

Levinas' Ontology of the Home: A Panacea for Radical Nationalism

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Abstract: There is an undeniable nexus between radical nationalism and violent conflict or war. Radical nationalism has its roots in Heidegger's concept of autochthony which is an offshoot of Western Philosophy's ontological categories in which the uniqueness of the "Other" is perverted and primacy is given to the "Totality" or the "Same". Levinas' ontology of the "home" is a response to Heidegger's concept of autochthony or rootedness and therefore, a panacea for radical nationalism and the concomitant isolation, discrimination and injustices that breed human conflict.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nationalism *per se* has a positive connotation because it is inspired by the desire to protect a nation's independence and self-determination and the feelings of patriotism that ensue from shared ethnicity, culture and social values. Nonetheless, nationalism becomes radical when it promotes the idea that a person's identity is solely determined by rootedness and when it champions the promotion of the interests and rights of members of a particular group or nation and the exclusion and/or discrimination of those deemed to be aliens. In such a scenario, the latter becomes an enemy to be vanquished by all means and this necessarily leads to conflict. Indeed, major conflicts such as the First and Second World Wars and current conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian war and Russia-Ukraine war are usually fueled by radical nationalism that aims at protectionism. Levinas' ontology of the home is meant to cure this malady. This article links radical nationalism to Heidegger's concept of autochthony and advances the argument that Levinas' ontology of the home which promotes infinite responsibility for the stranger or the "Other", is a panacea for radical nationalism and the human conflict that ensues therefrom.

1.1 Radical Nationalism and the Exclusion and Violence on the "Other" by the "Same".

The term "nationalism" centrally encompasses two phenomena, namely, "the attitude that members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of that nation, and the actions that the members of a nation take in seeking to achieve or sustain some form of political sovereignty."¹ Nevertheless, nationalism can be both positive and negative. It is positive when it is catalyzed by the desire of protecting a nation's sovereignty and the right to self-determination and when the feelings of patriotism arise from shared ethnicity, language, religion, culture and social values. However, it is banal when it promotes either the idea that a nation has the right to dominate other nations through conquest if necessary, or when it leads to authoritarianism over, and exclusion of people of other nations. This is referred to as radical or fanatical nationalism.²

The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the latter brand of nationalism as "identification with one's own nation and support for its interests, especially to the exclusion and detriment of the interests of other nations"³ In other words, this kind of nationalism advocates for the elevation of one's nation or nationality and the exclusion of all others, and puts emphasis on "the promotion of a particular nation's or group's culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations, nationalities or supranational groups."⁴

¹ Miscevic, Nenad, "Nationalism", in *The Internet Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (fall 2023, edition), Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, accessed at <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2023/entries/nationalism/> on 28th November, 2024.

² Cf. Stephen, Tierney, *Constitutional Law and National Pluralism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 20-22.

³ *Internet Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, accessed at <https://www.oxfordlearner'sdictionary.com/nationalism> on 28th November, 2024.

⁴ Internet Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed at <https://merriamwebster.com/dictionary/empathy> on 28th November, 2024.

The ideology of nationalism has its immediate roots or basis in Western philosophy, particularly in Heidegger's philosophy of homecoming, that is, his emphasis on the ontological necessity of the home.⁵ Actually, "Heidegger's project was to put an end to the problem of homelessness by effecting a return to the house of being abandoned by Plato and Aristotle."⁶ Moreover, his attachment to his home environment was foundational to his own thinking and in some sense, his "homebound ethos" can be deduced from his autobiography.⁷ This is evident from the explanation he gave when he was questioned about his choice to live in the "Province" in a 1934 radio interview. In answer to this question, Heidegger asserted that:

The inner relationship of my work to the Black Forest and its people comes from a centuries-long and irreplaceable rootedness in Alemannian-Swabian soil. My whole work is sustained and guided by the world of these mountains and their people. Lately from time to time my work up there is interrupted by long stretches by conferences, lecture trips, committee meetings, and my teaching work down here in Friburg. But as soon as I go back there, even in the first few hours of being at the cabin, the whole world of previous questions forces itself upon me, in the very form in which I left it. I simply am transported into the work's own rhythm and in the fundamental sense I am not at all in command of its hidden law.⁸

This averment attests to the fact that Heidegger viewed himself and his work as the product of his place of birth. The inner relationship of his work with his place of origin and its people and the irreplaceable rootedness in the soil became the focal point of Heidegger's philosophy of history.

