

The Right of Return, at Last

by Edward Said

The contradictory part of the issue is the snowballing effect of what is now a universal Palestinian demand heard literally all over the globe for the right of return. Petitions have been signed by the dozens, thousands of names in the Arab world, Europe, Africa and the Americas have been added to these lists on a daily basis, and for the first time ever, the right of return has been put squarely on the political agenda.

NOW that all the cheery atmospheres connected with Ehud Barak's tenure in office have more or less dissipated, and he or his party faces prosecution for campaign corruption at home, and an increasing demand for results abroad, the true face of his regime is emerging with startling, not to say disquieting clarity.

For me, one of the worst offenders in this moral blindness remains the Palestinian leadership, which has actually eased the way forward for Zionist arguments and plans, with scarce allowance for the sufferings of the huge mass of Palestinians who languish in camps, shanty-towns, and makeshift houses in Palestine and in too many Arab countries to be counted.

The issues in the by-now notorious peace process finally has come down to the one issue that has been at the core of Palestinian depositions since 1948 — the fate of the refugees who were displaced in 1948, again in 1967, and again in 1982 by naked Israeli ethnic cleansing. Any other description of those acts by the Israeli army is a travesty of the truth, no matter how many protestations are heard from the unyielding Zionist Right-wing (assuming that the Left is more likely to accept the truth).

That the Palestinians have endured decades of dispossession and raw agonies rarely endured by other peoples — particularly because these agonies have either been ignored or denied, and even more poignantly, because the perpetrators of this tragedy are celebrated for social and political achievements that make no mention at all of where those achievements actually began — is of course the locus of the Palestinian problem, but it has been pushed very far down the agenda of negotiations until finally now, it has popped up to the surface.

For the past several weeks two contradictory sets of happenings have occurred which, in their stark, irreconcilable antithesis, tell almost the whole story of what is wrong with an unyielding Zionism on the one hand, and what is just as seriously wrong with the peace process on the other. Barak and several of his faceless underlings have tirelessly been on record in Israel, in Europe and elsewhere to affirm their increasingly strident disavowal of any responsibility for Palestinian dispossession. Here and there, a more humane Israeli official will, for example, temper these disavowals

with an acknowledgment that Israel bears some responsibility for the "transfers" that took place in 1948 and 1967, but that "the Arabs" — who presumably are supposed to have evicted Palestinians too; the notion is too preposterous to require rebuttal — are also responsible, thereby preparing the way for a magnanimous offer for Israel to take back 100,000 of the nearly 4.5 million refugees who now exist in the Arab world and beyond.

But such individual declarations are remarkable for their infrequency and the lack of response they have engendered in Barak and his entourage, to say nothing of the Knesset majority, the settlers, and a dispiritingly large number of ordinary Israelis who seem to believe that whatever happened in 1948 they will never have anything to do with it. It's not their problem, and so why should they have anything to say? And that of course has precisely been Barak's negotiating strategy: to refuse any discussion at all of the refugee claim to return, repatriation and/or compensation. Recent revelations by an Israeli researcher that a bigger May 15, 1948 massacre than the notorious one at Deir Yassin took place in Tantura with over 200 Palestinian civilian victims shot in cold blood by Zionist soldiers has not shaken Barak's stony rejectionism an iota.

The contradictory part of the issue is the snowballing effect of what is now a universal Palestinian demand heard literally all over the globe for the right of return. Petitions have been signed by the dozens, thousands of names in the Arab world, Europe, Africa and the Americas have been added to these lists on a daily basis, and for the first time ever, the right of return has been put squarely on the political agenda. Assaad Abdel Rahman, the PLO's minister in charge of the refugee question for the peace process, has recently made some excellent strong statements about the absolute right of return for Palestinians evicted by Israel; these statements express the right kind of resolve and the right kind of moral indignation.

