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The Balfour Declaration: Between History and Narrative

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100 years have passed since the Balfour declaration, and this significant historical document is still under much scrutiny and at the same time highly relevant. Each side – the Jews and the Palestinians – makes a structured political use of it, in order to justify its arguments, and to criticize what does not fit his narrative; and this mainly to deepen his justifications and nationalist ideology.

On November 2017, the 100-year anniversary to the declaration, it will be put once more to the test of time, and we shall discover, yet again, how significant and focal it is mainly in the historiography of both national movements which have been struggling to this very day not just over the land, but also over justifying its ownership. A struggle which is an everlasting war on the historical conscientiousness of future students in both educational systems – those which leaders train to become warriors, while they themselves are not battling for peace.

In this paper I wish to address mainly the space of the debate and disagreement created by the Balfour Declaration, which has broadened throughout the years – a space in which the Zionist narrative and the Palestinian narrative seek to subjugate each other. I will also address the dual attitude of the Israeli educational system towards the Balfour Declaration.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, but also for many years before, there has been an active struggle between rival narratives on shaping the identity, the collective memory; and particularly about controlling them. The Zionist project led not just to a struggle against the other, the Non-Zionist, and Non-Jewish; but also to a struggle of narratives within its own borders, each side using social economic, technologic, cultural, linguistic and mental resources, which produces and reproduces a space moving between liberation and victimization. This struggle is infected, by nature, with lack of tolerance for other narratives. It creates a discourse that enlists justifications and post-colonialist linguistic aspects, which are then used to depict both the social history and the history of society's narratives; it is also used to form and fixate pseudo-truths.

In this struggle between narratives, political interest groups forge an alternative narrative, and this in order to ensure, through manipulations, an absolute control over the winning narrative and the preservation of its hegemonic status. In an effort to establish a hegemony where one narrative comes at the expense of the other, this struggle does not only symbolize a sort of coercion applied by the dominating group over other social groups, but also the infiltration of interests into all other groups. The practices of this struggle are being applied intelligently in language and discourse patterns that are put to constant use.

The Zionist ideology sought to nullify the many existing cultures, to remove them from the new Jewish nation and create a new narrative, a formative one, fixed in a centralist collective memory; while being aware of the heterogeneity of the established state's social structure. In

order to achieve this goal, it constructed homogenization and Israelization mechanisms, The Balfour Declaration was used as one of their foundations.

The construction of a nation is the process in which the ideological institutional infrastructure of a community is laid (in our case, the Jewish–Zionist community) which sees itself, or imagines itself, based on Benedict Anderson’s words, as a nation.

In the process of constructing a nation not only the educational system is enlisted as a means in the hands of the state, much like the army or the police, a corpus is formed to strengthen the citizen’s affinity to the state. This process takes place, among other things, in the revival, rewrite and invention of an historical mythology and a collective memory.

In this process of building a collective memory the Balfour Declaration has been located for many years as part of the journey of atonement made by the nations of the world – those who for many years (too many) have labeled, hurt, and abused the Jews. Hence this document is enlisted to show the Israeli student in the education system, a chain of events commencing with the divine promise of land, a promise which is the foundation to the justification, through the Cyrus Declaration (enlisted nowadays by the Iranians to justify the fact that they are not anti-Jewish as prime minister Netanyahu presents them) up to the Balfour declaration – the modern document in which once more there is an acknowledgment of the right. The narrative constructed – based on the declaration – is the narrative of the Jewish struggle for recognition as a nation (and not just as a religion) hence it is a Zionist narrative. In this framework Israel is not considered as a new creation but as a renewed one.

Zionism has simultaneously shaped two historical memories that were meant to transform it into a didactic and enlisting component: the memory of the distance and recent Jewish past and the memory of the history of the Zionist movement and its work in the land of Israel.