The terms Heidegger employs in his writings such as clearing, earth, field, path, native ground, soil on the field, *et cetera*, reflect his emphasis on autochthony (feeling of belonging to a place or region due to one's birth or historical origins). In actual fact, "considered in tandem with his homecoming ethos and his personal attachment to his native soil, Heidegger's 'homely' language is revealed to be the proper idiom of a thinker whose concern with rootedness is simply unmatched by any other thinker of his stature."⁹ Heidegger's infatuation with rootedness led to his infamous "nationalistic claim that we need to stay rooted in the soil of our homeland."¹⁰ As James Ward clearly emphasizes in his work, *Heidegger's Political Thinking*, Heidegger "belongs to the tradition of *volkische* nationalism; a number of texts evoke the *volkische* vision of a homogeneous, rural, and pastoral people, deeply rooted in the soil of a place, suspicious of, if not hostile to industrialism, capitalism, urbanization and globalization."¹¹ It can be argued that Heidegger's sympathy for the Nazi regime's radical nationalism were fundamentally interweaved with his emphasis on significance of place.

Radical nationalism is grounded on the biased view that outsiders are usually adversaries with nefarious or harmful motives. This prejudiced belief leads to "aggression, insofar as people desire domination over others or believe that protecting their own country requires force."¹² In fact, the First and the Second World Wars were precipitated by radical nationalism particularly on the part of the aggressor or aggressors, and the consequent response by the victims in an attempt to defend either their nation's sovereignty or those of their allies. Indeed, there is an undeniable nexus between radical nationalism and global, regional and even interstate conflict.

Today, radical nationalism has contributed to the ongoing conflicts such as the Israeli-Palestinian war that is apparently mutating into a regional conflict, and the Russia-Ukraine war that has indirectly involved other countries in Europe, Asia and the United States of America. These conflicts have the unfortunate potential of plunging the world into a Third World War. Most of these conflicts normally start with hawkish leaders or elites who harbour ultra-nationalist beliefs and desire to conquer other nations. These leaders ultimately instigate mass public nationalism to gain domestic backing for their military adventures as was the case with Adolf Hitler and the instigation of the Second World War, and Vladimir Putin and the Russia-Ukraine war. Conversely, the

⁵ Cf. David, J. Gaunther, "Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and the Politics of Dwelling", A Doctoral Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Political Science: Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agriculture and Mechanical College, Louisiana, 2004, 10.

⁶ Gaunther, "Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Dwelling", 13.

⁷ Cf. Gaunther, "Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Dwelling", 13.

⁸ Heidegger, *Denkerfahrungen (Experiences of Thinking)*, 1910-1976, (Frankfurt: Klostermann Publishers, 1983), 9-11.

⁹ Gaunther, "Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Dwelling", 15.

¹⁰ Vycinas, Vincas, *Earth and Gods: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Martin Heidegger*, (The Hague: Nijhoff Publishers, 1969), 47.

¹¹ James, Ward, *Heidegger's Political Thinking*, (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), xix.

¹² Kathleen, E. Powers, and Jiyoung Ko, "The State of Nationalism: Nationalism and International Conflict", *Studies on National Movements* 13 (2024), 160-183.

nationalistic public could pressure leaders to initiate unwanted conflict, as is the case with Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹³

The rationale behind radical nationalism and the propensity of its adherents to mete violence on the perceived “outsiders or aliens” has always been the preservation of the integrity of the “Totality” or the “Same” (governments or cultural entities), with complete disregard of the consequences on either the aggressor’s or the victim’s populace. In this sense the “Other” (civilians and combatants) are sacrificed for the wellbeing of the “Totality” or the “Same”.