After all, Abdel Rahman says, a UN Resolution (number 194) has been affirmed annually since 1948; it allows Palestinians the right of return and/or compensation. Why should there be a compromise by Palestinians given the world community's unanimity? Even the US has supported the resolution, with Israel its

lone dissenter. The troubling thing, however, is that Abdel Rahman hints that the PLO leadership may do a deal with Israel on the refugees behind his back which, in view of the long history of shabby compromises whose net effect has been to sell out the people, is an allowable, not to say perfectly well-founded worry.

The one certain thing is that it is going to take a great deal of ingenuity, public relations spin-doctoring, and specious logic to convince any Palestinian that the deal to be made (as it will be) by the PLO is not in effect an abrogation of the right of return. Consider the logic of what has happened since 1991. On every major issue separating Palestinians from Israelis it is the Palestinians who have given way. Yes, they have achieved small gains here and there, but all one needs to do is to look at the map of Gaza and the West Bank, then visit those places, then read the agreements, then listen to the Israelis and Americans, and one will have a pretty good idea of what has happened by way of compromise. Lawless arrangements and a general abrogation of full Palestinian self-determination.

All this has been achieved because the Palestinian leadership has selfishly put its own self-interest, its over-inflated squadrons of security guards, its commercial monopolies, its unseemly persistence in power, its lawless despotism, its anti-democratic greed and cruelty, before the collective Palestinian good. Until now it has conspired with Israel to let the refugee issue slither down the pole, but now that the final status era is upon us all, there's no more room down there. And so, as I said above, we're back to the basic, the irreconcilable, the irremediably interlocked contradiction between Palestinian and Israeli nationalism.

Unfortunately I have no faith whatever that our leadership will in fact maintain its facade of resistance and continue to let Abdel Rahman and others like him carry the message forward. There is always another Abu Mazin-Yossi Beilin arrangement to be made, and if the Israelis can "persuade" Arafat's men that Abu Dis is in fact Jerusalem, why can't they also persuade them that the refugees will just have to remain refugees for a bit longer? Of course they can, and will.

So that leaves the unanswered question before us all: are the Palestinian people as a whole — you and I — going to ac-

cept this final card being played against us, or not? Unfortunately the short-run prognosis is not good, as witness the wasted opportunity to impeach the Authority last November after the petition of 20 was signed, several of its signatories unlawfully imprisoned, the rest threatened. Very little happened by way of repercussion, and the Authority got away with its brazen strong-arm tactics.

Arafat survives inside the Palestinian territories today for two main reasons: one, he is needed by the international supporters of the peace process, Israel and the USA and the EU chief among them. He is needed to sign, let's call it, his people. The second reason is that, he has bought off or threatened all organised opposition (there are always individuals who cannot be co-opted) and therefore removed them as a threat.

That leaves the Palestinian diaspora, which produced Arafat in the first place; it was from Kuwait and Cairo that he emerged to challenge Shukairy and Haj Amin. A new leadership will almost certainly appear from the Palestinians who live elsewhere; they are a majority, none of them feels that Arafat represents them, all of them regard the Authority as without real legitimacy, and they are the ones with the most to gain from the right of return, which Arafat and his men are going to be forced to back down on. We must encourage ourselves to do the work of inventing the desires and the number of refugees, cataloguing the property losses, compiling the list of destroyed villages, carrying forward the claims such as the petition now being circulated by BADIL.

The extraordinary engineer and scholar, Salman Abu Sitta has already done a lot of the work about property and demographics; others are following his lead, or supporting him. He works entirely on his own, or with the support of friends.

To expect Yasir Arafat to take advantage of all this loyal expertise and authentic commitment is of course a pipe dream. What he has done is to contract out the final status negotiations to a right-wing London think-tank, the Adam Smith Institute, which is paid for its services by the British Foreign Office, and has retained an American consulting firm, Arthur Andersen, to advertise its investment attractions.

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Courtesy: 'The Dawn' of Pakistan

India Unlikely to Oblige Clinton on Nuclear Issue

P. Jayaram writes from New Delhi

INDIA and the United States are unlikely to find meeting ground on the contentious nuclear issue during President Bill Clinton's visit here next month even as they seek to shed Cold War era inhibitions and forge a new and dynamic relationship.

