

Introduction: Countering the Nakba.

By Haidar Eid

“Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and ... compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property....made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.” *UN Resolution 194 passed in December, 1948 MidEast Web Historical Documents.*

www.mideastweb.org/194.htm

“Although the two regimes are different, Israel's laws and practices in the OPT certainly resemble aspects of apartheid, [. . .] and probably fall within the scope of the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.” *John Dugard, UN's Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, compares Israel to South Africa. Report Electronic Intifada. 27 February 2007.*

In 1974 the veteran Australian journalist John Pilger made a film entitled “Palestine is still the issue.”¹ The title of this film is the driving idea behind this collection of essays: Palestine is still the issue. What do Palestinian, American and anti-Zionist Israeli intellectuals, artists and academicians think of the various “peace processes” and failed solutions to 60 years of dispossession and Diaspora? Are there alternative solutions and is there an effective and legitimate resistance? This collection of analytical writing on the conflict is composed almost entirely of essays by intellectuals and activists critical of the dominant US/Israeli political ideology in the Middle East. By featuring voices of American, Israeli, and Palestinian intellectuals and activists from a broad cross-section of academic institutions and civil society organizations, this collection aims to provide an in-depth look at how alternative political programs and struggles can offer prospects for a just peace in Palestine.

Almost all contributors to this volume believe that the only just solution to the conflict is

the establishment of a unitary state in which all inhabitants are treated equally regardless of their religion and ethnicity. What is envisioned is a solution based on resolutions of international legitimacy which accord the Palestinian people at least some of their basic rights -- i.e., self determination, establishment of an independent state, return of dispossessed refugees, a significant part of Arab Jerusalem as their capital, and the removal of all Jewish settlements. That such a solution seems to be further away than ever is, ironically, the direct consequence of the Oslo Accords signed in 1993. Because there was nothing in these accords to prevent Israel from continuing land confiscation for Jewish settlement construction, nothing to prevent the continuing ethnic cleansing of indigenous Palestinians, and nothing to prevent the construction of the cyclopean Apartheid Wall which divides the West Bank into a series of disconnected Bantustans--- the point may already have been reached when a two-state solution is no longer possible. The establishment of a viable sovereign independent Palestinian state living side by side in peace with Israel – i.e. the “two state solution”-- would have required adequate areas of contiguous Palestinian land connected to each other, to Gaza, and access to Palestinian residential areas and the Holy Sites of East Jerusalem, all of which conditions are disappearing at an incredible pace. Hence the contributors to this volume are unanimous in their advocacy of the one-state solution—i.e. the establishment of a secular democratic state in Palestine in which ALL citizens are treated equally regardless of their religion, sex, and colour. ²

A comprehensive peace, within this context, means that Israel would have to acknowledge the right of the Palestinians to exist as a people and their right to self determination as well as their right to human life. Such an acknowledgement seems a far-off dream in light of the actual history. A comprehensive and detailed documentation of the statistics of this history is provided by Nur Masalha in “The Historical Roots of the Palestine Refugee Question” (in *Palestinian Refugees: The Right of Return*, ed. Naseer Aruri, London: Pluto Press, 2001, pp36-67). Among the catastrophic figures cited by Masalha are the following: At its birth in 1948, Israel dispossessed 800,000 Palestinians and massacred hundreds of others. In 1967 Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza, Golan, and Sinai, annexed Jerusalem and Golan, driving thousands more refugees from their

homes with napalm. In order to remove the PLO leadership from Beirut, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, and continues to expropriate Palestinian land, build settlements, and now constructs a gigantic Apartheid Wall. Israeli troops and settlers killed more than 2000 Palestinians during the first Intifada (1987-1993) and have killed more than 4000 during the current one, and continue to uproot trees, assassinate and/or imprison Palestinian leaders, ban and destroy books, demolish houses, and close universities. The totality of these practices, as Clare Brandabur points out in her article "Roadmap to Genocide", manifests a deliberate attempt to annihilate and dispossess the Palestinian people and therefore falls under the rubric of genocide according to the definition of Raphael Lemkin as formulated in *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Chapter IX "Genocide." Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).

