

EDWARD SAID

Palestine: Memory, Inequality & Power
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Edward Said, an internationally renowned Columbia University professor, practically invented the field of post-colonial studies. His great works *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* have been translated into many languages and are widely used in colleges and universities. *The New York Times* called him, "one of the most influential literary and cultural critics in the world." As one of the few advocates for Palestinian rights in the U.S., he was the target of vilification, death threats and vandalism. The *Economist* said he "repudiated terrorism in all its forms and was a passionate, eloquent and persistent advocate for justice for the dispossessed Palestinians." He was a trenchant critic not just of Israeli policies, but also of Arafat, the corrupt coterie around him and the despotic Arab regimes. He wrote: "While I have always advocated resistance to Zionist occupation, I have never argued for anything but peaceful coexistence between us and the Jews of Israel once Israel's military repression and dispossession of Palestinians has stopped." He felt strongly that intellectuals had a special responsibility to speak out against injustice, challenge power, confront hegemonic thinking, and provide alternatives. His friend Noam Chomsky said of him, "Said was one of the most remarkable and influential intellectuals of the last half-century. Much of his immense effort and talent was dedicated to overcoming the insularity, prejudice, self-righteousness, and apologetics that are among the pathologies of power and defending the rights of the victims." His memoir *Out of Place* won the New Yorker Book of the Year Award. His two books of interviews with David Barsamian are *The Pen & the Sword* and *Culture & Resistance*. Edward Said died in New York in 2003.

This is a very fraught moment to be speaking about human rights in the Middle East and those of the Palestinian people in particular. But it does seem to be in some ways a symbolically useful time for the purposes of my lecture. The United States of America has already sent a hugely intimidating military force to various Arab and non-Arab countries in the region surrounding Iraq. The frankly imperial idea behind that is, on one level at least, to disarm Iraq forcibly, and also to change its dreadful regime. The rest of the international community, not least among them the Arab countries of the region as well as some of the other permanent members of the Security Council, has been expressing varying degrees of disquiet and occasionally urgent disapproval. However, it's also clear that most Arab governments are too unpopular and intimidated to do anything but go along.

Certainly, it's the case that no one outside Iraq has suggested any iota of concern about Saddam Hussein and his government. It is the people of Iraq who stand to suffer the most and whose doubly and triply miserable fate is of the deepest interest to people all over the world, although you wouldn't know it from the American media. I'm sorry to say that none of this has had the slightest effect on what is an impervious, not to say granitic will on the part of a tiny number of members of George Bush's administration who plan to go forward with a war among whose stated intentions is the unilateral wish to bring American style democracy to Iraq and the Arab world, redrawing maps, overturning governments and states and modes of life on a fantastically wide scale in the process. That all this has very little to do with the enhancements of human rights in a part of the world especially rife with their abuse, in my opinion, is patently obvious.

Were Iraq to have been the world's largest exporter of oranges, there would have been no concern over its purported possession of weapons of mass destruction or its extraordinarily cruel and tyrannical regime. This is a war planned for resources and for strategic control, and whether or not it occurs, there is still some small room for doubt about that given the huge number of protests all over the world, a deeply encouraging sign, the U.S. or its government has at very least asserted its strategic dominance over the center of the world's largest known energy reserves from the Gulf to the Caspian Sea, and plans to reshape the area by pacifying threats to its dominance in countries like Syria, Iran and some of the Gulf emirates.

To threaten war with such belligerence and such a wasteful deployment of military resources is an abuse of human tolerance and human values. That it might in the end turn out to be only a display rather than an actual use of force only deepens anxiety about the kind of world we are moving toward.