1.2 Levinas’ Concept of the “Home”: An Antidote to Autochthony and the *Terminus a Quo* of Infinite Responsibility

Levinas, although an admirer of Heidegger, was critical of his philosophy of history which put emphasis on autochthony or rootedness in the soil as the indispensable pre-condition for every great philosophical epoch. Levinas’ appraisal of Heidegger comes out clearly in the answer he gave to the question of whether Heidegger’s thought represented a culmination of paganism. In this occasion, Levinas stated that:

For me Heidegger is the greatest philosopher of the century, perhaps one of the very great philosophers of the millennium: but I am very pained by that because I cannot forget what he was in 1933, even if he was only that for a short period...he has a very great sense of everything that is part of the landscape; not the artistic landscape, but the place in which man is enrooted. It is absolutely not the philosophy of the émigré! I would even say that it is not the philosophy of the emigrant. To me being a migrant is not being a nomad. Nothing is more enrooted than the nomad. But he or she who emigrates is fully human: the migration of a man does not destroy, does not demolish the meaning of being.¹⁴

This statement clearly brings to the fore Levinas’ take on Heidegger’s insistence on the ontological significance of place. Actually, in his various writings, Levinas takes a swipe at Heidegger’s ontology of rootedness and accuses “Heidegger’s sanctification of place as being a manifestation of latter day paganism and labels Heidegger’s place-bound ontology as one that gives primacy to ontological supremacy, anti-humanistic animus and pagan religiosity.”¹⁵

In response to Heidegger’s ontology of rootedness, Levinas proposes a divergent view of rootedness or home. In the first place, Levinas makes a distinction between “nature” and “home”. Accordingly, he views “nature or element as anonymous: a mutual fund that does not belong to any particular person and which is unalienable.”¹⁶ Indeed, when a home is built, it becomes a semi-internal space that surrounds the Subject and separates it from nature or the element and this anonymous entity lacks objective reality prior to the building of a home.¹⁷ This is clear from Levinas’ assertion that:

The recollection necessary for nature to be able to be represented and worked over, for it to take first form as a world, is accomplished as the home...Hence, the subject contemplating a world presupposes the event of dwelling (that is, from the immediate enjoyment, already uneasy about the morrow), recollection in the intimacy of the home.¹⁸

This submission makes it clear that contrary to Heidegger’s conviction that rootedness in the soil gives the subject identity, it is indeed the latter that gives meaning and identity to the former.

Levinas argues that the home is also indispensable to the human subject because it prevents disquiet and anxiety from leading the Self to a collapse back to the element. This is because:

Since the external things that nourish us become the basic components to our lives and identities, and shape us as independent entities, the anxiety caused by the fear that this can disappear, makes one build a home which allows the subject to dispel this disquiet and continue enjoying...Thus the home’s primary role is not to provide shelter from the harsh weather but to break the element by providing a utopia or a separation of self from the world.¹⁹

Furthermore, Levinas emphasizes that:

The home does not implant the separated being in a ground to leave it in vegetable communication with the elements. It is set back from the anonymity of the earth, the air, the forest, the road, the sea, the

¹³ Cf. Kathleen, E. Powers, and Jiyoung Ko, “The State of Nationalism: Nationalism and International Conflict”, 160-183.

¹⁴ Emmanuel, Levinas, *Entre Nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (trans.), (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 116-117.

¹⁵ Gaunthier, “Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas and the Politics of Dwelling”, 19.

¹⁶ Edna, Langenthal, “On the Threshold of the Home-According to Emmanuel Levinas”, *Ex-Centric Narratives: Journal of Anglophone Literature and Media* 3 (2014), 89-100.

¹⁷ Cf. Langenthal, “On the Threshold of the Home-According to Emmanuel Levinas”, 89-100.

¹⁸ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152.

¹⁹ Langenthal, “On the Threshold of the Home-According to Emmanuel Levinas”, 89-100.

river...Circulating between visibility and invisibility, one is always bound for the interior of which one's home, one's corner, one's tent, or one's cave is the vestibule. The primordial function of the home does not consist in orienting being by the architecture of the building and in discovering a site, but in breaking plenum of the element, in opening in it the utopia in which the "I" recollects itself in dwelling at home with itself.²⁰

The significance of this statement is that it does not only dismantle Heidegger's ontology of place which nourishes radical nationalism but also shows that the Self, though living in a place, should identify with the home rather than the place. As a consequence then, a "Subject's identity and independence are created through dwelling in one's home (in the world or in a certain geographical location) from whose interiority, human beings approach the world."²¹ Levinas also asserts that since a person inhabits a home (in his or her place of birth or elsewhere in the world), human beings are never homeless. Furthermore, "travel and rootedness do not make humans homeless but rather dispose them to seek a home."²²