In this sense, the makers of Zionist history, were also those who shaped the memory of the movement, which did not facilitate the study of Zionist history, as well as the disengagement

from this pattern in all matters related to their strong desire to shape the collective memory for the nation being built in Israel.

The makers of Israeli history as well as its writers considered the Balfour Declaration not just as a political asset at the time in which it was granted, but as a unifying component, therefore they tried to give it an essentialist nature. It enabled recognition – both external and internal – of the Jewish people as entitled to national-Jewish sovereignty, sought to legitimize the Zionist movement as one which wishes to overcome the resistance of Jews who considered themselves internationalists and stood against it.

There were many who – when coming to know that the declaration is being stirred up in offices, salons, restaurants, and taking shape towards publication – asked to stop it. One of them was a British-Jewish politician (whose correspondences have recently been revealed at the National library in Jerusalem). The Israel collection of the library exposed that Edwin Samuel Montagu, the cousin of Herbert Samuel, the British High Commissioner in Palestine, who was appointed in 1917 as Secretary of State for India, sent on August 23rd 1917 a memorandum to the British government in which he tried to prevent the publication of the Declaration, claiming it is an anti-Semitic document that would harm both Jews and Muslims.

He wrote that he fears that his protest may be too late. However, as a Jewish minister in the government, he wanted to express unique viewpoints. Further along he specified the risks, which according to him exist in granting the Jewish people a national home in Palestine. First he expressed his fear that the nations of the world would banish the Jews living within their boundaries, and will revoke their rights, by claiming that now that the Jews have a home of their own, they should move there. He cautioned that when the Jews will have a national home, Palestine will become the ghetto of the world and added by asking why would the Russians grant equal rights to a Jew when his national home is Palestine?

Montagu emphasized that in his view there is no Jewish nation and explained that his family members, for example, who live in Britain for generations, have no connection to any Jewish family in any other country, except for their belonging, to some or other degree, to the same religion. In order to clarify his meaning he wrote that Jews who live in two different places are like a Christian-Englishman and a Christian-Frenchman, sharing the same religion but not the same nationality.

At the same time, he warned against the fate of Arabs living in Palestine once it is transformed into “a national home” for the Jewish people. He stated that presuming that the meaning will be that Muslims and Christians will give way in favor of the Jews, who will get priority and enjoy a unique affinity to Palestine in the same way that England is linked to the English and France to the French. He went on by claiming that Muslims in Palestine will become foreigners, same way that the Jews will become foreigners in every country outside Palestine.

This correspondence was part of an entire array of exchanging opinions and thoughts that took place at the time, between British and Jews, some Zionists and some not, with regards to formulating the final version of the Balfour Declaration. Some may see it as an irrelevant outdated documentation.

Montagu's arguments, as a Jew, are used today, and have actually been used for quite a few years by the Palestinian national movement as a basis for its claims – which will increase in the upcoming months in a series of planned venues. The Palestinians claim focus on the fact that the Balfour Declaration is only the ultimate expression of European colonialist imperialism, which mainly hurt the Arabs, and that the settlement of the Zionist movement in the Middle East should be seen as the manifestation of an illegal, violent, intrusive settlement, and as such should be ended just like the rule of the Crusaders ended.

The Palestinians' narrative of "we are the indigenous/natives", also claiming ownership of the right and not just to the place and space, goes against the Balfour Declaration, but it mostly goes against the establishment of the Zionist movement's narrative, which manifests itself, for example, in Dr. Chaim Weizmann's response to Balfour that Jerusalem was the Jews capital when London was nothing but a swamp.

The Palestinians do not think so. They are, as aforementioned, leading a narrative that can be entitled "one nation promises a second nation the land of a third". This, by the way, is not only the position of the Palestinians, but that of radical Jews – both that of Ultraorthodox Jews throughout the world, who have always objected the establishment of a Jewish state that will speed up the arrival of the Messiah; and that of Jews within Israel who believe that we must separate from the state's Jewish identity and transform it into a "state of all its citizens". Both sides consider Zionism as one of the major crimes of the 20th century and try to smear it in various forms, which are recently gaining wide support from audiences that Prof. Ilan Gur-Ze'ev called "the new Anti-Semites".

