

Jury report
J.C. Baak Prize 2023

Edmund Flett MA, Leiden University

'Settlements now, settlement later' - Land swaps, settler relocation, and the viability of the two-state solution in Israel-Palestine

The jury has decided that the winner of the 2023 J.C. Baak Prize is Edmund Flett, for his thesis entitled *“Settlements now, settlement later’ - Land swaps, settler relocation, and the viability of the two-state solution in Israel-Palestine”*.

The thesis written by Edmund Flett is of extraordinary quality. It is fair to say that the same is to some extent also true for a few of the other theses submitted for the J.C. Baak Prize. However, taking into account the main criterion for awarding this prize (‘the research should be relevant in particular for the peaceful living together of different peoples’), our choice for Flett’s thesis hardly needs explanation. The conflict in the Middle East has been one of the most, if not the most protracted, complex, intractable international conflicts since the end of the Second World War, resulting in several wars, terrorist attacks and large-scale human suffering. At this moment, there is hardly any perspective of a long-term solution. As Flett notes in his thesis, there is currently little scholarly interest in the details of how a ‘two-state solution’ could be achieved, the most recent relevant journal articles having been published some 10 years ago. This lack of academic interest may explain why the so-called Palestine Papers, leaked by Al Jazeera as far back as 2011, have not yet been used for thorough research. At the same time, the ‘two-state solution’ is the only generally recognized objective of the international community.

The thesis is remarkably concise, well written and well structured, reflecting high-level research in the fields of history and international relations. It is the merit of this thesis that Edmund Flett demonstrates the courage to ‘never give up’, not accepting the conclusion that it is not realistic to expect a solution to this conflict any time soon, concluding his thesis by a sign of hope: “In the right circumstances, political barriers can be moved”. It is also the merit of this thesis that, by making use of the leaked Palestine Papers, the author is able to outline the realistic contours of a possible future settlement. He demonstrates convincingly that no such settlement will be possible without ‘land swaps’: in compensation for Israeli annexations in the West Bank to accommodate the Israeli settler population (a key interest for Israel), Palestine would receive unpopulated pre-1967 Israeli lands elsewhere. He analyses the viability of land swaps, indicating the main impediments for reaching an agreement. In addition to its academic merit, the thesis also has great practical significance, not only for the two main parties to the conflict but also for outsiders such as the US and the EU, involved in attempts to find a long-term solution.

For these reasons, the jury is convinced - that the thesis written by Edmund Flett fully deserves the 2023 J.C. Baak Prize.

Prof. dr. N.M. (Niels) Blokker, hoogleraar internationaal institutioneel recht Universiteit Leiden
Prof. dr. J.C.J. (Hans) Boutellier, bijzonder hoogleraar Polarisatie & Veerkracht Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, wetenschappelijk adviseur Verwey-Jonker Instituut
Prof. dr. F.P.I.M. (Frank) van Vree, gasthoogleraar Willem Alexander leerstoel Universiteit Luik, emeritus-hoogleraar geschiedenis van oorlog, conflict en herinnering Universiteit van Amsterdam, oud-directeur NIOD

The meeting of the jury took place on December 19th, 2022, via Zoom, was chaired by KHMW-director Ir. J.R. (Ronald) Prins and was also attended by Prof. dr. R.B. (Rudy) Andeweg, secretary of humanities and social sciences.