It is also noteworthy that in spite of the fact that the home is apparently that which shelters and contains the Subject and sets him or her apart from the world, this does not imply a parting from the world but just a suspension of the world in a way that allows the Subject to return to it later. Moreover, Levinas insists that this movement from the home to the world and back to the warmth or intimacy and tenderness (tenderness that allows the Subject to constitute herself or himself softly and intimately) of the home gives the Subject a lesson on welcoming or hospitality.²³ This is because this movement reveals the home as a place of welcome or hospitality and a condition of the possibility of welcoming the "Other". Indeed, the intimacy and tenderness of the home is a testimony to the intimacy one has with the "Other" or what Levinas calls "the feminine element". In this connection, Levinas argues that:

The home that founds possession is not in the same sense as movable goods, it can collect and keep. It is possessed because it already and henceforth is hospital for its proprietor. This refers us to its essential interiority, and to the inhabitant that inhabits it before every in habitant, the welcoming one par excellence, welcome in itself-the feminine being. Need one add that there is no question here of defying ridicule by maintaining the empirical truth or counter-truth that every home *in fact* presupposes a woman?...and the empirical absence of the human being of 'feminine sex' in a dwelling nowise affects the dimension of femininity which remains open there, as the very welcome of the dwelling.²⁴

As Levinas implies in the statement above, the hospitality offered in the home is not a trade-off or exchange whereby a home is perceived to be somebody's property and where hospitality is understood as giving what one is obliged to give, but a giving in destitution.

Levinas seems to be aware that reference to the feminine as the "welcoming par excellence" may open floodgates of ridicule particularly by feminist readers who may construe such characterization to mean that the female subject is prevented from assuming her own separate being within this relation.²⁵ The reason for this fear is that the identification of the feminine being as the personification of hospitality or welcome may be interpreted to mean that "a woman is commanded to give herself over to the male subject so that he may feel at home as a condition of his own transcendence."²⁶ Commenting on this feminine metaphorical imagery employed by Levinas, Lisa Guenther allays this fear in her affirmation that:

This feminine economy generates something out of nothing: it bears the other in the same, without reducing the difference in between. Differences within such an economy multiply without lining up along the axis of binary opposition. The feminine economy does not operate on a principle of exchange, but rather with a non-reciprocal reciprocity given without calculating, renouncing all security-spending without a return.²⁷

Levinas also makes it clear that in the act of hospitality, although the one who is welcoming finds "himself or herself disrupted by the presence of the "Other" in the dwelling, it does not mean that he or she is not given in a relation of alterity with the other person nor that he or she lacks presence but rather that his or her subjectivity is

²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 152.

²¹ Langenthal, "On the Threshold of the Home-According to Emmanuel Levinas", 89-100.

²² Langenthal, "On the Threshold of the Home-According to Emmanuel Levinas", 89-100.

²³ Cf. Langenthal, "On the Threshold of the Home-According to Emmanuel Levinas", 89-100.

²⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 157-158.

²⁵ Cf. Melissa S. Tradel, "Re (Imagining) Home: Emmanuel Levinas on Dwelling, Responsibility and the Welcoming of the other", An Unpublished paper presented to the Graduate School, Department of Philosophy, Concordia University, Canada, 2015, 1.

²⁶ Tradel, "Re (Imagining) Home: Emmanuel Levinas on Dwelling, Responsibility and the Welcoming of the other", 1.

²⁷ Lisa, Guenther, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas and the Politics of Reproduction*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 76.

revealed through the very act of responsibility, amidst the event of the welcome.”²⁸ This is implied in Levinas’ contention that:

For the intimacy of recollection to be able to be produced in the oecumenia of being the presence of the Other must not only be revealed in the face which breaks through its own plastic image, but must be revealed, simultaneously with this presence, in its withdrawal and in its absence. This simultaneity is not an abstract construction of dialectics but the very essence of discretion. And the other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy, is the Woman. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation.²⁹

