

50 Years of Israel

An Orphaned People

by Edward W. Said
Special to The Daily Star

Jerusalem is overwhelming in its relentless Judaization. Divided and segregated, the small, compact city in which I grew up has become a metropolis, surrounded on the north, east and west by immense building projects that testify to Israel's power, unchecked, to change the character of Jerusalem so that Arabs feel harassed and intolerably hemmed in. Here too there is a manifest sense of Palestinian impotence, as if the future is settled.

I have just returned from two separate trips to Jerusalem and the West Bank, where I have been making a film for the BBC on what Israel's fifty years have meant for Palestinians. Traveling the region interviewing people, recording scenes of Palestinian life, impressed upon me two overwhelming and completely contradictory realities, both of them the consequences of 1948. The first is that Palestine and Palestinians remain, despite Israel's determination to get rid of them or to circumscribe them so much as to nullify them politically. There is no avoiding that, as an idea, a memory and an often buried or obscured reality, Palestine and its people have simply not disappeared. The very fact of our existence has foiled, where it has not defeated, the Israeli effort to destroy us. This is as true for the 2.4 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza as it is for the 1 million Israeli Palestinians, whose main representative in the Knesset is the remarkable Azmi Bishara. For Bishara, as for an increasing number of Israelis (Professor Israel Shahak in the forefront), the real battle is for equality and the rights of citizenship, given that Israel is explicitly a state for Jews and not for all its citizens. The courage and intelligence of the new generation of Palestinians. Contrary to its expressed and implemented intention, therefore, Israel has strengthened the Palestinian presence, which is growing in sheer numbers and which refuses to be denied. No matter where you turn,

we are there, often only as humble, silent workers (who ironically labor to build the Israeli settlements) and compliant restaurant waiters, cooks and the like, but often also as substantial communities — in Hebron, for example — which continually resist Israeli encroachments. The second overriding reality is that minute by minute, hour by hour, day after day, we are losing more Palestinian land to the Israelis. Scarcely a road, or a highway, or a village that we passed hasn't witnessed the daily tragedy of land expropriated; fields bulldozed; trees, plants and crops uprooted; houses demolished, while the Palestinian owners stood by, helpless to stop it. There is nothing quite like the misery one feels listening to a 35-year-old man who worked fifteen years as an illegal day laborer in Israel in order to save up money to build a house for his family only to be shocked one day upon returning from work to find that the house and all that was in it had been flattened by an Israeli bulldozer. When I asked why this was done — the land, after all, was his — I was told that a paper given to him the next day by an Israeli soldier stated that he had built the structure without a license. Where else in the world are people required to have a license (always denied them) to build on their own property? Jews can build, but never Palestinians. This is apartheid. On the way from Jerusalem to Hebron one day we saw an Israeli bulldozer protected by soldiers plowing through some

fertile land alongside the road. About a hundred meters away stood four Palestinian men. It was their land, worked for generations, now being ruined on the pretext that it was needed to widen an already wide road built for the settlements. This is occupied territory, remember, and the soldiers' action was in violation of international law. "Why do they need a road that will be 120 meters wide?" asked one of the men plaintively. "How am I going to feed my children?" Had they received any warning? No, they said, we just heard today and when we got here it was too late. What about Mr. Arafat's Authority? Hasn't it helped? No, of course not, was the answer. It's never here when we need it. Among the soldiers there was one who clearly seemed troubled, though he said he was merely following orders. "But don't you see how unjust it is to take land from farmers who have no defense against you?" I said, to which he replied, "It's not their land really; it belongs to the State of Israel." Sixty years ago, I said, the same argument was made against Jews in Germany, and now here were Jews using it against Palestinians. He moved away, unwilling to respond. And so it is throughout the territories and Jerusalem, with