Hence, in a synergetic manner, there is a coalition of Satmar followers, sections in Mea-Shearim in Jerusalem, former Member of the Israeli Parliament, Azmi Bishara and some of his representatives in the Balad party at the Knesset to parts of the Israeli radical left (and of course the European one) and even to some of the Mizrahi Jewish activists in Israel itself, who see the arrival of European Jews to Israel as an action of colonialism aimed at them, and also against their brothers, the Arabs as some of them choose to refer to them.

Between the Palestinian and radical Mizrahi audiences – which stand at the margins of society and do not belong to the traditionalist or secular Israeli mainstream – there is an unwritten pact according to which both communities see themselves as victims of Zionism.

The radical sections of the new Mizrahi narrative in Israel view the European Zionists as the

agents who instigated the conflict – which in their view was unnecessary – between the Arabs and the Jewish-Arabs (this is how they refer to themselves).

In this respect, Jewish Montagu, in 1917's Britain views Zionism just like a distinguished professor from one of the universities in Israel who believes that the Zionist messengers sent to the Arab countries are the key players in the conflict between Arabs and Jewish-Arabs living in their countries.

The new Mizrahi narrative seeks to embrace the Palestinian narrative as a historical point of reference, a narrative model which to which I will refer to as the “Brother-Narrative”, and to create a shared point of origin for both of them. This will be achieved by drawing a pyramid-shaped map, at the top of which we find the Ashkenazi offender, who came from Europe carried on the wings of the Balfour Declaration; and at the bottomed those harmed by the colonialist Zionism – the radical Mizrahi Jews and the Arabs – according to the same narrative. This coalition of Arabs and radical Mizrahi-Jews shares also the resistance to Zionism and to Balfour's definition of the right to a national home in Israel.

On the Balfour Declaration's 95th anniversary the Palestinian ex-minister Nabil Shaath, published an article in the Daily Telegraph in which he also identified with this standpoint and attacked Britain for its famous declaration supporting the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Israel. Shaath is only one of the voices going against the establishment of “a colonialist entity on the expense of the Palestinians”, as he says; he called the declaration publish by Lord Arthur James Balfour the commencement of the “British imperialism” in Palestine.

In the center of Shaath called “crimes in Palestine” lays the promise of this land to the Jewish people, who according to Shaath, “doesn't even live there.” For him, there was no Jewish history in Israel that requires recognition; but these were nothing but “colonialist conspiracies” against the Arab residents who lived there. Hence, the revival of the Jewish

national home is a product of manipulations by external forces such as Britain, and not the result of Jews' authentic yearning to their land.

The thing which outraged Shaath (and many other Palestinian speakers) most was that the Balfour Declaration was the first step in a long process of recognition by the international community of the historic rights of the Jewish people to its homeland. Actually, recognition was achieved through a stubborn diplomatic struggle by the leaders of the Zionist movement during World War I and in the years that followed; although there historians have two schools of thought. One which gives much importance to the Zionist moves that led to the declaration and the other that put more emphasis on Britain's interests as part of the agenda that led to the declaration.

Britain was not the only country involved in this. On July 4th 1917 a letter was received by the French Foreign Minister that stated: "... it will be an act of justice, righting past wrongdoings, to assist through the Allied Forces protection, to the revival of Jewish nationalism in the land from which the people of Israel were exiled so many hundreds of years ago." It turns out that during those days it was more difficult to extract such strong statements from the British Cabinet.

The Balfour Declaration's version has undergone several drafts during the 1917 spring and fall. The original version of the declaration, approved by the British Foreign Ministry and by the Prime Minister Lloyd George on September 19th 1917 explicitly stated that Britain has accepted the principle according to which the Land of Israel should be rebuilt as the national home for the Jewish People.