As against those mighty facts, whether people are prevented from getting an education or from being allowed to move, express themselves, and organize freely without fear, either of intimidation, collective punishment, or assassination, may seem therefore like relatively humdrum if not entirely trivial issues. But they do pertain with a frightening parallelism, to both the people of Palestine and the people of Iraq. In either and both cases, my point here is to assert the universal applicability of human rights to those unfortunate people, given that since World War II, there is going up an impressive even formidable worldwide consensus that each individual or collectivity, no matter his or her color, ethnicity, religion or culture, is to be protected from such horrific practices as starvation, torture, forced transfer of populations, religious discrimination,

humiliation, extrajudicial political assassinations, land expropriation, and all manner of similar cruel and unusual punishment.

I want to affirm, also, that no power, no matter how special or how developed or how strong or how urgent its claims of past victimization and present mission, is exempt from accusation and judgment if that government practices such things. And finally, no people or individuals can be singled out as exceptions to these general rules so as to be considered in fact liable for such abrogations of human rights as those I've mentioned.

I have no power, so I must resort to the tools of education, writing, and speaking. By the same token, I want to reiterate my conviction here that the specific case of the denial of the human rights of the Palestinian people by the state of Israel, supported by the United States, cannot at all be justified on any – on any of the grounds routinely accepted by far too many individuals and governments who would be the first to object to similar behavior in other cases.

So far from Israel and the Palestinians being a special case of unusual and exceptional circumstances, I think the exact opposite is true, that because Palestine is perhaps of all places on earth the one more densely saturated with cultural and religious significance, precisely that reality makes it an instance of universality thwarted and flouted the universality of human co-existence, human acceptance of the other, and human construction of a just and fair society for all, and certainly not only some of its residents.

The point is that no state, no state at all is in my opinion entitled legitimately to object to these formulations, and certainly, no leader can state unarguably, for example, as George Bush has, that the United States is good and its enemies evil or as General Sharon has announced, and I quote now, that “We are placing no restrictions on our operations in the Palestinian territories. Israel is under no pressure. No one is criticizing us,” he says, “or has the right to do so.” I would submit that such sweeping statements of higher purpose and extraordinary impunity must be opposed and intellectually dismantled for the thuggish balderdash that such pronouncements really are, especially if they are intended to cover or explain or excuse or somehow justify barbaric devastation and vast ruin.

Yet the contrast between the immensely powerful and the relatively powerless is not so simple since the great outcry all over the world against the U.S. war today and the felt need by even American government spokespeople to reiterate a general American commitment to democracy and human rights, does in fact reveal a profound worldly awareness that aside from comfort and convenience, human beings today expect to be respected, their requirements for a decent life met, their wish recognized not to be tortured or detained unlawfully, their concern for their children and their livelihoods accepted despite the supposedly higher

priorities asserted by great power. All these, in theory at least, are rarely challenged head on, and considered to be human entitlements, even if such terrible abstractions as are used today – the national interest, the national unity, and so on, are affirmed as superseding individual rights. I don't believe they do and can never be allowed to.

This unattractive and unacceptable argument certainly now prevails in the U.S. where education and history, for instance, have become a profoundly ideological battleground for free proponents of a kind of heroic primitive white American nationalism and the much more sensible advocates of the multicultural, multiracial reality stressed, for instance, in his work by the prominent historian Howard Zinn. This is, after all, an immigrant society and to pretend that it's a derivation exclusively from England is a preposterous mistake.

This other American history that Zinn has looked at includes a bitter legacy of domestic slavery, imperial conquest, and terrible class inequality. So, the universally widespread conviction that everyone on earth deserves a modicum of human rights is only a symbolic moral power, perhaps too ill-endowed to take on so redoubtable a force as American global reach and its all too numerous local henchmen, and fearsomely neoconservative spokespersons who want so-called American values to rule the world, resistance and objections notwithstanding.

So, to speak about Palestinian rights in so skewed a context therefore may seem quixotic, and certainly the current impression that Israel and the United States have borne all before them in their stubbornly engrained hostility to full Palestinian self-determination reenforces the superficial impression. But I want to argue that is not at all there is to the whole truth. There are other accomplishments and realities also to be noted with positive approbation and admiration.