In an article entitled "Israelis adopt what South Africa dropped," UN human rights repertoire John Dugard observed that the human rights situation in the occupied territories continues to deteriorate and called the conditions "intolerable, appalling, and tragic for ordinary Palestinians." Significantly, Dugard made shocking parallels between the situation in the Palestine and his country South Africa under apartheid: "Many aspects of Israel's occupation surpass those of the apartheid regime. Israel's large-scale destruction of Palestinian homes, leveling of agricultural lands, military incursions and targeted assassinations of Palestinians far exceed any similar practices in apartheid South Africa." (<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article6137.shtml/%22>.) What the late Edward Said in *The End of the Peace Process* (2000), finds "astonishing", is how far "after 52 years, supporters of Israel will go to suppress the fact that these years have gone by without Israel restitution, recognition, or even acknowledgment of Palestinian human rights and without connecting that suspension of rights to Israeli official policies" (*The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and After* (2000). New York: Pantheon Books. 25-26).

Nor is there a light at the end of the tunnel for the Palestinians; a solution that guarantees equality for all inhabitants of historic Palestine. Neither "Oslo Agreements," nor "The Road Map" guarantees their minimum rights: a sovereign integral independent Palestinian state, the Right of Return, Jerusalem as their capital, removal of settlements within the borders of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. And this is not to mention the

cultural rights of 1.3 million “Arab Israeli” citizens of Israel, as John Halaka's "Outsiders on the Inside" argues. Laws analogous to the Nazi Germany Nuremberg Laws (governing Jews under that state's Racial Policy asserting Aryan race superiority) and similar also to Apartheid South African segregation and Pass Laws, are used today to govern the Arab native inhabitants, whether citizens (Palestinians residing in Israel) or otherwise (West Bank and Gaza residents). In a cruel irony of history, the perpetrator this time is the government of Israel, a state founded as a homeland for the Jews who were victims of Nazism. Thanks to unconditional American support, whatever Israel says goes; it has ignored over five dozen UN Resolutions condemning or censuring it for its actions against the Palestinians, demanding that it end them. But Israel flaunts the rule of law, and gets away with it,: out of 80 American Vetoes used in the UN Security Council, 41 were in defence of Israel.

Critics of the Palestinians blame them for turning down every “opportunity” offered them by the occupier. A particularly deceptive example of such blaming is that the Palestinians “blew it” when they turned down Ehud Barak’s “generous offer” in Camp David in 2000. In fact, this argument is a lie that has been taken seriously even by those who should know that it is no more than propaganda. In many debate son TV and radio, and articles in main-stream papers, Zionist supporters of Israel insist that this was the case without mentioning that they have never read Barak’s offer simply because it was never documented! But the point is that the common assumption has been that the victims are to blame, not the Israelis, even though according to International Law the latter are the occupiers. While Barak’s “generous offer” was never published officially, Americans habitually give Israeli spokesmen the benefit of the doubt. As the distinguished American intellectual Noam Chomsky explains:

The Clinton-Barak stand (left vague and ambiguous) was hailed here as ‘remarkable’ and ‘magnanimous,’ but a look at the facts made it clear that it was - - as commonly described in Israel -- a Bantustan proposal; that is presumably the reason why maps were carefully avoided in the US mainstream. It is true that Clinton-Barak advanced a few steps towards a Bantustan-style settlement of the kind that South Africa instituted in the darkest days of Apartheid. Just prior to Camp David, West Bank Palestinians were confined to over 200 scattered areas, and Clinton-Barak did propose an improvement: consolidation to three cantons, under Israeli control, virtually separated from one another and from the fourth

canton, a small area of East Jerusalem, the center of Palestinian life and of communications in the region. And of course separated from Gaza, where the outcome was left unclear. ("On Israel/Palestine." Chomsky interviewed by Z/Net April 2, 2002.
www.comsky-into/interviews/20020402.htm.19k)

The essay in this volume by the late Tanya Reinhart was among the very last things she wrote before her untimely death. In her *Edward Said memorial Lecture of Adelaide University*, (2006) Professor Reinhart argues that Barak's package would have given Palestinians a non-sovereign, truncated "state" in return for a final termination of all rights and claims in historical Palestine, including the right of return. Either Palestinians give up sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian holy places in Jerusalem and relinquish the Palestinian Right of Return in exchange with a non-sovereign demilitarized Palestinian State in parts of the West Bank (amounting to less than 65%) and Gaza Strip (minus Jerusalem,) or reject the whole offer out right, which they did.