The meaning of the term "rebuild" means that the Jews have historical rights over this land, which was their past homeland, and it should be restored to them. Just like the opening words in the Israeli Declaration of Independence - the Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people.

The Zionist leadership headed by Chaim Weizmann and Nahum Sokolow, struggled to achieve the phrasing that will explicitly state the affinity of the Jewish people to its land. This original version was approved by the American president Woodrow Wilson who received the text in advanced.

The declaration was accepted with much enthusiasm in the British press in those days; an enthusiasm, which one can assume the Netanyahu government would only dream of.

The Manchester Guardian wrote that after two thousand years of Israeli exile Zionism has become an inseparable part in all plans for a new world after the war. The Morning Post wrote that the dream of resurrection, of returning to their homeland; a dream that the nation spread worldwide for two thousand years has never stopped dreaming. The Observer wrote that the ambition for liberty and healing in lasting peace shall now become the aspiration of many.

The Palestinians are less enthusiastic. On July 2016 the president of the Palestinian National Authority called the Arab League members to file a lawsuit against Britain for the Balfour Declaration. According to him, it led to the Palestinian catastrophe called the “Nakba” (the disaster) – which is the Israeli War of Independence or the War of Liberation, according to the Zionist Israel.

Mahmud Abbas said that the Palestinians are working to open the case of international crimes committed against our people, starting from the British Mandate through the massacres of 1948 and those which followed them and on the 100 year anniversary to this historic massacre, and due to the continuation of the tragedy, we beseech the Arab League General Secretariat to assist us in filing a lawsuit against the British Government for publishing the Balfour Declaration that led to the Nakba of the Palestinian people.

The lawsuits submitted by the Palestinians to Britain include bearing the responsibility for the declaration that brought upon the Palestinian people the tragedy from which it suffers to this

day; apologizing for the Palestinian people; acknowledging the existence of a Palestinian state immediately; revoking the Balfour Declaration and replacing it with another resolution that will do justice with the Palestinians; paying restitution to the Palestinian people, while creating an affinity between these restitution and the restitutions paid by Germany to the Jews following the Holocaust.

If you would ask the leader of the British Labour Party Jeremy Corbyn, he would not have objected a deal that would enable an acknowledgment of some of the claims made by the Palestinians from his country. This is the same Corbyn who following a visit to London and Gaza presented the leaders of both organizations – Hamas and Hezbollah as “friends who are working for peace, understanding and dialogue.”

Hence, the Fatah movement published a Statement of Opinion in which it defined the Balfour Declaration as an historic crime committed by the British imperialist power, which has made Britain and all its governments since the publishing of the Balfour Declaration, responsible for establishing a homeland for the Jews on the expense Palestinians land, that they claim, who have grown from the land, from homeland Palestine, since the dawn of history.

It is not merely a symbolic struggle. It is a living breathing struggle that seems not to interest most Israelis who believe that Israel is militarily strong enough to sustain itself in the Middle East. However, it is a struggle for the acceptance of Israel – of the Jews – in the Middle East, within limited borders (called “The two state solution”) or within expanded borders (“one state solution”, or any other solution that will drive Israel into an apartheid regime, conceived by right-wing Post-Zionist entities, or a civilian non-Jewish state as a an Anti-Zionist solution by the Radical left).

There is no agreement regarding this right. Particularly there is no agreement as to the definition of the right to a Jewish national home within these or other borders – meaning, acknowledging Jews as a nation, as a people who have the right for self-determination, and

therefore the right to some place, a piece of land between Jordan and the Sea. The same right Balfour granted in that very declaration and the same right that has been anchored in the International Law.