During my own lifetime, Palestinians, since the climactic events of 1948 when their society was destroyed and two-thirds of the population dispersed by the Zionist forces of the time and Israel was established, Palestinians have gone from the status of nonpersons to that of a universally acknowledged national collectivity, that is, a people, by virtue not of force of arms but of other means, some of which I want to rehearse here. If for now, the Palestinians are still a stateless people, dispossessed and for the most part exiled, it is because by those very unmilitary means, some of which are the mobilized force of memory, the power of images and the heroism and ingenuity of sheer persistence, Palestinians embody perhaps the most visible and certainly the most universal case of human rights abuses on earth today. There is no desire on my part to be fetishistically competitive about such a claim, so I won't go on about it any further, but I will ask you to keep in mind that a great deal of the agitation all over the world about the

upcoming U.S. war in Iraq is also concerned with self-determination for the Palestinian people.

I want, therefore, to talk about the visibility, not only of the Palestinians' presence as victims of injustice and human rights denial but of the equal force they represent on the world stage of a wrong that must be righted. That focus seems to me, an excellent way of characterizing the overall human achievement of the Palestinian people in the period after 1948 until the present.

Note that in all of the many amazingly different places, conditions and politics, that the approximately seven and a half million Palestinians now live in, and count them, there are the Palestinian citizens of Israel as a people under military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza since 1967, as refugees and stateless persons in several Arab countries, as refugees with various acquired nationalities scattered all of the world, including America, and as members of a dispossessed people, Palestinians have developed a moral and political solidarity with each other, nothing less in fact than a national identity, that it has been the goal of Israel to deny, obliterate, and refuse to acknowledge as sovereign.

To argue backward for a moment, let me cite only one recent example of what I mean by denial and a refusal to acknowledge. It was precisely that Israeli refusal that flawed the Oslo process that began in 1993. From the moment it was undertaken, it was undertaken alas with, in my opinion, unqualified and unprepared Palestinian representatives, who were delegated with a task that was designed not to restore but to further postpone and deflect the fulfillment of Palestinian aspirations. In this, neither Israel nor the United States since 1993, was moved by an acknowledgment of past injustices, nor by a spirit of contrition or of reconciliation. With their batteries of legal experts backed by the disproportional military weight of both countries and at the same time as more than double the preexisting number of settlements were being created on Palestinian land and more human rights abused, Israel and the United States divided and subdivided, occupied ever-diminishing bits of Palestinian territory into smaller and less viable units for the unfortunate Palestinian Authority to take over and rule, all under the misleading, not to say willfully deceptive, rubric of the peace process.

Was there ever any other intention than to draw it out and colonize more Palestinian land? Not peace at all, but pacification for a time. The Oslo Accords were alas far too much of a piece with several prior decades of Palestinian dispossession, house demolitions, land expropriations and attacks on civil society. As against that, there has been as I said a moment ago, a moral and political solidarity building up between Palestinians all over the world. Some of it was evident in the past week's worldwide protests. One of its manifestations and perhaps not its most significant one, is that today for example, there is a Palestinian cinema and

with it a kind of transnational visibility of a Palestinian person that would have been unthinkable three decades ago.

Visual symbols have played an extraordinary role in this reappearance of the Palestinian individual after years of absence and programmed national effacement. I don't want to rehearse here the steps taken by Israel inside former Palestine to systemically obliterate the centuries-old Arab presence along with its symbols and structures. I have described some of these on the juridical level so far as the taking over of land and property was concerned in my book *The Question of Palestine* where I discuss how Palestinian land, 90% of the territory of mandatory Palestine, – which was owned by Arabs who were then kicked out – was redefined as Jewish national land in the years between 1948 and 1950. The overall plan was to start Israel as if afresh, a state rising from nothing to take its place among the nations. In the affirmations of its renewed millennial identity, Israel managed, for quite a while, to remove the traces of Palestinian life for the most part, even though of course a large number of those traces remained as a remnant of people despite the expulsions of 1948, were there as a humbled and scarcely perceptible presence, ruled inside Israel by the military government until 1966. Even so, apparently innocent and objective a science and discipline such as archeology thereafter was complicit in the making over of the land and its markers as if there had never been any Arabs there.