Palestinians nearly powerless to help one another. At the University of Bethlehem I spoke about the continuous dispossession and wondered why the Authority's 50,000 security people — plus the thousands more who sit in offices pushing paper from one side of the desk to the other, cashing handsome checks at the end of each month — were not out on the land to prevent expropriations. Why, I asked, don't villagers led by members of the Authority go out to their fields and simply stand in front of the bulldozers? And why don't all our great leaders give support and moral help to the poor people who are losing the battle? Wherever I went, whenever I talked to, whatever the question, there was never a good word for the Authority or its officers, or for the Oslo process or the United States. The Authority is perceived as basically guaranteeing security for Israel and its settlers, furnishing them with protection, not at all as a legitimate or concerned governmental body vis-à-vis its own people. All this is the stain of Oslo. That so many of these leaders should, meanwhile, think it appropriate to build ostentatious villas fairly boggles the mind. If it is to be anything today, Palestinian leadership

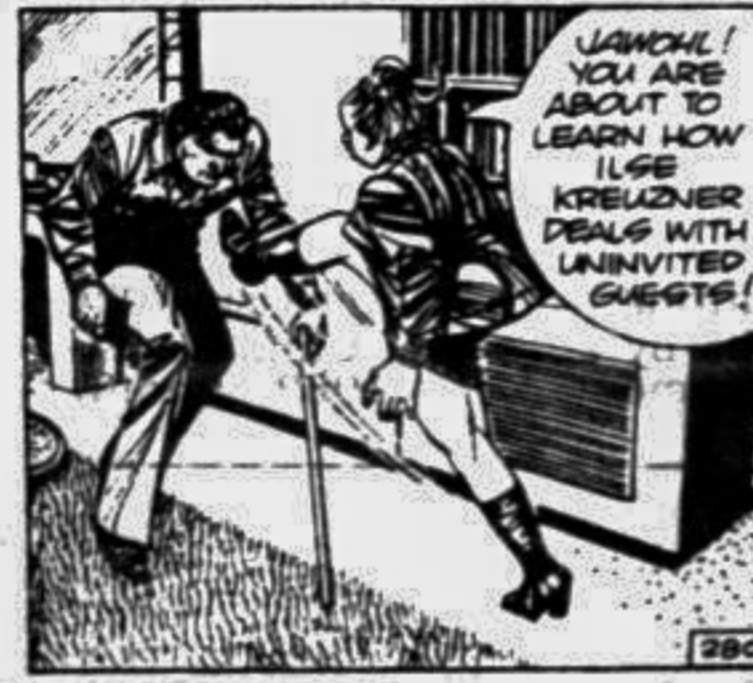
must demonstrate service and sacrifice, precisely the things so lacking in the Authority. What I found staggering is the absence of care — the sense that each Palestinian is alone in his or her suffering, with no one so much as to offer food, blankets or a kind word. Truly one feels that Palestinians are an orphaned people. Jerusalem is overwhelming in its relentless Judaization. Divided and segregated, the small, compact city in which I grew up has become a metropolis, surrounded on the north, east and west by immense building projects that testify to Israel's power, unchecked, to change the character of Jerusalem so that Arabs feel harassed and intolerably hemmed in. Here too there is a manifest sense of Palestinian impotence, as if the future is settled. People told me that after September 1996, when Israeli troops fired on Palestinians protesting the opening of a tunnel that undermined the Al Aksa mosque complex, they no longer felt the need to expose themselves to more sacrifice. "After all," one said, "sixty of us were killed, and yet the tunnel remained open, and Arafat went to Washington, despite having said that he would not meet with Netanyahu unless the tunnel was closed. What is the

point of struggling now?" It is not only the Palestinian leadership that has failed in Jerusalem; it is also the Arab countries and the United States, which bows before Israeli aggression. Palestinians from Gaza or from the cities of Ramallah, Hebron, Bethlehem, Jenin and Nablus cannot enter Jerusalem, which is cordoned off by Israeli soldiers. Apartheid once again. On the Israeli side the situation is less bleak. I interviewed Professor Ilan Pappé of Haifa University. He is one of the new Israeli historians whose work on 1948 has challenged Zionist orthodoxy on the refugee problem and on Ben-Gurion's role in the Palestinian dispossession. They have confirmed what Palestinian historians and witnesses have said all along: that there was a deliberate, violent military campaign to rid the country of as many Arabs as possible. But Pappé also said he is much in demand for lectures in high schools all over Israel, even though the latest textbooks for classes on Israel's history do not mention the Palestinians at all. This blindness coexisting with a new openness regarding the past characterizes the present mood and deserves our attention as a contradiction to be analyzed further.