The prime-ministers of Israel – both from the left (Barak) and from the right (Netanyahu) have agreed that the Palestinian's resistance to acknowledging this right (i.e. these of other borders, even limited ones) is the basis for the conflict between the Jews and Palestinians cannot reach a point of an "ending". Both major parties representing the Israeli mainstream suppose that such acknowledgment from the Palestinians in the Jewish right is as significant as the Israeli security within these or other borders. The Palestinians are aware of this and are not willing to grant (in this stage) this acknowledgment in such a definitive manner; and therefore are unwilling to acknowledge the Balfour Declaration as granting that right.

Palestinian entities such as Hamas, as well as others, argue that no Palestinian leadership has any right to acknowledge the Jewish right to any part of Israel (small as it may be) just like Post-Zionist entities in the Israeli Right-wing do not acknowledge any Palestinian right on what they refer to as "the land of Israel which was promised to the Jewish people" and determine that occupation is impossible "in your own homeland", in their words.

This alliance in resistance from both sides has been managing the conflict for many years, and generating its stagnation. Jewish Montagu (who objected to the Balfour Declaration) was naïve: he thought that once Balfour will make his declaration – the Arabs will leave. They haven't left and are not willing to leave. Even those who are willing to acknowledge the state of Israel (and have acknowledge it as part of the Oslo Accords) are not willing to acknowledge the Jews' right to any part of the country, but are only willing to acknowledge the fact of the establishment of the Jewish-Zionist sate. For some of the Jews in Israel, this resistance is the basis for continuing the conflict and for the collapse of the leftist concept (adopted by some of the right-wing members, for example in Ariel Sharon's disengagement

from Gaza) – land for peace. These Israelis think that peace means that the end of the conflict will bring an end to all claims, and not simply armistice for a few years. Hence, the narratological element of the conflict should not be underestimated. In a conflict between narratives, between ethnic, social and national groups, the narrative is not just a tool for justification and accusation, but becomes an ideological tool. During an ongoing battle, the collective narrative stands in the heart of the narrative. Memory does not require an historic truth, it generates a truth that serves the group as a tool to sustain its existence. Narratives are motivational tools, which are important in the creation of legitimacy; in the Israeli-Palestinian case, it mainly provides legitimacy to the ongoing violent scuffle. Most collective memories, said Robert Rotberg, function when they are oriented, biased, selective, and distorted. Daniel Bar-Tal and Gabi Salomon stated that collective narratives have become the social construct which contains an internal connection to historic circumstances and current events.

Therefore, when the Palestinian Revival Museum will be established (and it will be established) the British will gain an honorary place amongst the nations of the world who harmed them. A place they already hold in the Palestinian Authority's official textbooks, which view the Balfour Declaration as a fatal blow not just to historical justice, but also to the Palestinian historical truth, according to which, the Zionists are invaders, western-sponsored invaders.

Palestinian's genealogy places at the same screen those who enabled what they call "the crime" – the British and their western allied, Jewish-loving European Christians who have always supported the return to Zion (be it the English priest Dr. Guz, who in 1621 published a book supporting the Jewish return to Zion, in a movement established in Britain under the name "British Israel", which believed that the British were the decedents of the ten tribes, or the Times which published on 1840 an memorandum submitted to the European powers and

to the President of the United States, which said that “under the holy reign of Christianity the scattered Jewish people will regain his kingdom”).

Those who committed “the crime” – Zionist leaders who pressured (cunningly, according to them) the British heads of administration to provide the document, and finally, the new colonialists – the intruders: the Zionist–Jews who according to them are not born out of this land, but rather those who stole it and still do so today (in various forms).

The Palestinians narrative constructs itself as a counter-narrative, who’s choice of words, its lexical terminology, its historiographic construction and its conceptual world – all these seek to create a correlation between the “Zionism” as a term to the terms of “crimes”, “injustice”. This correlation has been, for some years gaining legitimacy amongst various entities in the west. They view the slandering of Zionism not just as a tactical course of action as part of the path towards a political solution, but as a strategic movement that will not allow Israel to live in peace with itself (meaning, it will lead to internal cracks in the internal narrative of the Israeli society); to live in peace in the world and with the world.

