



Bulletin

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Learning from the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

An Interview with Dr Mandy Turner

Dr Mandy Turner has agreed to discuss the lessons from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process for conflict resolution and the role of international actors with the Director of the Centre FrancoPaix, Professor Bruno Charbonneau.

Mandy Turner is the Director of the Kenyon Institute (Council for British Research in the Levant) in East Jerusalem, which she joined in 2012 after a lecturing post in conflict resolution in the Peace Studies Department at Bradford University (UK). Her research focuses on the politics of international intervention and the political economy of peacebuilding with a country focus on the occupied Palestinian territory, but also comparatively.

Her publications include: *The Politics of International Intervention: The Tyranny of Peace* (co-edited with F.P. Kühn; 2016); *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy: De-development and Beyond* (co-edited with O. Shweiki, 2014); and *Whose Peace? Critical Perspectives on the Political Economy of Peacebuilding* (with M. Pugh and N. Cooper, 2008). Her new edited book *From the River to the Sea: Palestine and Israel in the Shadow of 'Peace'* was published by Rowman and Littlefield/Lexington Books in April 2019.¹



Housing construction in Beitar Illit, which is one of Israel's fastest-growing settlements in the occupied West Bank. The international community regards Israeli settlements in the OPT to be illegal under international law.

Interview by Bruno Charbonneau

Bruno Charbonneau (BC):

You have researched the Israel-Palestine conflict for 16 years, and been a witness to it since 2012. What can we learn from the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process (IPPP)?

Mandy Turner (MT):

Whether it was planned or not, the 1993 peace deal between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) – the ‘Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements’ (also known as the Oslo Accords) – allowed Israel to accelerate rather than end its policies of: building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), expropriating Palestinian land and other natural resources, disregarding Palestinians’ right to (and demands for) self-determination, and using extreme amounts of military violence. Israel's biggest military operations in the OPT took place during this purported period of ‘peace’.

What is interesting about the Israeli-Palestinian case is that it is an exemplar of the things that fascinate me empirically and theoretically, and require us to consider broader debates on how to conceptualise the international system, the nature of power, and how to understand international intervention.

BC: We always hear about the IPPP, and yet it seems that there is never any resolution. Is that a correct assessment?

If so, how did we get to this point? If there is no sense or process toward resolution, what is, then, the IPPP?

MT: It is now a standard cliché, frequently uttered by critics, that the IPPP has been all process and no peace. However, this does not capture what I, and many others, regard to have been a travesty of modern ‘peacemaking’.

Initially the Declaration of Principles was hailed as a success story, because it seemed to signal a historic compromise, in that it enshrined the principle of partition and so an end to disagreements over who had the exclusive right to the land of Mandate Palestine. The PLO was to give up its dream of one democratic secular state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea and settle for the lands occupied in 1967. Israel was to give up its dream of a Greater Israel (*Eretz Israel*) by ending its expansion into the OPT (including East Jerusalem). The fact that some members of the PLO still hope for one secular state over the whole of Mandate Palestine is irrelevant because they do not have the power to make it happen, and the PLO’s official policy since 1988 is for a two-state solution. But Israel is clearly still in control of the OPT and has accelerated its policies of settlement expansion and land grabbing, thus showing it is still pursuing its goal of *Eretz Israel*, and continues to assert its sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem in contravention of international law.

Of course it is true that Israel relinquished parts of the OPT by withdrawing its military from around 20 per cent of the West Bank during the 1990s and unilaterally disengaging from Gaza in 2005. But these areas in the West Bank, which are heavily populated with Palestinians, are surrounded by land controlled by Israel – these are not contiguous areas. And the Gaza disengagement was undertaken so that Israel could concentrate on securing its control over the more historic and strategic West Bank – we know this because Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon stated it at the time.² Since this disengagement process, Israel has imposed a crippling blockade on Gaza that has turned it into an “unliveable habitat”, according to the UN.³

There will be no resolution while Israel continues to gobble up the land designated for a Palestinian state. Israel’s settlement strategy began immediately after the occupation in 1967, and has been pursued since by *every* Israeli government (irrespective of political affiliation). It is a war crime for an occupier to settle its own civilian population in an occupied area – one that is also purportedly for the self-determination of Palestinians through sovereign statehood. And yet the numbers of Jewish-Israelis in the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) nearly doubled between 1993 (when Oslo was signed) and 2000 (when the Second Intifada broke out), and has nearly doubled again – it is now around 750,000. The Declaration of Principles stated that neither party undertake actions that could impact on final status issues. Settlement violates both the principle and spirit of the peace accords.