Likewise, one witnesses small gestures of reconciliation that may be worth more than dozens of Oslo accords. While I was in Jerusalem, Daniel Barenboim was there for a piano recital. Born in Argentina, Barenboim came to Israel in 1950 at the age of 9, lived there for about eight years, and for the past ten years has conducted the Berlin State Opera and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, though he remains an Israeli citizen. Over the past few years he and I have also become close friends. He agreed to an interview in which he regretted that fifty years of Israel should also be the occasion of fifty years of suffering for Palestinians and openly advocated a Palestinian state. At his recital he dedicated his first encore to a Palestinian woman who had invited him to dinner the night before and was present in the hall. I was surprised that the entire audience, almost all Israeli Jews, received his views and noble dedication with enthusiastic applause. Clearly some constituency of conscience is beginning to emerge, partly as a result of Netanyahu's excesses, partly as a result of Palestinian resistance. And yet one has only to go to Hebron to find the embodiment of the worst aspects of Oslo. Some 400 settlers control the heart of an Arab city whose population of 100,000 is unable to visit the city center, constantly under threat from zealots and soldiers alike. I visited a man in the old Ottoman quarter. He is surrounded by settler bastions, including three new buildings, plus three enormous water tanks that steal

most of the city's water for the settlers, plus several rooftop nests of soldiers. He was bitter that Arafat had accepted the town's partition on the entirely specious grounds that it had once contained fourteen Jewish buildings dating to biblical times but no longer in evidence. "How did these Palestinian negotiators accept such a grotesque distortion of reality — especially since at the time they made the deal not one of them had ever set foot in Hebron?" he asked. The next day three young men were killed at the barricade by soldiers, and many more were injured in the fighting that ensued. Hebron and Jerusalem are victories for Israeli extremism, not for coexistence or any optimistic future. So despite some rays of hope, a great cloud of injustice hangs over the Holy Land. Among Israeli, US and Palestinian leaders there is too little vision, and among the Palestinians too much anguish. At such a time it is important to testify to the continued potency of the Palestinian cause for self-determination. After three weeks of recording stories of a people's dispossession, the Israeli sound engineer in our crew said, "It is hard to be an Israeli again." But it is much harder to be a Palestinian, for whom the choices today are apartheid or fruitless waiting for Israel to withdraw. It is a situation both tenuous and volatile. Edward W. Said's latest book is Peace and Its Discontents (Vintage).

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Taiwanese trade team meets Tofael

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed yesterday said the present government is very much interested to attract foreign investment by offering an attractive incentive package to the investors, reports BSS.

He was talking to members of a business delegation of Chinese Taipei while they called on him at his office here.

The leader of the delegation, Dr Lee Cheng Liang, expressed keen interest to invest in education, information technology and power sectors.

Welcoming their interest, the minister said Bangladesh is allowing hundred per cent foreign equity, tax holiday for three to five years, repatriation of profit and dividend including capital and other fiscal and non-fiscal incentives.

The minister said, the government is giving special initiatives to flourish computer software and power generation. He said "we allow private investment in power sector even with 10 mw of capacity."

The minister requested them to set up a residential university in Bhola. He also asked them to make joint venture projects as Bangladesh has so many potential entrepreneurs.

Nirmul meeting at Mirpur held

Ekatturer Ghatak Dal Nirmul Committee yesterday accused all the post 75 political parties of distorting the history of the 1971 Liberation War, reports UNB.

The committee leaders alleged that the rehabilitation of the anti-liberation forces by the military regimes in politics and failure of the political parties to play their due role have undermined the spirit of the Liberation War.

They were addressing a meeting at the city Ward No. 4 in Mirpur with Anisur Rahman Tito in the chair.

