haaretz*, there is something concrete that the Palestinians – from their side – should do in the meantime:

in their asymmetric battle with the occupation, Palestinians must turn to peaceful resistance. It is the only way to tilt the balance of power in their favor, by neutralizing the arms of the occupation and its military and technological capacities, while at the same time gaining the respect, the sympathy, and the support for the world for their battle⁵⁸.

It is clearly out of the scope of this article to address such a fundamental issue, i.e. the Palestinian non-violent struggle against the Israeli occupation. Yet, this would

certainly have a positive effect on the power balance between Israel and the Palestinians, that is to say on a crucial issue for the solution of a typical asymmetric conflict.

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Endnotes

¹ There is no universally accepted definition of “power”. Usually, proxies are used to measure power. Paul believes that power has demographic, economic, and military sources, while Arreguin-Toft measures power in terms of armed forces and population. See Thazha V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Ivan Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Wins Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

² Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers*.

³ Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Wins Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*.

⁴ John W. Bellflower, “4th generation warfare.” *Small Wars Journal* 4, (February 2006), pp. 27-32.

⁵ John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt and Michele Zanini, “Information-Age Terrorism.” *Current History* 99, n. 636 (2000), pp. 179-185: 179.

⁶ John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Pittsburgh: Rand, 2001).

⁷ Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Wins Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*.

⁸ Hugh Miall, *Emergent Conflict and Peaceful Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 121.

⁹ Out of the 173 conflicts analysed by Arreguin-Toft, in only 29 cases (16.8%) a change of strategy during the conflict has occurred. Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Wins Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁰ Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Wins Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*, p. 20.

¹¹ Galtung's article published in 1971 is an early case of analysis of a complex international conflict by means of a formal theory of conflict: Johan Galtung, “The Middle East and the Theory of Conflict.” *Journal of Peace Research* 8, n. 3-4 (1971), pp. 173-206. More recently, the case of Northern Ireland as a structurally asymmetric conflict has been analyzed: James W. McAuley, Catherine McGlynn and Jon Tonge, “Conflict resolution in asymmetric and symmetric situations: Northern Ireland as a case study”, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* 1, n. 1 (2008), pp. 88-102.

¹² Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers*.

¹³ Arreguin-Toft, *How the Weak Wins Wars. A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict*.

¹⁴ Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse and Hugh Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. 21.

¹⁵ The term *terrorism* is always controversial. Here we intend by terrorism any action directed against civilians to weaken the morale of the adversary. As such, terrorism it is not only the weapon of the weaker; it is used also by the stronger, and in particular by state actors. Typical examples are Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the Dresden bombing. Arreguin-Toft uses for these cases the term 'barbarism'.

¹⁶ Hugh Miall, *Emergent Conflict and Peaceful Change*.

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- ¹⁷ Ted Robert Gurr and Barbara Harff, *Ethnic conflict in World Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).
- ¹⁸ Diana Francis, *Culture, power, asymmetries and gender in conflict transformation*, August 2004. Available from Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management. http://www.berghof-handbook.net/uploads/download/francis_handbook.pdf. Accessed 26 October 2009.
- ¹⁹ Mitchell uses the term *structural asymmetry* in a more limited sense than we do here: in his terminology, the adjective *structural* denotes only some of the dimensions of the asymmetry. Christopher R. Mitchell, "Classifying conflicts: Asymmetry and resolution", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 518, (1991), pp. 23–38.
- ²⁰ Mitchell, "Classifying conflicts: Asymmetry and resolution", p. 32.
- ²¹ Mitchell, "Classifying conflicts: Asymmetry and resolution", p. 35.
- ²² We are using this term the way Galtung does it in its *ABC* conflict paradigm. See Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means* (London: Sage, 1996).
- ²³ Adam Curle, *Making Peace* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971); John P. Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).
- ²⁴ Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution*, p. 22.
- ²⁵ Power imbalance refers to the different dimensions of structural asymmetry. Power balance exists when the parties have reached a comparable level on all or on most of those dimensions.
- ²⁶ We are using this term in the sense in which Pruitt and Rubin imply it, and it was re-elaborated by Mitchell. See Dean G. Pruitt and Jeffrey Z. Rubin, *Social Conflict: Escalation, Stalemate and Settlement* (New York: Random House, 1986).
- ²⁷ According to Pruitt and Rubin, the unawareness of the adversary's objectives and interests, and of the fact that its hostile behaviour is, at least in part, a reaction to our own hostile behaviour is at the root of the violence escalation common in many conflicts.
- ²⁸ Paulo Freire (ed.), *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1986).
- ²⁹ Ted R. Gurr, *People Versus States. Minorities at Risk in the New Century* (Washington D.C.: Unites States Institute of Peace Press, 2000).
- ³⁰ This is what happened in South Africa.
- ³¹ Nahla Valji, "Race and Reconciliation in post-TRC South Africa", May 2004. Available from The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. <http://www.csvr.org.za/wits/papers/papnv3.htm>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
- ³² It appears that the first one to use the formal theory of conflict to frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as asymmetric was Galtung.
- ³³ See Golda Meir's famous declaration, «There was no such a thing as Palestinians», published in *British Sunday Times* in June 1969.
- ³⁴ The UN Security Council Resolution n. 242 was still referring to Palestinians as "refugees".
- ³⁵ On November 22, 1974, the UN General Assembly voted a resolution which reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people "to self-determination without external influence", and "to national independence and sovereignty".
- ³⁶ The 28 articles of the text of the Mandate did not mention the Palestinian as a people. On the contrary, the Jewish minority was recognised in such a way. While the word «Jewish» was used to refer to a national political entity, the word «Arab» never appeared; and the word «Arabic» was used only in art. 22, which stated that Arabic was one of the three official languages of the Mandate, with Hebrew and English. For the full text, see: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp. Accessed 26 October 2009.
- ³⁷ Since 1882, the Sultan allowed the Jews living in the Russian territories to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire territories and to get Ottoman citizenship. There were two conditions; they had to renounce their previous citizenship, and they were not allowed to migrate to Palestine. However, the inefficiency of the Ottoman bureaucracy made almost impossible the enforcing of this prohibition. See James L. Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: 100 Years of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- ³⁸ The seventh Zionist Congress, held in 1905, rejected the so-called "Uganda proposal", but the conflict between *practical* Zionists and *political* ones lasted for some years, until Chaim Weizmann emerged with his "synthesis". See David J. Goldberg, *Towards the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought* (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