This is chillingly described by Nadia Abu El-Haj in her recent book *Facts on the Ground – Archeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. Her argument is that in the process of providing Israel with an ancient, objectivized history, visible in archeological evidence, the traces of other more historically adjunct histories were ignored or simply moved away. What remained became evidence of a kind of essential Israel likeness giving the state a pedigree and a long-distant past with the intervening cultures and peoples pushed aside. That's archeology. Moreover, in a trilogy of powerful books entitled *A Land Without People*, first one, the second *The Expulsion of the Palestinians* and the third one, *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*, 1967 to 2000, the Palestinian Israeli scholar Nur Masalha has unearthed both the theory and practice of emptying the land of Israel of its indigenous inhabitants. Much of the pre-state Zionist ideology that mobilized Eastern European communities for the trek to mandatory Palestine was premised on the virtual absence of inhabitants from what was often depicted as either a completely empty or a hopelessly arid land awaiting redemption.

Later, or in some cases, simultaneously with that contention when the discovery of actual Palestinians could no longer be deferred or denied, there was a concerted effort to devise ways of spooking them away. Transfer was the main euphemism for that fantasy for which the war of 1948

provided field commanders and Ben-Gurion with a rich opportunity. As I said, two-thirds of the Arab population of Palestine was expelled, almost 800,000 people.

All of these things are amply attested to in the Israeli military archive as combed deciduously by a number of Jewish as well as numerous Arab researchers including Masalha himself. Since 1967 when Israel occupied the rest of historical Palestine, the desire to efface and/or repress what has remained of an institutionalized Palestinian life in the cities and villages of the West Bank and Gaza has remained and often explicitly stated Israeli goal recently hidden inside the polemics of a war for Israel's survival and a defense against terrorism.

But whether its new Jewish citizens, like it or not, Israel was always and still is encumbered by Palestinian memory which is one of my themes here. It's not as if a whole existence of a people can be easily wiped away like footprints in the sand. The sheer banality of such a possibility is too obvious to require more comment here. What I would like to note, however, is that as the resourceful Palestinian-Israeli sociologist Ahmad Sadi has shown in an excellent piece of historical and social synthesis, the more Israel has unilaterally exerted its tremendous force to bury the Palestinian past, as it were, there has been a painstaking collective and yet uncoordinated Palestinian memory that has maintained Palestinian history since the disaster or catastrophe of 1948 as a tremendously potent site of memory.

What has remained of vastly dispersed and disjunctive fragments of history since 1948 have been painstakingly collected over time as objects of memory, such objects as house keys, title deeds, photographs, letters, newspaper clippings, embroideries and so forth, and through film, fiction, poetry, oral discourse, critical and political analysis and scholarship, significant or traumatic collective experiences like the Deir Yassin, Kafr Qasim and Sabra and Shatila massacres and more recently the devastation at the Jenin refugee camp, the significant episodes of Palestinian suffering have been preserved along with a national life that bore and outlived them.

I remember writing in 1982 that whenever one of us during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon had an opportunity to speak plainly, there was a felt requirement to start narrating the collective national story as if from the beginning. No freestanding Palestinian narrative was available that could place before the world the chronological sequence of dispossession and catastrophic loss that has so disfigured and mutilated Palestinian life. Such a sequence has been interdicted in all sorts of ways, far too many times by such things as the carting off by Israeli soldiers of Palestinian archives from Beirut during the 1982 invasion, and only the other day, the Israeli occupation army similarly removed records, computers, hard drives, statistics from Palestinian offices at the Central

Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and elsewhere in the West Bank. Whether this was meant to put a stop to Palestinian national life just short of full ethnic cleansing, I don't want to speculate here, but such procedures are of a piece with claims that Israel is fighting for its life and that in occupying and destroying everything possible by tanks, bulldozers, F-16s and Apache helicopters, it is defending itself against terrorists who happen to have no army or viable defense or means of waging war of any description, that seems totally obvious.