Where does that leave the national rights of the Palestinian people who have already accepted a political settlement based on international resolutions? The Palestinian people, who owned 90% of historic Palestine in 1948, are now "allowed" to take back 22%, according to UN resolutions 242 and 338. (UN Resolution 194 calls for the right of refugees to return.) In fact, the "missed opportunity" would not even consider the basic right of Palestinian refugees to return. And Israel has no political, legal, or moral responsibility for the plight of the Palestinians. The refugee issue is dealt with on "humanitarian" grounds, within the framework of individual cases of family reunification. This clearly illustrates Israel's attempt to relinquish all responsibility for the forceful emigration of Palestinian refugees and the destruction of Palestinian villages.³

Barak's demand that 80% of the present settlements be annexed to Israel constitutes a drastic division of the West Bank into four isolated cantons. The settlements are connected by bypass roads that are not only under complete Israeli control but also swallow up thousands of acres of Palestinian lands. Many of these settlements are built on Palestinian water aquifers, thus depriving Palestinians from access to water resources.

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In view of the facts on the ground in terms of the massive and growing Jewish settlements and the huge areas taken up by Jews-only roads and the Apartheid Wall, one may ask in all seriousness whether the Oslo accords and the Camp David proposals really constituted a serious Israeli attempt to find lasting solutions? Although to the colonized native Palestinians, whose rights are being determined by the US/Israel cabal, this might sound like a rhetorical question, it sheds some light on the discourse of domination that is prevalent in the Middle East at the turn of the Millennium. But there are more fundamental questions that need to be problematized. What needs to be emphasized, first and foremost, is the ‘bantustanizing’ and ‘apartheidizing’ nature of colonial Zionism. As Haidar Eid in his article "Alternative Story" holds, the severe damage done by the Oslo accords to the Palestinian situation, and their contribution to diverting international attention from the suffering of the Palestinian refugees, makes an objective appraisal more difficult. However, that is not to say that the international community does not hold responsibility in eliminating the roots of that suffering. The fact that some black South Africans accepted the Bantustan system did not convince the international community of the legitimacy and ‘humanity’ of apartheid.

Sixty years have passed since the establishment of the state of Israel and the dispossession and displacement of the Palestinian people; sixty years without a serious attempt to resolve a conflict that has caused pain and horror to millions of innocent people in the Middle East. With the end of the "two state solution," what we are left with is the South African and North Ireland model: a Secular Democratic State for all of its citizens.

¹ See John Pilger “Palestine is Still the Issue.” *Johnpilger.com: The Films and Journalism of John Pilger*. www.johnpilger.com/page.asp?partid=16 February 2008

² For more on the one-state solution see Ali Abunimah’s *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006); Virginia Tilley’s *The One-State Solution: A Breakthrough for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Deadlock* (Manchester: University of Michigan Press, 2005) and Ghada Karmi’s *Married to Another Man: Israel, the Palestinians and the One-State Solution* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

³ See the works of Israeli new historians:

Books by Benny Morris

(2008). *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*. New York: Yale University Press

(1988). *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press .

(2004). *The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem Revisited* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(2001). *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2001*. London: Vintage

(1994). *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Books by Ilan Pappé,

(2006). *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, London and New York: Oneworld

(2005). *The Modern Middle East*, London and New York: Routledge

(2003). *The Modern History Palestine, One Land, Two Peoples*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

(2003). *The Aristocracy: The Husaynis; A Political Biography*, Jerusalem: Mossad Byalik, (Hebrew),

(1992,1994). *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris

(1988). *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1951*, London: St. Antony's College Series, Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press,.

Books by Avi Shlaim

(1988). *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine*. Oxford: Clarendon

(1990 and 1998). *The Politics of Partition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

(1995). *War and Peace in the Middle East: A Concise History*. London: Penguin

(2000). *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. London: Penguin Books

(2007). *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace*. London: Penguin

⁴ Refer to Jimmy Carter's (2006) *Palestine: Peace, Not Apartheid*. New York: Simon and Schuster.