

Identity by Birth or by Choice?

by Edward Said

This is not merely a geographical wish or demand. It is at least five things more. It is the right to have one's own abode. It is the right to remain there. It is the right to repatriation. It is the right to compensation and restitution. It is the collective right of association (we want to be Palestinian where we want to be) and of residence. It is the right to coexist on an equal footing with Israeli Jews.

against Israeli occupation soldiers was in effect to give greater depth and meaning to the struggle against racial discrimination. It is surely one of the ironies of history that the Palestinian people's greatest historical enemy — the Zionist movement and its more militant ideologists — was energized precisely by the same idea, that one can strongly assume one's identity as a Jew rather than quietly submit to assimilation as a Polish, Russian, American or British citizen.

Most histories of Zionism show that for the movement's organizers the greatest problem was to persuade Jews in the diaspora that their identity as Jews by birth was not enough; they had to take on the additional national identity of Jews "returning" to Zion for their national origins to fulfill themselves. And so it has been recently with Palestinians who for years after 1948 were subsumed (willingly as well as unwillingly) into the melting-pot of whatever country they resided in, until, given an opportunity to take on the choice of being a Palestinian for purposes of political struggle, they did so in the years since 1970.

This does not contradict Rashid Khalidi's thesis in his recent book on Palestinian identity where he argues that one can discern a distinct national Palestinian identity that goes back well back in history through the culture, civil society, and political rhetoric. The point to be made in addition is that identity by choice is a political commitment to be Palestinian as an active commitment not just to the establishment of a separate state, but to the more significant cause of ending injustice and liberating Palestinians into a new secular identity able to take its place within contemporary history.

The pressures against making that choice today are increasing on an hourly basis. One of the principal objectives of the Oslo process so eagerly embraced by the US and Israel is a paradoxical one since it implicitly accepts (and then denies) the notion that Palestinian identity is in principle an identity based on more than narrow nationalist grounds.

To look back at recent history is to note that throughout the seventies and eighties being Palestinian meant being in the forefront of several liberationist struggles, not the least of which were those that went far

beyond the Arab world, in places like South Africa, Latin America, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe, as well as Asia.

I can testify to this in a recent encounter with a Maori intellectual from New Zealand, who came up to me after a lecture and proceeded to inform me in detail how much the struggle for Palestinian rights has meant for the Maori movement for at least three decades. I have encountered the same enthusiasm in places like India, Korea and Ireland, by no means among extremists but rather in the writings and practice of civil libertarians, secularists, women's groups, for whom the very idea of Palestinian identity signified far more than a simple ethnic nationalism. It meant acting against the forces of religious obscurantism, gender discrimination, economic inequality and the like.

Clearly the potency of this Palestinian identity was behind the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon during which Ariel Sharon's aim was scarcely as just as destroying the PLO's negligible military threat. Recall how one of the first things his troops did when they entered West Beirut in September of that year was to steal the PLO Research Centre's archives, a symbol of what in effect Palestinian identity had become in terms of sheer intellectual and moral potency.

Oslo was designed in part to break the back of this larger notion of identity, to drive Palestinians back into their Gaza and West Bank towns, villages, clans where they could be encircled, confined, cut down to size both by Israel and the US on the one hand and, most lamentably, by their own national authority. That effort and aspect of Oslo has succeeded, but the centre of attention has now shifted to the 4.5 million Palestinians who still remain in exile, and whose persistent stubbornness in expressing their identity by choice is symbolized by the right of return they continue to maintain.

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on an equal footing with Israeli Jews.

Quite clearly the Palestinian Authority symbolizes the defeat and abridgement of most of these rights. The burden for the rest of us — and here, I do not speak only of Palestinians by birth — is to resist the attempt to cut us and our ideas down merely to matters of birth and actual residence whose final arbiter is Israel. Thus current "international" plans to resettle the vast majority of refugees include sending them to places like Iraq, Canada, the US, even Jordan, as well as pressuring countries that have large Palestinian communities (eg, Lebanon) into giving Palestinians citizenship and residence where they already reside.