There is much to say about the strategy of the Palestinian leadership, and criticisms abound. However, *The Palestine Papers* published by the news channel Al-Jazeera reveals a lot about their weakness, and the fact that no one stood by them to uphold international law despite a major compromise on their part to accept a truncated Palestinian state on only 22 per cent of the land of Mandate Palestine.

There is little doubt that settlement expansion is *the* main obstacle to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state and thus the two-state solution, despite claims to the contrary from Israel and its supporters. International law regards the settlements to be illegal and a war crime under the Fourth Geneva Convention, as confirmed by the UN Security Council as recently as December 2016. Despite the fact that President Barack Obama had vetoed more UN Security Council resolutions than any preceding US presidents, his relationship with Israeli prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu was tense. Indeed, in a presidential version of a blooper, Obama was caught admitting this to former French president Nicolas Sarkozy at the November 2011 G20 summit because a microphone inadvertently broadcast to journalists a private conversation between the two. That the US did not veto UN SC Resolution 2334 in 2016 was the Obama administration’s parting shot to show its frustration at Israel’s settlement policy. And, of course, we got a taste of things to come as President-elect Donald Trump condemned the US’s abstention stating there would be no such criticism of Israel under his leadership.

The IPPP is now, and perhaps always was, an optical illusion that paved the way for the imposition of a victor’s peace, and implicated the Palestinian leadership in the dispossession of its people.

BC: How would you describe the current state of the IPPP? Can we talk of a ‘Trump disruption’?

« While the US has always backed Israel, largely unconditionally, the support extended by Trump has broken with some previously important aspects of US policy – or perhaps just pushed them to their logical extremes. »

MT: The peace process is at the worst state it has ever been: there have been no peace talks since the 2013-2014 US Secretary of State John Kerry Initiative. Even during the Second Intifada (2000-2004), and Operation Defensive Shield (2002)

when Israel attacked and destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and institutions in the West Bank, there were still talks: the 2001 Taba Summit, the 2002 Road Map for Peace, and the 2003 Geneva Initiative. There has been much talk of a Trump ‘peace plan’ – what he refers to as ‘the deal of the century’, making it sound like he is selling a used car, not trying to solve *the* most intractable conflict in the world. Nothing, however, has materialised yet, although we can make an educated guess at what the ‘deal of the century’ is likely to mean from Trump’s actions so far: Israel will annex its major settlements in the West Bank and retain control over the Jordan Valley, Jerusalem will remain undivided under Israeli sovereignty, the PLO/Palestinian Authority (PA) will retain (non-sovereign) control over Palestinian high density population areas, the refugees will continue to be ignored, and Gaza will be dealt with separately.

While the US has always backed Israel, largely unconditionally, the support extended by Trump has broken with some previously important aspects of US policy – or perhaps just pushed them to their logical extremes. The first thing to note is the extremely partisan team working on and in Israel-Palestine, particularly in that they support Israeli settlement expansion. Before taking up his role as US Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman was the chair of ‘American Friends of Beit El’ (which also received a large donation from Trump

in 2003), a US NGO that financially supports a Jewish settlement located in the West Bank near Ramallah. In 2016, Friedman called the two-state solution “a scam” and has referred to Jews who support it as “kapos” – a highly derogatory term that signifies collaboration with the enemy, but which originated for Jews who were enlisted by the SS during the Holocaust to serve as administrators or functionaries in the concentration camps. Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt also do not consider Israeli settlements in the OPT to be an obstacle to peace; John Bolton and Mike Pompeo are also extremely partisan towards Israel.