It was addressed, among others, by committee executive convenor Kazi Mukul, city convenor Sadikur Rahman Farag, Mozammel Haq, Abdul Khaleq and Saidur Rahman Said.

Later, a committee for the ward was formed with Sheikh Miraz as convenor, Shamim Hossain Khan coordinator, Shubra member secretary and Masuma Chowdhury women affairs coordinator, said a press release.



A developer at Tejjona Industrial Area has been pumping sewerage water into the road in front of Mitsubishi Motors, flooding the area. Construction materials are also blocking the footpath. — Star photo

Female UP members allege They aren't being allowed to discharge duties

As a group of female UP members yesterday alleged that they were not being allowed to discharge their duties, Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena advised them to press the chairman and male counterparts to include them in all activities, reports UNB. "Compel the Union Parishad chairmen and male members that they are bound to hear from you," he said while distributing certificates among 30 newly elected women members from Pakundia in Kishoreganj who took part in a five-day workshop in the city. Nari Uddog Kendra (Centre for Women's Initiatives) organised the workshop titled "Training Course on Women and Human Rights Education". Its Executive Director Mashuda Khatun Shefali presided over the ceremony. Referring to a number of initiatives taken locally in some

unions, the CEC asked the female members to work for genuine development of the country as well as women community by not keeping themselves limited within only so-called development activities. "The activities like disbursement of relief and VCD cards and food for works are not the original functions of the UP... but the members and chairmen have kept themselves busy only within such work," he said adding that those activities should be separated from the UP. "Registration of birth and death is a major work of the UP. Is it done in any union?" Abu Hena asked and told the female members that they should do the real works of the UP like maintaining law and order specially resisting repression on women. "If the chairmen do not listen to you, go to the TNO... if he also not then go the DC," he advised them saying being an elected member of an area, which is three times greater than that of a male member, you have every access to reach. He, however, hoped that in some cases the functions of the female members would be specified and urged the government to frame guidelines so that a woman member can discharge some special duties following it. The CEC emphasised on political empowerment of women for their own development and informed that even in the developed world it is not at a satisfactory level. The rate of women in parliament in the world is only 10.5 per cent, he said. Women in parliament in different countries: (in percentage) UK 9.5, USA 10.9, Canada 18, Denmark 33, Netherlands 31.3, Sweden 44.4, Bangladesh 10.6, India 8 and Pakistan 1.8. Countries like UAE, Kuwait and Bhutan, the rate of women in parliament is zero.

by Jim Davis



FOR thirty out of the past fifty years I have worked as a journalist covering Palestinian affairs for the Israeli press. More than once it has struck me that all these years I have been writing what is essentially the same article. There is always something about a crisis in the diplomatic process; there is the threat of a renewed outbreak of violence and a steady stream of the same words: terror, settlements, refugees, rights. In March, I asked myself, How many more times can I write that "the Oslo peace process is dying and the diplomatic impasse is very dangerous"? Haven't I already written this, on average, three times a week over the past year? Israel's security and its relationship to the Palestinians are the difficult issues that the Jewish state has not been able to resolve since its inception. Recently, we have seen an attempt to jump-start a new US diplomatic initiative. The Israeli government finds it very difficult to agree with the proposals put forth by President Clinton and Secretary of State

Israel at Fifty

by Danny Rubinstein
If both sides know that this approach presents the only possible solution to the conflict, why not move to the final stage and put it into effect? Why are the Israelis and the Palestinians fated to undergo more violence, suffering and bloodshed when in the end the only possible and predictable solution will be accepted?

Madeleine Albright. This pattern has repeated itself since the 1967 war. In its first incarnation, the US initiative was called the Rogers Plan — named for William Rogers, the Secretary of State, who called for almost complete Israeli withdrawal on the Egyptian front and the evacuation of the Sinai Peninsula by Israeli forces. The Israeli government rejected the plan, which had undergone a long series of emendations and corrections. In the end, a diplomatic deadlock set in and continued through the early seventies. This led to one of the worst wars

in the history of Israel, the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In Israel the consequences of the war were read as a major defeat. The government and its investigative commissions were established. It is worth noting that to this day in Israel there are no public monuments in memory of the fallen soldiers of the 1973 war. The agreements, signed after the war obligated Israel to withdraw from the Sinai. After that came President Anwar Sadat's peace initiative, followed by the Camp David accords. The result was that Israel returned all of the Sinai Peninsula, to the very last grain of sand.