Although official Palestinian rhetoric today insists on the right of return, the Authority's past performances on matters of stated principle does not provide a convincing precedent. Besides, Israel's position since its inception in 1948 has been flatly to deny Palestinians anything like a right of return while insisting on the absolute right of any Jew anywhere both to "return" and to unconditional Israeli citizenship.

In such a situation then to choose Palestinian identity means in effect to resist what the final status Oslo negotiations will have to offer. This is not just a negative thing. It means insisting on the national and political rights that have been denied to us as a people by the British (one mustn't forget that the Balfour Declaration of 1917 offered Jews political rights as a nation whereas it promised Palestinians only religious and civil rights) and later by Israel and the US (and, it would seem, most of the Arab states). It also means that we stand firm on the matter of identity as something more significant and politically democratic than mere residence and subservience to what Israel offers us.

What we ask for as Palestinians is the right to be citizens and not just numbers in the ultimately losing game being played by the Oslo participants.

It is worth pointing out moreover that Israelis will also be the losers if they accept the narrow-minded and ungenerous definition of the Palestinians as a subject people confined to a "homeland" being manipulated by their government. In a decade there will be demographic parity between Jews and Arabs in historical Palestine. Better that we accommodate to each other sooner rather than later as full members of a bi-national secular state than to go on fighting what has been de-meaningfully called a shepherd's war between feuding tribes. To choose that identity is to make history. Not to choose is to disappear.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan

Why Armies Still Bite the Bullet and Bury the Ballot

Pakistan's military coup spotlights the role of the military in the political systems of many developing countries, where guns and butter are often still entwined. But as a Gemini News correspondent argues, the overthrow of Nawaz Sharif's government has differences from other military takeovers.

Gareth Jenkins writes from Istanbul

Power from the barrel of a gun

Military regimes	Large measure of military independence
Myanmar	Russia
Pakistan	
Official role for the military	Many authoritarian regimes depend on military to retain power, including most of Arab world and many west and central African countries
Indonesia	
Turkey	
Military and civil organisations inextricably integrated	Civilian authorities afraid of antagonising the military
China	Argentina
N.Korea	Chile
Cuba	Vietnam
	Bolivia
	Peru

MILITARY might remain the ultimate arbiter of political power in a number of developing countries in the post-Cold War era, as Pakistan's recent coup demonstrates. But Pakistan is different from other nations that have been subject to military takeovers within democratically elected political systems.

While almost all governments in Africa, the Middle East and Asia see elections as necessary for political legitimacy, many still depend on the support or tolerance of the armed forces for political power.

But the 1990s have seen a shift in the pattern of military involvement in politics. Military regimes like those in Myanmar and Pakistan are now rare. Military interventions driven by political ideology, such as the left-wing and right-wing coups of the Cold War period, have almost disappeared.

In Latin America, recent military challenges to the civilian authorities in Argentina, Chile and Brazil have tended to focus on immunity for offences committed under past military regimes, rather than attempting to overthrow elected governments. Even so, few Latin American governments feel secure enough to risk antagonising the military.

Some, such as Chile, fear civil unrest and reopening old wounds, as is evidenced in its opposition to General Augusto Pinochet's extradition from Britain to Spain. For others, a coup remains a real, if diminishing, possibility.

while others, such as Egypt, are led by men who have worked their way up through the military.

Traditionally, most military coups have replaced one authoritarian leader with another rather than, as in Pakistan, overthrowing a democratically elected government.

Coups often appear to enjoy considerable support domestically, even though toppling an elected government tends to trigger condemnation in the West. This is partly attributable to opponents of the overthrown government, such as the declaration of support for Pakistan's coup by former prime minister Benazir Bhutto. But the main reasons tend to be abuses of power by the elected government, where there is often a large gap between the theory and practice of democracy, and local social attitudes and values favour authoritarian rule.

Even though many leaders in the West view military intervention and elections as incompatible, in many sub-Saharan African countries such incompatibilities have virtually become part of the same political process.

such as Liberian President Charles Taylor, have used armed force to seize power and then retain control by being elected as a civilian head of state. In Nigeria last February, Olusegun Obasanjo, who headed a military dictatorship 20 years earlier, won the elections that ended 15 years of military rule.