Moreover, Levinas contends that the home, which is the locus of hospitality, is also an incident of displacement or dispossession of the Subject by the “Other”: a dispossession which is an engendering of ethical individuality which begs for disturbance or interruption of the Self by the “Other”. Indeed, in the act of hospitality, the host is held hostage by the “Other” to whom the welcome is extended because of the primordial compulsion to be hospitable. In agreement with this affirmation, Jacques Derrida is of the view that “the host is a hostage insofar as he is a subject put into question, obsessed and (and thus besieged), persecuted, in the very place where, as emigrant, exile, stranger, a guest from the very beginning, he finds himself elected to or taken up by a residence before himself electing or taking one up.”³⁰

The obvious corollary to the above statement is that in the Subject’s relation with the “Other”, he or she finds himself or herself as a Subject dislodged by the “Other” who obliges him or her to be hospitable or welcoming. In other words, the Subject is besieged by the presence of the “Other” which calls him or her to responsibility. Therefore, in contrast to Heidegger’s ontology of rootedness in which the “event of recollection accomplished through dwelling is a gathering together of oneself apart from the world, an individualizing that occurs in solitude, Levinas’ gathering of at-home already presupposes the welcome.”³¹ This implies that the Subject discovers himself or herself only in relation with the “Other” who dislodges him or her. Consequently, since the “Other” that commands the Subject to be hospitable breaks, pierces and destroys the horizon of Subject’s egocentrism, hospitality is the *terminus a quo* of infinite responsibility. In this sense, Levinas’ idea of the “home” as the starting point of infinite responsibility is inextricably linked to the overall theme of inter-subjectivity as infinite responsibility that is the hallmark of his ethical phenomenology.

1.3 Levinas’ Concept of Infinite Responsibility: A Panacea for Radical Nationalism

It is worth re-echoing the fact that radical nationalism aims at the preservation of the “Totality” or the “Same” (national, physical and cultural identity). This preservation is achieved through meting violence and/or killing the “Other”. This condescending attitude on the part of those who unleash violence and kill the “Other” is born of the feelings of belonging and entitlement anchored in their subscription to the ontology of autochthony. Having lived through the horrors of war and the Holocaust directly associated with these ideologies, Levinas’ concept of inter-subjectivity as infinite responsibility serves as an antidote to the ontology of “Totality” that is the seedbed of the aforementioned ideology, and the resultant wars or violent conflicts. This is clear in his observation that:

The visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality which dominates Western philosophy. Individuals are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. The meaning of individual (invisible outside of this totality) is derived from the totality. The unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to, to bring forth its objective meaning.³²

What Levinas is describing here is the ontology of “Totality” which ensures the “peace of empires”. However, in another text, he maintains that this peace of empires is cosmetic in the sense that the “peace of empires is on the basis of a truth of a knowledge where instead of opposing itself, the diverse agrees with itself and unites-where the stranger is assimilated, where the other is reconciled with the identity of the identical in everyone.”³³ In seeking this kind of peace, war is seen to be an indispensable instrument and this itself is a contradiction in terms. Regrettably, the victims of these wars are reduced to bearers of forces that command them to unleash violence on

²⁸ Tradel, “Re (Imagining) Home: Emmanuel Levinas on Dwelling, Responsibility and the Welcoming of the other”, 1.

²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 155.

³⁰ Jacques, Derrida, *Adieu to Levinas*, Pascale-Anne and Michael Nass (trans.), (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 56.

³¹ Tradel, “Re (Imagining) Home: Emmanuel Levinas on Dwelling, Responsibility and the Welcoming of the other”, 20.

³² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 22.

³³ Levinas, “Peace and Proximity”, in *Emmanuel Levinas: Basic Philosophical Writings*, 162.

the “Other”. In most occasions, these victims have no idea of the causes of the conflict; they are simply used as pawns in the game of the whole. This is the kind of peace pursued by radical nationalists.