Another well-known US initiative was that of President Ronald Reagan, which was proposed during the war against the Palestinians in Lebanon in September 1982. This plan spoke of establishing an autonomous Palestinian area in the territories and proposed a freeze on Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel again rejected the US proposal with the simple word "no," in the familiar style of Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The result? Another period of diplomatic inaction, until the outbreak of the Palestinian national uprising, the intifada, in December 1987. This insurrection forced Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir to advance a proposal of his own, which included conducting elections in the territories. That idea led to the Madrid conference of 1991, which was the first set of meetings between an Israeli delegation and representatives of the P.L.O. under direct orders from Yasser Arafat.

Although I have mentioned only two important US diplomatic initiatives, there were others. The terminology of Israel's military retreats has changed over time. In the seventies they were referred to as "separation of forces"; today they are called "redeployment." They, too, retreat was once called "improving our position by moving back." Yet the concept underlying those retreats was the slogan constantly reiterated by Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser after the defeat of his armies in 1967: "What has been taken by force can only be taken back by force."

Without engaging in detailed historical analysis, we can conclude that whatever territories Israel didn't want to return to the Arabs within the framework of a US territorial compromise it eventually did return after considerable pressure was brought to bear. It returned the Sinai after the Yom Kippur War, and Gaza and the major cities of the West Bank after the intifada. Today the Israeli proposals for unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon, what it terms the "Security Zone," have come about only because of the serious losses inflicted on Israel by the Hezbollah guerrillas. What, then, will be the fate of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations? It is quite possible that the two-year stalemate — which began when Israelis voted in the Netanyahu government — will simply continue. No one knows how long such a stalemate will last or when the next outburst of violence will occur. It is reasonable to expect that violence will be sparked, at the latest, in a little over a year, when the interim agreements come to an end and

the ideological component in this debate. With vivid threats of the destruction of the State of Israel, those opposed to territorial compromise play on the primal fears of Israelis. They condemn the proposals for a return to the 1949 perimeters, calling them "Auschwitz lines." Ironically, this foreboding phrase was first used by Abba Eban (whose dovish views are well-known) when he was Israeli ambassador to the United Nations decades ago. The Palestinians, too, know that partition is the only possible solution. To put it mildly, they don't like it either. It forces them to give up forever two-thirds of what they consider their homeland. Almost half the Palestinian people lost their houses, lands and property in the 1948 war and became refugees. It is little wonder that the generation of Palestinians that experienced the loss of homes and homeland was unwilling to make any compromise with the State of Israel. Only now, fifty years later, are the children and grandchildren of the 1948 Palestinian refugees willing, with difficulty, to recognize and enter into negotiations with Israel. Unfortunately, this process will undergo many ups and downs — forward in the style of "one step forward and two steps back" (in Lenin's famous phrase) — until, in the end, a solution will be achieved.



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predictable solution will be accepted? The answer is that although both sides know that partition is the inevitable and sole solution, large sectors of the Palestinian and the Israeli population don't want it — even find the very idea repulsive. In Israeli public opinion polls over the past few years, almost 60 per cent of the respondents said they thought a Palestinian state would be established. But when the pollsters asked if they were in favor of such a state, most Israelis said no. There isn't necessarily a contradiction in these figures; most Israelis don't trust the Palestinians and fear a sovereign Palestinian state so close to Israeli population centers. There are other groups of Israelis, with very strong ideological commitment, unwilling to give up the "Last of the Fathers" of Judea and Samaria. But the use of such historical arguments to bolster the idea of total Israeli control over the land has declined in the past few years. Security concerns have replaced