What distinguishes Pakistan's coup from recent military interventions elsewhere is that it was conducted by the military as an institution rather than as the power base of a strong individual.

The coup was triggered when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif tried dismissing General Pervez Musharraf. But the underlying reason was a power struggle between the military and the civilian government exacerbated by Sharif's decision to overrule the advice of his generals and withdraw Pakistani troops from Indian-administered Kashmir after an abortive incursion.

The military's considerable public prestige, economic interest and record of ruling the country for 25 of the last 52 years give it considerable informal influence and virtual autonomy in security policy.

Military Take-over in Pakistan Was it a Necessity?

by A M M Shahabuddin

The General, however, knows well he won't be able to put the 'crumbling' economy of Pakistan back on the right track without the goodwill and cooperation of donor countries and international lending agencies, like IMF. It all depends to what extent the military rulers will be accommodating with the 'ideas' of the Western leaders. Only time will show which way they move.

cape unhurt and uncaught with anything he would do to, and the time-serving sycophants, buzzing around him for honey, were busy in flattering him. Virtually 'catch me, if you can' became Sharif's slogan.

Kicks Against Judiciary and Media: Thus equipped with unprecedented power, Sharif started behaving like a 'despot' rather than a 'democrat'. He stretched his mighty hands to knock the judiciary, the media and even the army, to serve his ends. He successfully removed Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, his political rival, then President Leghari, Chief of Army Staff Gen. Jahangir Karamat and Naval Chief Monsurat Haq, on flimsy grounds. Former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto took shelter in UK in self exile. He was already looking larger than his size when he wanted to run down the media barons by picking on the oldest Urdu Jong Group of Publications and sent to prison renowned journalists like Rahmat Shah Afridi, editor-proprietor of Frontier Post and Friday Times editor Najam Sethi, and his colleague Hassan Haqqani.

Come via Washington? There used to be a popular yoke in Pakistan (I don't know whether it is still in use) that if you want to stay in Islamabad, come via Washington. To what extent it is applicable to Nawaz Sharif, that he had shown himself. When Kargil crisis was at its peak, Sharif rushed to Washington at the call of Clinton's invitation of President Clinton, who held series of talks with Sharif to thrash out Kargil crisis and Clinton all the time was 'on line' with Indian Prime Minister Bajpayee to brief him about the 'progress' in the talks. Then came the fateful July 4 Agreement, which Sharif signed, literally, under US pressure, agreeing to withdraw all Pakistan-backed forces from the Kargil sector on the Indian side of LOC. The Pakistani took it as a great humiliation and the Army took it as a 'betrayal' as it was not taken into confidence when the agreement was signed in Washington. He went into action, immediately on return home, to call back the Pakistan-backed 'intruders' from the Indian soil. But he tried to placate it as a triumph for Pakistan as the Kashmir issue had drawn the attention of the international community.

On the other hand, world community, including 'G-7 group' had earlier advised Pakistan to pull back its force to Pakistan side of the LOC. What a mess he created! First, he said Pakistan had nothing to do with what was going on in Kargil, then agreed to withdraw its forces. But, unfortunately the poor fellow, who did so much under order from 'high command', could not be saved from the great fall even by Clinton.

The Last Nail: Again, perhaps to please his friends (not masters), Sharif ventured to put his fingers in hornet's nest when he directly accused the Afghan Taliban-trained terrorists of fomenting sectarian violence and killings in Pakistan and asked Kabul to restrain them and close down such training centres. Simultaneously, order was issued in Pakistan to 'monitor' the activities of some eight to ten thousand Madrassas which had links with the Taliban. His cup was already full and the proverbial 'last drop' came to over flow the cup when he hastened to sack Gen. Musharraf and appointed ISI Chief Gen. Ziauddin as Army Chief. The sacked 'General' resurrected to sack the Prime Minister.