The issue has been on top of the U.S. agenda since India's nuclear tests in May 1998 and Washington has indicated that there will be no sidestepping of the issue at talks that Clinton will hold with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

But the ten rounds of strategic talks between External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott have helped the two countries to reach a better understanding on each other's positions on the divisive issue.

Moreover, nearly two years after the emotive days following the Indian tests, when India was at the receiving end of international opprobrium, many strategic analysts here have veered round to the view that there is no reason why New Delhi should not sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). The statement by Indian defence scientists that there is no need for further nuclear testing and the government's stand that India would maintain a minimum deterrent have helped in arriving at this viewpoint.

But they acknowledge that for Vajpayee's government, Clinton's visit would not be the most appropriate time to endorse the CTBT, which it had opposed tooth and nail at the Geneva Disarmament Conference.

An official source said even if the government wanted to

sign the CTBT, as indeed was the indication before the Kargil conflict with Pakistan last year, it would not like to be seen to be doing so under pressure from the U.S., or any other country.

The more the pressure from the U.S. and other countries for India to sign the CTBT, the less the chances of India signing it, the source told India Abroad News Service.

Clinton will be the first U.S. President to visit this country since Jimmy Carter was here 22 years ago. The visit takes place as the two Cold War era antagonists seek to forge a new relationship on a broad front, particularly in the economic field.

Informed sources say that while no major breakthrough is expected on the nuclear front, during the visit, Indo-US ties are set to deepen in areas like energy, information technology, health and environment and in combating international terrorism.

New Delhi is well aware of Clinton's missionary pursuit of nuclear non-proliferation goals and his keenness to crown his last year in office with India's endorsement of the CTBT, but the Vajpayee government is unlikely to oblige him. The Indian government has repeatedly said that it would seek the widest possible national consensus before taking a decision on the CTBT.

Vajpayee recently assured a delegation of the main opposition Congress party that the government would not sign the CTBT until there was a national

consensus on it. He said the budget session of Parliament will have a full-fledged discussion on the CTBT and added the Clinton visit was not linked to CTBT.

The government should frankly tell the U.S. that there has been no national consensus on the matter so far and the rejection of the CTBT by the U.S. Senate made things very complicated, said Congress leader and former Minister of State for External Affairs K. Natwar Singh. "President Clinton should be told that there should be no effort to pressurise India in this direction because Indians don't like to be pushed around," he told IANS.

Before last year's Kargil conflict, New Delhi had appeared to be slowly but steadily moving towards signing the CTBT, an impression largely created by the Singh-Talbott talks.

While the Kargil conflict brought pressure on the government against signing the CTBT, the label of being "soft" for agreeing to the release of three extremists in exchange for the passengers of a hijacked Indian airliner has made the government more wary of signing the treaty.

But most economists say that the earlier the nuclear genie is put back in the bottle, the better for the country's economic development. "From the economic point of view, I don't see much point being a nuclear power," said S.D. Tendulkar, dean of the Delhi School of Economics.

But the problem, he told

IANS, was Indo-Pakistan rivalry, leading to unproductive defence expenditure which, he felt, should be curtailed and stopped. He noted that the U.S. sanctions after the Pokhran tests had affected investments because of what he called the "signalling effect."

Giri Deshingkar, of the Centre for Studies of Developing Societies, was also of the opinion that India should sign the CTBT and said the country was in a completely different frame of mind from the time when it had rejected it at the Geneva conference. "Nothing is gained by not signing," he told IANS and cautioned that New Delhi's refusal to endorse the treaty would send a wrong signal that it was getting ready to conduct further tests.

Former Foreign Secretary J.N. Dixit said while there was no reason for India not to sign the CTBT after the Pokhran nuclear tests, it should use the leverage to get the international sanctions lifted and funding by multilateral agencies resumed.

He noted that Clinton was coming to India despite differences over the CTBT and said these differences need not stand in the way of co-operation in other fields, like counter-terrorism.