In opposition to this paradoxical ontology, Levinas, in his concept of infinite responsibility on which even his ontology of the “home” is predicated, proposes what can be referred to as “positive peace”. In this respect, he argues that the “face is preeminently non-violence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As non-violence it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace.”³⁴

According to Levinas therefore, the opposition of the face is a peaceful one; where peace is not a suspension of a possible future war or a simple containment of violence. This is clearly put forth in his argument that:

The unity of plurality is peace, and not the coherence of the elements that constitute plurality. Peace therefore cannot be identified with the end of combats that cease for want of combatants, by the defeat of some and the victory of others, that is, with cemeteries or future universal empires. Peace must be my peace, in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the other, in desire and goodness, where the I both maintains itself and exists without egoism.³⁵

In this statement, Levinas is simply stating that what is achieved when a perceived enemy is defeated and surrenders cannot be referred to as peace but simply a postponement of war. For example, Germany’s defeat in the First World War and the consequent penalties imposed by the victors only brought about temporary peace. So, as Levinas argues above, peace cannot be identified with the defeat of some and victory by others and thus cannot be achieved through force of arms. War therefore, just provides superficial solutions to the issues that stem from the entrenchment of ideologies that promote violence against the “Other” such as radical nationalism.

We need to underline the salient fact that radical nationalism cannot precipitate war or violent conflict in a vacuum. Levinas is aware of this fact because in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, he makes a connection between war and politics in his assertion that “the art of foreseeing war and of winning it by every means-politics-is henceforth enjoined as the very exercise of reason.”³⁶ Additionally, Levinas maintains that “war is not only connected with a political form of rationality but also appears to be the pure experience of pure being.”³⁷ The reason why Levinas views politics as a farce vis-à-vis infinite responsibility to the “Other” is that “politics and the political is a comparison and equivalence in which the singularity of the individual call and command is lost to the general and the law...it is already a falling away from the transcendent and infinite ethical demand into the totalizing and economic rule of law and accounting.”³⁸ In fact, politics only serve the purpose of ensuring justice for the “third other” but even in this circumstance, Levinas is insistent that the Self is called “as a prophet in order to call the State to justice or ensure that the State responds to the call of the “Other” beyond the call of the law.”³⁹ This is certainly true because the violence that ravaged the twentieth century and wars that are ongoing can largely be linked to the political reality of various forms of nationalism. Thus, even though in the lens of Western metaphysics, politics has been perceived as the very exercise of reason, it is in fact an instrument of “Sameness” that is responsible for war. This means that radical nationalism becomes lethal only in the hands political operatives.

In order to contextualize this affirmation, it has to be borne in mind for example, that the current Israeli-Palestinian war, which is one of the longest running in modern history was precipitated by the “Partition Resolution” by the UN’s General Assembly in 1947.⁴⁰ This resolution led to the division of Great Britain’s former Palestinian mandate into Jewish and Arab states in 1948, but without the direct participation of the Palestinians or the Arab countries in the region.⁴¹ Therefore, the war that ensued thereafter and is still ongoing, is more or less a claim to historical rights of land. It is therefore a fight about rootedness which Levinas substitutes with his ontology of the “home”.

The ethical solution by the UN in its response to the Jewish holocaust and the subsequent displacement of people of Jewish ancestry should not have been the displacement of entire Palestinian populations to accommodate the state of Israel but a creation of two separate states through engagement with the Palestinians who had inhabited the land for centuries after the Jewish dispersion. This displacement and the injustices and violence unleashed

³⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 203.

³⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 306.

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

³⁷ Anckaert, Luc, “Ethics of Responsibility and Ambiguity of Politics in Levinas’ Philosophy”. *Problemos* 97 (2020), 61-74.

³⁸ Laubser, “When ‘there is a Black’: Levinas and Fanon on Ethics, Politics, and Responsibility”, 1-17.

³⁹ Ernest, Wolff, *Political Responsibility for a Globalised World: After Levinas’ Humanism*, (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 26.

⁴⁰ Cf. United States Department of State: Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, “Creation of Israel, 1948”, accessed at <https://www.history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/creation-israel> on 7th March, 2025.

⁴¹ Cf. United States Department of State: Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute, “Creation of Israel, 1948”, accessed at <https://www.history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/creation-israel> on 7th March, 2025.

against Palestinians since the creation of the state of Israel is an affront to the “Other” by the “Same”. Similarly, the retaliatory attacks by various militant groups since the creation of the state of Israel, against innocent Israeli civilians that culminated in the now infamous October, 2023 attack that occasioned the current bombing and siege of the Gaza strip, is also an injustice on the “Other” by the “Same”.⁴² The unfolding of these unfortunate events is a clear manifestation that politics play a big role as far as escalation of war is concerned. Undoubtedly, political interests and national interests have been at the centre of past and current violent conflicts since the First World War.