Thus Sharif's miscalculated and haphazard 'running' cost him the valuable 'wicket' when he was 'run-out' by Gen. Musharraf. (In an earlier article, titled, 'Pakistan Buckled by US...', DS 28.7.99, this writer, inter alia, said: "As resentment against Sharif's capitulation before US pressure in Washington and the humiliation that he had brought to his country, rises in tempo, it is difficult to say how long he would be at the 'crease'. And if he is 'run-out'... who will be the next batsman?") And it came true sooner than expected "Let the Pakistani audience watch the game", till the next 'batsman' comes in. Maybe later than expected this time, who knows?

Agenda of Action: In his nation-wide televised statement, after assumption of power as Chief Executive, the General gave the people his piece of mind, telling them his agenda for action. Although he didn't mention about the 'time frame' for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, he said that "this was not Martial Law. It was a part of democracy. The constitution has merely been

doctrine of *dual function* (dual function), which gives it a role as the country's defender and as an agent for social and political development, is enshrined in the constitution. But since President Suharto's 1998 resignation, the system has begun to unravel. Civil and ethnic unrest, combined with the national humiliation of the loss of East Timor — and international disgrace of the army's complicity in atrocities committed there by anti-independence militias — seem set to force the military to either adopt a higher political profile or subordinate itself to civilian authorities.

The Turkish military has adopted a more subtle approach, exercising its influence through public and private expressions of concern when it feels its core principles, such as secularism and territorial integrity, are being infringed. The military's prestige, and the memory of three coups in the last 40 years have proved sufficient for Turkish politicians to comply with the armed forces' wishes without the need for even the implied threat of a military takeover.

Pakistan's coup is largely the result of the military's failure to create sufficient prestige among its own politicians to prevent Sharif from trying to call its bluff by announcing Musharraf's dismissal.

Toppling the civilian government was probably the easy part for the Pakistani military. Western powers are still prepared to tolerate authoritarian regimes, particularly if they are well-established, but are now less sympathetic to the toppling of democratic governments, however imperfect.

return the country to democracy has bought him a little time, even though he has yet to announce a timetable. But international patience is likely to be limited and neither the economy nor the military, heavily dependent on imported spare parts, can afford a long period of isolation. Pakistan has already been barred from all Commonwealth activities.

Musharraf's challenge is to create a formula for a return to civilian rule that ensures a measure of military autonomy; he must do so before economic hardship and international isolation so irreparably damage the armed forces' prestige that future civilian administrations will call its bluff again.

'put in abeyance', freedom of the press has not been restricted, judiciary will be running as usual. The Gen. has promised that 'the armed forces have no intention to stay any longer in charge than is absolutely necessary'. He also pledged to return to democracy, a 'true one' and not a 'sham' or a 'label of democracy' which had been in practice till recent past. The General has also extended an olive branch to India announcing an 'unilateral military de-escalation' along the borders with India, also promising a 'policy of nuclear and missile restraint'.

The Western leaders in Washington, London and Europe, were not, however happy for the omission of any 'time frame' for the restoration of democracy, for which they unanimously insisted on the General to announce.

For some reason or other, the General kept mum on it, for which, as a punishment, Commonwealth, at a meeting of its 'council of 8', in London, suspended Pakistan's membership and also barred it from the upcoming Commonwealth summit to be held in South Africa. Other punitive actions like sanctions, stoppage of loans by IMF and aid-flows from donor countries, are being implemented perhaps to teach the army rulers a 'hard lesson' for ignoring the request for a 'time-frame'.

Only Time will Show: Gen. Musharraf and his colleagues have assumed a great responsibility, by replacing a civilian government and any lapse or failure on their part would be disastrous for the image of the army of which he happens to be the chief. Perhaps he himself doesn't know when he would dismount from the tiger he is now riding possibly not before the 'Augean stable' is cleaned thoroughly, to return to 'true democracy'.

The General, however, knows well he won't be able to put the 'crumbling' economy of Pakistan back on the right track without the goodwill and cooperation of donor countries and international lending agencies, like IMF. It all depends to what extent the military rulers will be accommodating with the 'ideas' of the Western leaders. Only time will show which way they move.