The second thing to note about the Trump ‘break’ lies in the attempt to remove certain issues from the negotiating table. In 2018, Trump implemented the 1995 US Embassy Act that recognises Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and moved the US Embassy there from Tel Aviv. This is a radical break with 70 years of official US policy towards Jerusalem although the foundations had already been laid for this decision back in 1995. Also in 2018, Trump ended over 60 years of US financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was significant because the US was UNRWA’s single largest bilateral donor. The closure, in March 2019, of the US Consul General in Jerusalem and its ‘merger’ into the new US Embassy, which ended the practice of different diplomatic missions to Israel and the Palestinians, was therefore probably inevitable.

The third part of the Trump ‘break’ is more like a reversal back to US policies before Oslo – that is, being hostile towards the PLO. In September 2018, the US forcibly closed the PLO offices in Washington DC and rescinded the residency visas of the PLO’s representative, Husam Zomlot, and his family. This was closely followed, in January 2019, by the ending of all funding to the development agency USAID West Bank and Gaza as well as to the Palestinian Authority (apart from on security coordination). By these actions, it is clear that Trump believes he can force the current Palestinian leadership into accepting the truncated Bantustan state that Israel wishes to impose.

Some commentators welcome the fact that the US is no longer pretending to be an ‘honest broker’. But this also signals a dangerous situation because if there is literally no one to reel Israel in then who will stop the military violence, repression and settlement building? I have lived in East Jerusalem since 2012 and the changes are palpable since Trump became president: settlements are expanding at an

astonishing rate, the amount of arrests is increasing, and Israel is further emboldened to shoot protesting Palestinian civilians on its ‘frontier’ with Gaza.

The fourth thing to note is that the Trump administration is full of neoconservatives whose first desire was to rip up Obama’s Iran nuclear deal. This is important because it feeds into the political landscape and balance in the Middle East, in that Saudi Arabia is more interested in containing Iran, and has through this shared interest become a stronger ally of Israel. Unfortunately this means that the Palestinians have been sacrificed at this altar, with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman even purportedly demanding that the Palestinian leadership should accept whatever peace deal Trump offers them.⁴

The Palestinians have tried every strategy in the book to end the occupation – going to the UN, non-violent resistance, plane-hijacking, guerrilla warfare, suicide attacks, even building institutions in the hope they can somehow prove they deserve the right to self-determination.

Why did the peace process turn out this way?

The short answer is that it has suited Israel, the PLO has been unable or unwilling to muster a viable resistance to it, and the key third party actors appear unwilling to use pressure against Israel to uphold international law.

BC: What are the underlying causes of the conflict? What is it, exactly, that the IPPP is supposed to solve?

MT: Some narratives define the Israel-Palestine conflict as one predominantly over religion – and, of course, this has come to play a role. However, fundamentally the conflict is one over land and resources; Israel controls access to both of these, and has gained ownership over more and more through an aggressive colonisation strategy of settling its own people in the OPT, land-grabbing, and using a variety of tactics to push Palestinians off their land and into more confined urban spaces, or even to emigrate.

The competing narratives of suffering and quest for self-determination can often displace and replace a structural analysis; however, we need to focus on the latter over the former. The Israel-Palestine conflict is fundamentally a struggle over land which pits a powerful state against a stateless people, and which has created a vicious cycle of insurgency and counterinsurgency.

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The Oslo Accords did not change this – on the contrary, they provided a veneer of international legitimacy and respectability for these processes to continue under the guise of a peace process and with huge amounts of international aid to underpin it.

We are now seeing a breakdown in this aid-as-counterinsurgency strategy, at least from the US who is trying to accelerate the imposition of a victor's peace, although the European Union and Arab donors appear to be filling the gap for now. However, the current circumstances could yield new political strategies, for instance provoking a new PLO/PA strategy or a new movement to emerge.

BC: In this context, what are the roles and contributions of donor-countries in peacebuilding in the OPT?