The question that arises then, is why the UN, with a *Charter* that clearly spells out that its mandate among other things, is to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, can neither prevent nor end the ongoing conflicts. The reason is given by Levinas in his argument that “politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it.”⁴³ Unfortunately, this is what has crippled the UN because it has gradually been held hostage by the world powers who have the power of veto in the UN’s Security Council. The UN has therefore become an instrument of the “totality” because it is controlled by superpowers with vested national interests. Moreover, the five veto-wielding members are also the biggest funders of UN’s activities. This capture by powerful nations is what afflicts the UN and has led to its failure to carry out its mandate of averting war and resolving current wars.

The diagnosis given above is given credence by Antonio Guterres, the current UN’s Secretary-General who, speaking to *Al Jazeera Arabic* news media in an exclusive interview, “decried the failures of the Security Council, which was established in the aftermath of World War II to ensure international peace and security but whose permanent members’ veto power has consistently proven to be an obstacle to the goal,”⁴⁴ Furthermore, he maintained that “the Security Council is an outdated, unfair and ineffective system whose failure to put an end to Israel’s war on Gaza, war in Ukraine and Sudan, has damaged the credibility of the organization as a whole.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, although “paralysis in the UN Security Council is far from new, the United States’ and Russia’s repeated exercise of the veto power held by them as two of the Council’s permanent members has prevented the Council from responding to the conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine.”⁴⁶ The actions of the permanent members of the Security Council and by extension actions of nations closely allied to them, is an injustice to the other nations who are deemed to be poorer and less powerful. To use Levinas’ ethical terms, this is an affront to the rights of the “Other” and the “third party”.

The assertion by Levinas to the effect that politics left to itself bears tyranny within itself calls for immediate action by the non-permanent members of the UN so as to create an organization that works for the interests of all the member states and their citizenry so that the imperialism of the “Same” in the form of the five veto-wielding members is permanently dealt with. This calls for a decisive reorganization of the UN’s Security Council so that all the current one hundred and ninety three members of the UN’s General Assembly can have a voice in the Security Council. Besides, the question of the permanent members and their veto power needs to be revisited so that the UN ceases to be tool for domination and control of the perceived smaller and poorer nations by the powerful nations but an organization that ensures fairness and justice for all without discrimination. Such a radical surgery will enable the organization to carry out the core mandate for which it was established. If this were to happen, then we will witness the dawn of a new age born of responsibility to the “Other” where violent human conflict or war can always be nipped in the bud.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, human beings long for freedom and happiness and that this cannot be achieved without peaceful co-existence. The antithesis to the realization of this desire is war or violent conflict and its attendant effects. War is not a phenomenon of the past era but an issue of great concern in the contemporary society. Notwithstanding the fact that the world is struggling to forestall human conflict and resolve conflicts that are ongoing, it behooves all the stakeholders to examine the role played by radical nationalism in stoking human conflict. Levinas’ ontology

⁴² Cf. Global Perspective Human Stories, “Gaza: Hamas, Israel Committed War Crimes, Claims Independent Rights Probe”, *United Nations News*, accessed at <https://www.news.un.org/en/story/2024/06/1150946> on 7th March, 2025.

⁴³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 300.

⁴⁴ “UN Head Slams Security Council for Failure to end Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine Wars”, in *Al Jazeera Arabic News*, 13th September, 2024, accessed at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/13/un-head-slams-security-council-for-failure-to-end-gaza-sudan-ukraine-wars> on 6th March, 2025.

⁴⁵ “UN Head Slams Security Council for Failure to end Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine Wars”, in *Al Jazeera Arabic News*, 13th September, 2024, accessed at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/13/un-head-slams-security-council-for-failure-to-end-gaza-sudan-ukraine-wars> on 6th March, 2025.

⁴⁶ Oona A. Hathaway, Maggie Mills and Heather Zimmerman, “How to Reform the UN Without Amending Its Charter”, *Commentary*, Carnegie Global Order and Institutions Program, July 15, 2024.

of the home and his idea of infinite responsibility can be used as a model for not only dealing with radical nationalism but also charting a new path to conflict resolution and peace.

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