The Palestinians, who think that Zionism has taken advantage of their political and social incompetence – while they were weak and divided – are now seeking to make an amendment and coordinate a project which upon the 100 year anniversary will focus its emphasis on British campuses and on entities identified with the BDS movement, and will dismantle step by step the mechanisms of power and legitimacy of the Balfour Declaration.

The Palestinian Anti-Zionist project – which gains support from the European radical Left, is based on the post-colonialist perspective of Franz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, but mostly on Eduard Said’s and Homi Bhabha’s orientalist analysis.

Parenthetically, I would say that there Israeli-Jewish intellectuals who support these positions and even act to fulfil this action of de-legitimization. In this respect, the European – meaning the European Jew – is the wild representative of the west. According to Said, orientalism is

an insurance certificate for the European lifestyle, whose role is dominating the orient, reorganizing it and impose authority and sovereignty over it. Based on Michel Foucault's claims that without examining the orientalism within a discourse, it is impossible to understand the immense systematic supervision, through which the European culture managed to manage – and even create – literacy on a political, sociological, military, ideological, scientific and imaginary in the post enlightenment period.

Hence, according to the Palestinians narrative, the Balfour declaration is a clear Orientalist expression aimed at exerting the cultural power of western supremacy on the Levantine inferiority. Zionism, according to this view, is only the devils messenger, the executioner, and the one who planned the crime should also be brought to justice – meaning Lord Balfour and his heirs in the British Government.

And what is the attitude towards the Balfour Declaration in the Israeli educational system?

The Israeli educational system has a dual attitude towards the Balfour declaration.

On the one hand, the Israeli educational system presents the declaration as one of the most important documents in the history of Zionism. The declaration becomes the axis upon which rests the entire international legitimacy for the work of political Zionism, as the victory of Zionist diplomacy (first and foremost that of Dr. Chaim Weizmann who is presented as Herzl's successor, but of other figures such as Nahum Sokolow, Dr. Shmaryahu Levin, and the Jewish-American Judge Louis Brandeis).

The document is presented as the victory of “good British” over the “bad British” – those who accepted the position that there should be a full political acceptance of the Jewish people into the family of nations, opposite those who rejected this position. The instruction of history makes use of the “bad British” in order to present them as pertaining to the anti-Semite, Arab-lovers – meaning part of the long chain of generation of anti-Semites who have been

harassing the Jewish People. Be it in this form or another, the overt and covert message is – there are more of these in the world, and they are quite a few.

In an educational system whose purpose is not only to consolidate a people and a state but also instill the justification to the new generation of Israeli soldiers – this position is important and critical, just as the journey of high-school students to the Nazi concentration camps in Poland – a sense of “do not forget and know what we are fighting for and for what you are going to fight.”

On the other hand, the declaration is treated all along with some sort of reservation that seeks not to place it above the natural and historical (not to say the divine) right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel. It is placed in textbooks and in history lessons, in a respectable historical context though; however over the years it has been slightly pushed aside, among other things, in order not to grant it a preferential status – just as it is placed only in one line in the fourth paragraph in the Declaration of Independence read by David Ben-Gurion, under the words “This right was acknowledged in the Balfour Declaration”. With regards to that right, four whole paragraphs have been written on the “right of the Jewish people to a national revival in its land”.

The historiographic sequence presented to the Israeli student seeks to emphasize particularly the struggle of Jews in Palestine against the British – the “bad British”, those who published this White Paper or another, who supported the Arabs for tactical or strategic reasons – and of course, those who prevented the arrival of Holocaust survivors to the shores of the land.