MT: The stated principle for the massive amounts of aid from western bilateral and multilateral donors since the signing of the Accords has been to support the peace process in preparation for final status negotiations. For Arab donors, the stated principle was solidarity with the Palestinian people. But underlying both sets of aid actors is the fundamental goal of ensuring stability until a resolution to the conflict has been found. I call this 'peacebuilding as counterinsurgency' because the donor peacebuilding policies have created another layer of pacification techniques that have meshed with Israeli's more 'kinetic' strategies, and achieved things that Israel had tried but failed to do in the past, particularly around 'self-governance'.⁵ Donors

have been absolutely crucial in sustaining the idea of the 'peace process' and the two-state solution because the Palestinian Authority would have long ago collapsed without aid and support. The Trump administration has broken with this 25-year consensus because they are guided by a neocon foreign policy of defeating and isolating Iran in the region, and by a partisan evangelical Christian Zionist agenda that supports Israel.

BC: What does the IPPP tell us about international peacebuilding and conflict resolution? What lessons can we learn?

MT: There are three main general lessons that can be gleaned from the IPPP. The first is that an occupation and process of colonisation cannot be resolved via bilateral peace talks but requires the application of international law and a process of decolonization. The second lesson is that power discrepancies between the conflict parties *must* be

balanced by a third party willing to use pressure to stop the powerful party dictating the process – otherwise a victor's peace is the likely outcome. This is why – 26 years after the first peace agreement was signed – the Palestinians are no nearer to self-determination and sovereign statehood, in fact possibly further away than ever. The third lesson is that donor peacebuilding aid is a stabilisation strategy and this means that in contexts where there is no attempt to control the stronger party this aid will be used to control the weak, i.e., 'peacebuilding as counterinsurgency'. Aid is not, and cannot be, a substitute for political negotiations. However, aid donors could use trade and diplomatic strategies to control the process and balance power discrepancies – it is a *choice* that they do not do so in the case of Israel, for foreign policy reasons that are too complex to go into in any detail here.

BC: Is the situation in Israel and the OPT singular or generalizable to other contexts? In other words, how is research on the IPPP relevant to other situations, other peace processes, and other efforts at conflict resolution?

MT: While all situations are singular and have their own specific dynamics, there are certainly generalizable aspects of the case of Israel and the OPT. The most important first step is to understand the causes of the conflict. There is a re-emergence of literature proposing that we understand the experience of Israel-Palestine through a settler colonial lens. This was the original PLO understanding of what was

happening to its people but was dropped as an official policy during the peace talks. But now academics and activists (both Palestinian and otherwise) have re-engaged with this concept, particularly since the seminal comparative and theoretical work of Australian anthropologist Patrick Wolfe in 2006. Wolfe argued that settler colonialism is a structure not an event, and identified Israel as an important case study.⁶ Settler colonialism seeks to replace the original population of the colonized territory with a new society of settlers. Once Israel and the OPT is seen through this lens then a lot of Israel's strategies and actions make sense. Whether Jewish-Israelis regard themselves to be returning after 2,000 years or not, Zionism, as articulated by its founders and main proponents, presented itself as a settler colonial project, and Israel was built on the foundations of destroyed or expropriated Palestinian homes and businesses. And this process was extended to the OPT after 1967. It is absolutely crucial that this analysis is adopted because a situation of settler colonialism requires a different kind of

« *Settler colonialism seeks to replace the original population of the colonized territory with a new society of settlers. Once Israel and the OPT is seen through this lens then a lot of Israel's strategies and actions make sense.* »

conflict resolution – it requires a strategy of decolonization, not ‘confidence-building’ measures and mediation strategies, which are not only inappropriate but also ineffective. Fundamentally, the Israel-Palestine peace process failed because it was based on a misinterpretation/misunderstanding of the causes of conflict. This is generalizable in that any peace process not based on sound analysis is going to fail.

BC: Since the election of Donald Trump, many scholars, journalists, politicians, and others argue over the faith and future of the international order. Some are warning us about the dangers of wide-ranging transformations, which could lead to more armed conflicts. I have argued that we live in a time of counterinsurgency politics. How does your research on Israel and Palestine relate to such issues and questions, or to your wider research on the politics of international intervention?

MT: Interestingly our research seems to have converged and landed on the same conclusion – that international intervention (and I include peacebuilding and peacekeeping in this) is a form of counterinsurgency politics designed to control and stabilise, while advancing international, regional and domestic elite interests. The Israel-Palestine situation relates to this in two key ways.