Indian Communists and other left parties see the Clinton visit as part of the U.S. efforts to internationalise the Kashmir dispute and to put pressure on New Delhi to sign the CTBT. "They are putting pressure on us to sign the CTBT while at the same time they are unwilling to agree to universal disarmament," said S.D. Tendulkar, spokesman for the Communist Party of India.

—India Abroad News Service

An Extra Day!

Two thousand years from now in the year 4000, there is not going to be any Leap Year Day. In that year, February would end in 28 days.

A. H. Jaffor Ullah writes from New Orleans

there is "Spin Problem."

If the Earth would spin a tad slower than its normal spin, the year would be precisely 365 days instead of 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and a little over 45 seconds. Think of it, if the day were just a minute longer than it is, we would not need Leap Year Day. Can one stretch the time a little longer? How about redefining the unit of time? Instead of 1440 minutes making up the day (24 x 60 minutes), define one day equal to 1441 minutes. Our entire problem relating to "Spin Problem" will simply go away.

However, since we cannot change the unit of time, the next best thing the Roman pundits have devised is to compensate the world for losing approximately one-fourth day every year. This action however created another problem.

The Romans were smart enough to add one-fourth day to get the 365.25 days Julian Year. However, the discrepancy was still there. It takes the Earth to go around the sun in 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and a little over 45 seconds. But the Romans added an extra 11 minutes and 15 seconds to the calendar. This addition has caused the seasons to creep through the calendar once again, only slower, and in the reverse direction. According to a calculation, the Earth would run into the same problem as described earlier but this time once in about 23,000 years. Fortunately for us, things never reached that far. In Vatican,

during Pope Gregory XIII's time (1582) the calendar was about ten days out of whack. To correct the problem 10 extra days were added to the calendar, which has brought us thus far without any seasonal problem. A new rule (Gregorian) was put in place to make sure that the calendar maintains the seasonality. This rule is the following: If the year is divisible by 100, it is not a Leap Year UNLESS it is also divisible by 400.

It turns out that the Gregorian Rule is not a foolproof rule, after all. Following this rule, the Earth's season will again get six months out of whack once in 60,272 years. And to correct this, another rule was created. You might as well call this — the Modern Rule. According to this, if the year is also divisible by 4000, it is NOT a Leap Year. Therefore, two thousand years from now in the year 4000, there is not going to be any Leap Year Day. In that year, February would end in 28 days. You may ask: What this correction would do to the calendar? According to a calculation, the Earth's season would again get out of alignment once in every 3.5 million years (to be exact 3 million 565 thousand and 426 years). A long time, you might say.

Now that we are getting one extra day in this millennium year, have you considered how would you spend the day? I wished the world would celebrate this date by taking it

easy on this special day. We could have taken the day off pondering the mathematical incongruity that was imposed on us by Mother Nature. Nonetheless, that won't be the case. We now live in a very competitive world, indeed. Just the other day, I was reading The Wall Street Journal. One particular news item really caught my attention. It read: "Leap Day add \$25.26 billion to the domestic product of USA this year." LeapSource, a Phoenix outfit that provides web-based finance and accounting back office services computed this number. Reading this news item the corporate America is probably heaving a sigh of relief knowing that an extra \$25.26 billion worth of goods and services would be generated this year due to an extra day that was applied to this year's calendar.

As I was reading the Wall Street Journal's snippet of news, I immediately juxtaposed the news to what goes on in an ordinary day in impoverished Bangladesh. I doubt it very much that any politicians in Bangladesh would think about the contribution of this year's Leap Year Day to the GDP growth of our anemic economy. Why do I say this? Because most politicians in Bangladesh, those who are not elected to any public office, would look at one day thinking — could I call this day a *hartal* day? They would never think for a moment how much growth would be impeded by the curse of *hartal*. How many stomachs would go hungry because of the work stoppage? How many lives would be lost due to *hartal*? How many schools, college, and university students would sit idle at home not learning the skills that would be necessary for them to become a productive citizen of Bangladesh?