- ³⁹ In the Balfour Declaration, the Jews were recognised as a «people», and entitled to establish in Palestine their «national home». The Palestinians were referred to as «the non-Jewish communities in Palestine», despite being more than 90% of the total population, and they were only entitled to «civil and religious rights». For the full text, see: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp. Accessed 26 October 2009.
- ⁴⁰ There were profound rivalries between clans and families, such as the one between the so-called *majilun* (from *majlis*, council), related to the Husayni family, and the so-called *muariton* (from *muarita*, opposition), linked to the Nashashibi clan.
- ⁴¹ See Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2000).
- ⁴² The newspaper *Filastin*, published in Jaffa since 1911, was heavily addressing the policy of Zionism. In the same year, Najib al-Khuri Nassar wrote the book *al-Sihuniyya (Zionism)*, warning the Arab Palestinian population about the risks they were facing.
- ⁴³ Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine. One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 105.
- ⁴⁴ Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage. The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).
- ⁴⁵ Emile A. Nakhleh, “The Palestinians and the Future. Peace through Realism”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, n. 2 (1989), pp. 3-15.
- ⁴⁶ Rashid Khalidi, “The PLO and the Uprising”, *Middle East Report* 154, (September-October 1988), pp. 21-23.
- ⁴⁷ Camille Mansour, “The Palestinian-Israeli Peace Negotiations: An Overview and Assessment”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, n. 3 (1993), pp. 5-31.
- ⁴⁸ 'Abd Al-Shafi – one of the most relevant representatives of the Palestinians from the OPT - was one of those who opposed the Oslo Agreements for these reasons. See “The Oslo Agreement. An Interview with Haydar 'Abd al-Shafi”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, n. 1 (1993), pp. 14-19.
- ⁴⁹ Sara Roy, “Why Peace Failed: an Oslo Autopsy”, *Current History* 101, n. 651 (2002), pp. 8-16.
- ⁵⁰ According to Morris, the Israeli Prime Minister Shamir did not intend to reach any progress, and his idea was to drag out the negotiations without any improvement. Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999* (New York: Knopf, 1999).
- ⁵¹ See http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info/settlement-info-and-tables/stats-data/comprehensive-settlement-population-1972-2006. Accessed 6 March 2010.
- ⁵² Charles Elderlin, *Le rêve brisé. Histoire de l'échec du processus de paix au Proche-Orient 1995-2002* (Paris: Fayards, 2002).
- ⁵³ It was easy for the newly elected Prime Minister Sharon to present to the entire world the Palestinian terrorism as part of the Islamic terrorist galaxy led by Al Qaida.
- ⁵⁴ Baruch Kimmerling, *The Politicide. Ariel Sharon's War Against the Palestinians* (London: Verso, 2003).
- ⁵⁵ Signed in Washington on October 1995.
- ⁵⁶ According to the American Journalist David Rose, the US were backing *Fatah* against *Hamas* in the Gaza Strip. See Rose, David. “The Gaza Bombshell.” *Vanity Fair*, April 2008. In <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>. Accessed 26 October 2009.
- ⁵⁷ Focusing on them is out of the scope of this article. Yet, it would be quite interesting analysing their specific behaviour in terms of *conscientization* (that took place only after 1966, with the end of the military administration, and had some key-moments in the following years; for example, the *Land Day* on March 30, 1976), *confrontation* (the last episode was the famous October 2000 revolt) and *negotiation*. Currently, they are part of the *negotiation* between Israel and the PLO, since Israel requests that the PLO formally accepts Israel as a “Jewish State”.
- ⁵⁸ Z. Abu Zayyad, “The power of non-violence”, *Haaretz*, March 5, 2010, in <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1154402.html>. Accessed 6 March 2010.