First of all, Israel is considered to be the world’s ‘war laboratory’: it currently has *the* most sophisticated counterinsurgency strategies because it emerged and developed in a hostile environment as a settler colonial state. Israel then was able to capitalise on its military, technical and bureaucratic sophistication in the post 9/11 world to show other states how to spy on, control, and if necessary silence restive populations. It trained US troops before the US launched its war against Afghanistan, it trained US assassination squads in Iraq, and (repackaged as ‘homeland security’) it has advised and trained the police forces of many US and Latin American inner cities in a process that has blurred the distinction between the police and the military. Counterinsurgency thereafter becomes a domestic strategy, too, rather than just an international one thus blurring the domestic/international boundaries – something that you have also argued.

Second, the underlying goal of all the aid pouring into the OPT has been to ensure stabilisation. Counterinsurgency politics include the use of kinetic *and* more pacific techniques. While Israel has perfected sophisticated kinetic techniques, aid has been used as a pacific technique to ensure acquiescence from an occupied and colonized people by buying them off and controlling their political elites. And it is this deadly combination of kinetic and governance mechanisms that makes it clear that an oppressed people cannot often rely on political elites – neither domestic or international

– to develop or implement strategies to end oppression and violence: this needs to come from a mass civil society movement that forces a change in policy and strategy.

BC: Any hope left?

MT: In the short term, no. But in the medium to long term, yes. I like to keep in mind Gramsci’s idiom: “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”. In the absence of the two-state solution as represented by the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state existing side-by-side with Israel, there are only two avenues left. The first is the full implementation of the Allon Plan – usually referred to as the ‘Jordan option’ – where the current PA-governed areas in the West Bank federate with Jordan, and Israel annexes its settlement blocs and strategic areas; Gaza is dealt with separately; East Jerusalem remains part of Israel; and the refugees ignored. The second avenue is to decolonize the space from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea to create one state that represents all religions and nationalities; this would require a separation of religion and state, the end of privileges for one group of people over the others, massive investment in Palestinian areas long neglected under the current system, and a total rethink of how political representation and participation could operate.

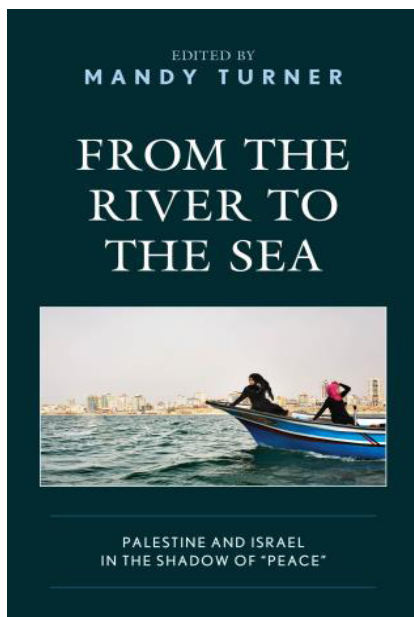
The first avenue would swing the pendulum back to Israel’s original plan allowing it to expand *Eretz* Israel; the second avenue would swing the pendulum back to the PLO’s original plan of one democratic state in the whole of historic Palestine. However, in a situation where there is no clear journey towards one of these options, the colonial peace that was initiated and legitimised by the Oslo Accords and implemented through the Oslo framework will continue.

In my new edited book, just published, *From the River to the Sea: Palestine and Israel in the Shadow of ‘Peace’*, Israeli academic Yonatan Mendel argues: “Israelis have been told they cannot have security and prosperity without peace, but yet they feel they do; they have been told that the world will exact a price from them for the occupation, yet the world has not; and they have been told that whatever stability they enjoy cannot last for long, but the occupation has lasted for nearly half a century and is still going strong” (p.169).