The author is a senior research scientist in America.

Women Photographers Recapture Their Stolen Image

by Philip Waruinge Ngunjiri

Tourists, commercial photographers and travelogue producers have long been pointing their lenses at the Masai people of east Africa. Now, reports Gemini News service, a group of women from this herding community have taken up cameras themselves to put their own message across.

KENYA'S Masai are among the world's most photographed people. Now they have seized the opportunity to put themselves behind the camera as well as in the picture.

"It was a case of 'enough is enough,'" says Lapket Olbeti, a member of a Masai women's photography group, which has been set up as part of a development project. "It was about time we took over the business and ran it ourselves."

The female photographers can focus on the benefits of their new skill, which is enabling them to portray themselves and convey their own messages while enhancing their social status and bringing their families material gains.

They hail from a storytelling culture and were quick to realise the possibilities of the new medium.

The tourists cameras seek to capture 'an exotic community', focusing on the Masai's multi-coloured beads and elaborate jewellery and young warriors resting on spears. Such images are featured in thousands of postcards and souvenir publications. The Masai women, on the other hand, seek to highlight the lives, struggles and achievements of their community of pastoralists who live in semi-arid regions of the Rift Valley.

The women belong to the Elangata Wuas Ecosystem Management Programme, which has more than 1,500 members, 600 of them women. The group is a partnership between the people of Lodikilani and Torosoi villages, about 100 kilometres south of Nairobi, and the Centre for Biodiversity of the National Museum of Kenya.

"The idea was a homegrown sustainable development process utilising local resources," says Mathijs de Vreede, a Dutchman who helped to set up the programme.

The photographers' work has been exhibited in Kenya, Germany and Scandinavia. "Many viewers have been amazed at the quality," adds de Vreede.

Among their products is a coffee-table book, *A View of Masai Women: Our Life*. It is selling well, especially in Nordic countries.

The women not only took the pictures but wrote the captions. They depict themselves in traditional women's roles: fetching water and firewood, building houses, tending goats and sheep and catering for the family.

One photograph shows a middle-aged woman carrying 30 litres of water in jerry cans. A baby is strapped to her body, and she must carry the heavy load 30 kilometres home.

"All I ask from my husband is a donkey," reads the caption. "It would make my work much easier. Carrying water like this causes severe backache and headaches."

Her husband need sell only one of his prized bulls from a herd of more than 100 to buy a donkey.

But social status is linked to the size of one's herd, and men are reluctant to part with their cattle. This is one of the problems the women have focused on.

"The book has awakened our menfolk, who have always taken most things we do for granted," says Martha Naphiphae, co-ordinator of the group.

Traditionally, women are not supposed to take part in



Masai decision-making. "This is one way of gaining experience in expressing our views," she adds.

When the book was being compiled, small groups of women were asked to consider the good and bad things in their lives, and to take pictures to illustrate these aspects.

"An insight into the needs and priorities of the women had been laid out for the whole world to see," says Naphiphae.

The Masai are traditionally semi-nomadic herding people of the Rift Valley of Kenya and Tanzania. The programme also encourages this group of women to grow their own vegetables.

"I don't buy vegetables any more," says one member, Ndinyo Nkala. "Instead, I use the money for buying for the family."

Other activities they are pursuing include ostrich farming, jewellery making, ecotourism

and community-controlled game shooting. They also make brushes from ostrich feathers which can be used to clean delicate electronic equipment.

The women share the money earned from photography and other activities. The income has brought many benefits to their families. For instance, many have built better homes.

"My husband was sceptical about me joining the programme," says Naphiphae. "But he is now proud of me. He sees me differently."

Joel ole Nkusus, a Masai elder whose wife owns a camera, comments: "We are now used to seeing our women snapping shots — just like the tourists."

— Gemini News

Philip Waruinge Ngunjiri is a Nairobi-based journalist specialising in environmental, developmental and social issues.

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NOT UNTIL I HAVE TO... JUST HEAD FOR THE CYCLES GROUP...



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