However, one thing has been very encouraging in South Asian peace context. There was an alarm of anxiety, particularly in India, with the coming into power of the army, about the rising tension in the region. The General's peace offer to India is expected to go a long way to defuse the tension. As voiced in The Daily Star editorial (19.10.99), Gen Musharraf's announcement of 'unilateral troops de-escalation along the borders should have a positive vibe with India because it comes from the horse's mouth now.'

IQBAL Ansari Khan, nicknamed Henry, was the first among three children of late Ali Amjad Khan who was elected to Pakistan National Assembly in 1964. And Anwara Khatoun, the first Bengali Muslim woman member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly elected in 1946. She was re-elected in 1954. Born on 25 December, 1934 in a highly educated family with rich political background, Henry saw politics at an early age from very close quarters and naturally got hooked to it. It was in his nature to lead from the front and soon became a student leader by his own merit. A young man of courage and conviction, he took active part in the movement of class IV Employees of the Eden Buildings (Provincial Secretariat) in 1948 and was arrested and later jailed. It was a baptism in politics for Henry as he came back with renewed vigour and led the first batch of the students of Dhaka University on the streets in violation of Section 144 imposed by the provincial government on 21 February, 1952. He was again picked up by police and thrown into jail.

The seeds of a new political party named Awami Muslim League were sown in their old-town residence at Khaje Dewan (Bakshibazar) when stalwarts Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, H S Suhrawardy, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and others met and agreed to form a

new party in 1948. In the words of former AL leader Ahsan Rahman Khan: In fact Awami League was born in that house. Henry's father Ali Amjad Khan was the founder Vice-President of the new party which later dropped the word 'Muslim' to appear secular.

Obituary Iqbal Ansari Khan 1934-1999

By Staff Correspondent

As a student leader he had wide influence on the community and was involved with cultural activities as well. He was the president of Sanskrit Parishad, the cultural wing of East Pakistan Students' League at Dhaka university. He himself was a powerful stage actor and was instrumental in establishing the first group theatre in Bangladesh Drama Circle in 1956. To prove his worth as a sportsman, he led the Department of Law cricket team to inter-departmental tournament and achieved the championships in 1956. After completing his masters in International Relations and LL.B. in 1957, he joined the Bar and soon made his mark as a brilliant young lawyer. During Ayub Khan's martial law he joined politics and was elected as the joint secretary of the Na-



tional Democratic Front (NDF), an alliance of political parties that opposed Ayub's rule in Pakistan and also the candidature of Ayub Khan in the 1964 presidential elections under Basic Democracy against Fa-

tima Jinnah. Henry took active part in the War of Liberation and suffered tremendously at the hands of the Pakistani Army in August 1971 when his house was raided and he was taken away.

It was an act of providence that he survived the dying days of the Pakistani military atrocities in Bangladesh.

After the elections of 1973 he took time off active politics and engaged himself in social work through Rotary and here also made his mark as he was soon elected the Rotary District Governor for 1987-88. He turned out to be a highly successful Rotary official in Bangladesh and abroad and actively took part in many international conferences and seminars. Apart from contributing to local journals, he authored three books — two of which have been highly acclaimed by readers. The *Third Eye* and the *Babri Mosque* drawn attention and make interesting reading. The third book on jokes was written in jest.

Henry leaves behind his wife Munira, herself a social worker par excellence, son Asif, a former cricketer of repute, daughter Alia, a caring and loving daughter-in-law Lijju and three wonderful grand children — Mehreen, Maisha and Ashnaad to feel his absence and a host of friends and admirers to mourn his death.

by Jim Davis

Garfield
MICE ARE DISGUSTING

HELLO, YOU BIG, FAT, UGLY SLOB

SEE?!

James Bond
BY THE FLEETING BEARING BY BOAK

WELL, JAMES BOND WOULD BE THE STATION OF WHAT'S HAPPENED — AND BY THE WAY, KNOW YOU'RE COMING TO GREECE!

ANY MUNCHES YOU WOULD LIKE TO START?

LET'S SAY ATHEENS... IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER BECAUSE SHAMANEED TO LOOK FOR THEM —

THEY'LL FIND ME!