Palestinians are trapped in a situation that is neither peace nor conflict, but something in-between – and it is this ‘something in-between’ that necessitates an analysis that is bold and truthful. This is not an easy thing to do because one of the byproducts of this conflict, and the discourses surrounding it, has been the creation of a toxic environment in which those who support the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination are accused of anti-Semitism by

Israel and its supporters in an attempt to scare and silence. We are seeing a swathe of legislation across the West that is equating criticisms of Israel with anti-Semitism and outlawing the popular and non-violent Palestinian movement for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel until it ends the occupation, ends discrimination against Palestinian citizens of Israel, and allows Palestinian refugees to return. The fact that a popular civil society movement is being banned, and criticism is being outlawed of a state which is violently suppressing a people struggling for self-determination is yet another stain on the conscience of the world. It is clear that western states consider their connections with Israel to be more important than standing up for international law and the right to self-determination, much like many of them continued to have connections with apartheid South Africa until a strong civil society movement forced a change in policy. I think this is going to be the same for Palestinians – and therein lies my (cautious) optimism.

Mandy Turner is the Director of the Kenyon Institute (Council for British Research in the Levant) in East Jerusalem.



¹ The author offers to our readership a 30% discount coupon on her new edited book *From the River to the Sea: Palestine and Israel in the Shadow of 'Peace'* (Lexington Books). You need to add the code "LEX30AUTH19" when ordering, until March 31, 2020. For more information: <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781498582889/From-the-River-to-the-Sea-Palestine-and-Israel-in-the-Shadow-of-%22Peace%22>

² Jerusalem Post, August 16 2015, "Former chief of staff: Ariel Sharon designed Gaza disengagement to save West Bank settlements": <https://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Former-chief-of-staff-Ariel-Sharon-designed-Gaza-disengagement-to-save-West-Bank-settlements-412213>

³ UN News, July 11 2017, "Living conditions in Gaza 'more and more wretched' over past decade, UN finds": <https://news.un.org/en/story/2017/07/561302-living-conditions-gaza-more-and-more-wretched-over-past-decade-un-finds>

⁴ Al Jazeera, April 30 2018, "MBS: Palestinians should accept Trump proposals or shut up": <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/mbs-palestinians-accept-trump-proposals-shut-180430065228281.html>

⁵ Turner, M. (2015). "Peacebuilding as counterinsurgency in the occupied Palestinian territory". *Review of International Studies*, 41(1): <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/review-of-international-studies/article/peacebuilding-as-counterinsurgency-in-the-occupied-palestinian-territory/AE37296FC1C29602BC02ED626A72665C>

⁶ Wolfe, P. (2006). "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native", *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8:4, 387-409: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14623520601056240>



News and announcements

- After the tragic massacre of Ogossagou in central Mali, security, inter-community violence and the structural difficulties of the Malian state will be at the heart of an interview with Moussa Mara, former Prime Minister of Mali. This event will take place in Montreal on Wednesday, May 1, at 5:30 pm, and will be hosted by the Director of the Centre FrancoPaix, Bruno Charbonneau. Admission is free, more information [here](#).
- Bruno Charbonneau will be discussant at the conference "[Norms and Practices in UN Peacekeeping: Evolution and Contestation](#)" at Université de Montréal on May 8. This conference will feature presentations from Georgina Holmes (University of Reading), Marion Laurence (University of Toronto), Lucile Maertens (Université de Lausanne), and Emily Paddon Rhoads (Swarthmore College). This event is co-organized by the *Centre d'études et de recherches internationales* (CÉRIUM) and the Centre FrancoPaix.
- Raouf Farrah and Adib Bencherif shed light on the links between crime and terrorism in the Sahel-Saharan region on April 23 at a lunchtime conference "[Crime-terror nexus in the Sahel-Saharan region: myths, realities and consequences](#)", co-organized by the Centre FrancoPaix and the Observatory on the Middle East and North Africa.
- Maxime Ricard presented a conference entitled "Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, UN operations in Ivory Coast and Mali" at Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf in Montreal on April 5.
- Niagalé Bagayoko participated in the International Symposium "Violence and exiting violence in Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa", co-organized by the *Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme* and the International University of Rabat (Chair of Cultures, Societies and Religion), in Rabat, Morocco, on April 18-19, 2019. She presented her study: "[Violence, justice and amnesty in the Central African Republic](#)".

The Centre FrancoPaix in Conflict Resolution and Peace missions aims to promote scientific research, academic training and the development of conflict resolution research in the Francophonie.

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