In any event, the great narrative of Palestinian life hasn't yet been achieved or for that matter written, any more than the fulfillment of its logical, national aspirations have been fulfilled. Although it seems just as obvious to every Palestinian that there is no regression, no flagging, no turning away among Palestinians everywhere on this inexorable drive. Despite all the difficulties, the Palestinian nation in exile or in waiting has emerged with an unmistakable outline and personality of its own. The vast network of institutions, groups and associations scattered all over the world that sustains the continuity of Palestinian national life is an amazing thing. It has drawn not only on the mobilized energies of Palestinians everywhere, but also on the very widespread commitment to them of their friends, allies, and comrades all over the world.

The obstacles placed before the Palestinians on a daily, minute-by-minute basis, cannot be overestimated. Each of them is a conscious, willful abuse of human rights collected from literally everywhere in the history of colonial brutality against indigenous people, but now protracted into several simultaneous regimes of oppression. Yesterday, eleven Palestinians were killed by the Israeli forces. Every day, five people are killed, three people are killed, and this is usually done under the heading of extremists or terrorists or dismantling this or dismantling that. In the meantime, shops, houses, etc., are demolished.

But note please the utter inequality of power between stateless and dispersed Palestinians, and not just Israel but the collection of Arab states who have offended their humanity, who have dehumanized them but who nevertheless house them. In Lebanon, for example, 400,000 Palestinians are kept stateless, their medical needs largely unattended to, their ability to travel, work, study and reside as they please – all of them, universally according to human rights, are scandalously curtailed by statutory laws designed expressly for that purpose. In Egypt, similar conditions apply, only with smaller numbers of Palestinians involved.

In countries where Palestinians have been fortunate enough to acquire citizenship such as Syria and Jordan, especially, there are nevertheless invidious laws that discriminate against them as somehow different from the rest of the population. This is sadly true, even in the United States, where Palestinians are treated, especially after 9/11,

as a people apart. Inside Israel, non-Jewish Palestinians are underrepresented. They are juridically not allowed rights of immigration, land ownership and buying. These rights are automatically accorded not just to the Jewish citizens of the state but to Jews anywhere in the world.

Since late 2001, extra pressure on Palestinian Israelis as a community has been applied, even though they represent not a small number, a little over 20% of Israel's population. The 35-year-old military occupation, now the longest in modern history, has taken a terrific toll on the human condition of Palestinians on every level. In fact, short of genocide itself, I cannot think of a single one of their human rights as a people that has not been violated with a kind of refined viciousness designed to dehumanize, break their spirit and humiliate them to a degree that is even to someone who has been carefully but helplessly aware of this taking place, simply stupefying. And that George Bush and Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld should go on and on about the infractions of Saddam Hussein's regime and how he has abused human rights and flouted the regulations and resolutions of the United Nations – every one of those claims can be made against Israel in its treatment of the Palestinians.

What's made it worse is how much of this has been willfully shielded from witnessing eyes by propaganda about fighting for survival against terrorism, claims that in any other instance would defy the credulity of the most gullible intelligence. The sheer inequality between the average Palestinian and the average Israeli is breathtaking. Well, you'll say something about -something disapproving about those terrible suicide bombers, and I will agree. But I will also ask you, how many Israelis have had to live through the demolition by bulldozing of entire villages, blocks of flats, and shopping districts. How many have had to endure missile attacks by Apache helicopters or rockets from American-made F-16 fighter jets? How many Israelis have to be stripped and searched the way Palestinians are at checkpoints on an hourly basis? Neither Indians demonstrating against the British nor South African Blacks fighting against apartheid faced anything like this, nor for that matter, did they have to reckon with missiles, hundreds of tanks, helicopters, and jets, and rocket attacks fired into civilian areas as well as refugee camps with no defenses.