This section is therefore awarded quite extensive space, and this is of course as part of the construction of the Zionist narrative. The collective memory at the service of the hegemonic meta-narrative, includes all the “legitimate knowledge”, which according to Michael Apple, a citizen needs to know and makes him forget all he does not need to know. And thus dialectic

process is created between the need to remember certain events, and in my humble opinion, to intentionally rank other events as part of the construction of the nation's biography.

The narrative is the masterplan in which the collective memory is the operative plan of action. Therefore, Balfour declaration has gained over the years a very particular place, in which there is a tendency to place it in a very specific place in the Israeli educational system, yet not to give it too much emphasis. Over-emphasis will also give an exaggerated place to the international community, its documents and its agreements.

In Israel who is constantly threatened by unsympathetic decisions and wishes to construct amongst its citizens a very specific attitude – of suspiciousness, and lack of trust towards the international community, as part of the creation of the Zionist ghetto – this legitimacy is not part of the plan, which I would like to refer to here as “a pedagogy of fear”. Fear that is sowing in the students in order to construct their victimization nowadays (when they are surrounded by an Arab-Iranian–Islamic world) like back then (when their mothers and fathers were surrounded by other kinds of anti-Semites).

Therefore the attitude towards the British is ambivalent. Given that the instruction of history in Israel is situated parallel to civics – and parallel to the political media discourse – official-educational Israel moves between two axes. On the one hand, it needs the international organizations (and emphasizes their legitimacy when they stand on the right hand of the Zionist position – in the Balfour Declaration, in the UN resolution on the establishment of a Jewish state) and on the other hand, official-educational Israel seeks to restrict the need for this legitimacy, since according to the Zionist narrative, mainly its Jewish sections (who are controlled by what is called in Israel the “Religious Zionism”, meaning the Right-Wing settlers) and particularly Israeli Jews have no need for legitimacy for the land that has been promised by God and not by international organizations in which Israel's enemies are

members, who are considered to be gentiles whose legitimacy for a divine promise should not be sought at all.

This struggle between an international democratic element called “International Law”, which was a structured element in Herzl’s political Zionism, meaning, the need to belong to the family of nations, to get its approval, to collaborate with it; and the separatist entities that can be found in very specific sections of the current Judaism (as well as in that of the past) and in very specific sections of the current Israeliness (much more identified with radical right-wing entities, who detest any relationship with the nations of the world). It is a struggle – if you please – between the separatism of Israel (moving towards a kind of apartheid state) to Israel that wishes to see itself as part of the world, definitely the western world, and places importance to internationalism and to international affiliation.

This struggle, ever so present in the current, daily, Israeli-political reality exists also in its colliding elements in the instruction of history and civics in Israel, and is manifested in Eli Barnavi and Eyal Nave’s high-school history textbook “Modern Times”, in which it says, among other things: “This is quite a strange document that meets no diplomatic tradition and no international logic: a great power guarantees a national movement it will recognize its rights and promotes its affairs in a region that does not belong to said power. Moreover, that national movement was born far away from that region.”

It has been almost a hundred years since the Balfour Declaration was granted. A hundred years from the meetings of Dr. Chaim Weizmann and Balfour, in which he convinces him to acknowledge the great possibilities of the Jewish national revival”. A hundred years from Sokolow’s meetings with the British Foreign Minister, in which he discussed the appropriate time for a Jewish country that could become a new source of enlightenment and knowledge, literature and art. A hundred years since Sir Mark Sykes has exited the British government’s conference room and shook Weizmann’s hand, his eyes glowing with joy and mumbling:

“congratulations, it is a boy” and a hundred years since at midnight Weizmann came to Ahad Ha’am’s house with a piece of paper and said “here”.

Since that day that summed up major Zionist efforts the declaration stands in the midst of a wide-range of discussion, insistence, of struggle and mainly of proving – proving a right and opposite it proving an injustice, in a world where any group narrates its own story – its narrative – as a way of constructing its justification and others wrongdoings towards it, the Balfour Declaration will continue to be a controversial document for two national movements, each one views it as the exact opposite.