Consider that on the internet for January 23rd, and I picked this at random, one can read that 836 Muslim pilgrims to Mecca from Gaza were denied permission to leave. The Palestinian Catholic Cardinal was detained and prevented from leaving Tel Aviv Airport. Some towns on the West Bank have already sustained 214 days of curfew. That same day, 150 dunams of fertile agricultural land were razed in Gaza. On the same day, 3 people, two of them civilians, were killed and 6 homes demolished. On the same day, 62 shops in the village of Nazlat Isa were flattened to the ground, and on the same day, literally thousands of

people, many of them sick and aged men and women, children trying to get to school, doctors hoping to reach their patients and their hospitals, professors and undergraduates desperate to get to their classes with three universities closed - I've never seen in the American university a word said in all the talk about academic freedom, never a movement or a statement said about Palestinian freedom of education. Universities and schools have been closed systemically for the past 35 years and no one has the decency to put up a petition talking about academic freedom. Three universities closed.

Ordinary human beings shopping, looking for food or work, all of these detained every single day by the endless number of checkpoints, over 300 of them that punctuate the existence of Palestinians in the occupied territories. Three days ago, 12 Palestinians were killed, dozens more injured, and tens of houses demolished. In varying degrees of severity and brutality, this sort of thing has been going on there every day for 35 years, as in the meantime dozens and dozens of new settlements have been set up on Palestinian land, and 400,000 settlers are on Palestinian territory today. They crowd nearly every available hilltop.

Conversely, ask the question. How many Palestinian settlements have infringed on Israeli property? How many daily armed incursions, sometimes with 60 tanks at a time, have penetrated Israeli towns and villages? How many Israeli fields have been burned? For this kind of brutalizing assault, the United States and Israel designed what they called a peace process that lasted 10 years which was not even supposed to put a stop to this, but rather to make it seem slightly less unbearable - yes, a peace process requiring thousands of hours of negotiations to make Israel stop, which of course, it didn't.

You have to use your memory to keep in mind that since the current intifada began two and a half years ago, representations of all this have been available on the international media but they simply do not render anything like the harsh awfulness of what life is like for a Palestinian on a daily basis. Tim Llewellyn, a well-respected veteran BBC reporter, has recently shown that when one deplorable Palestinian suicide bombing in December took place, it was reported, he says as if it were, and I quote him here, "The beginning of a new cycle of violence." Whereas the fact that "75 Palestinians" had been killed in the preceding month, "14 of them children under the age of 18," simply went unmentioned as did the fact of military occupation and resistance to it. "The efforts of Israel spin doctors," Llewellyn says, "the U.S. government and media, in conjunction with a weak Arab communications operation, have usually combined to make Israel's broad version of events prevail. These continue to give the impression of a struggle between equal forces, a beleaguered and misunderstood Israel, occasionally forced into excessive measures to clamp down on 'terror' versus hordes of

recalcitrant Palestinians careless of 'Western' values and endemically suicidal for obscure religious reasons. "Equivalence," he says, "is at the heart of Britain's misreporting of the crisis," a charge that can be doubled and redoubled for American misreporting.

Making the astonishing illegality and inhumanity of Israel's policy of Palestinian immiseration even more difficult to recall or actually see, not only for outsiders, so to speak, but even for Israelis themselves, is that as Amira Hass, the admirable reporter who lives on the West Bank, writes in *Haaretz* on January the 22nd, and I quote, "A person could travel the length and breadth of the West Bank without ever knowing, not only the names of the villages and cities whose lands were confiscated to build the Jewish settlements and neighborhoods but even the fact that they exist. Most of their names cannot be found on the road signs. And from a distance the calls of the muezzins and the streets empty of people, after all, there is nothing to go out for, and if they wanted to they couldn't because of the curfew, the streets empty of people seem like an aesthetic decoration. A Jew traveling on the almost empty roads of the West Bank would think that there are no longer any Arabs: They do not travel on the wide roads used by Jews."

Both Ehud Barak and now Ariel Sharon have pressed ahead with the building of a fantastically expensive wall, most of it paid for by American taxpayers, which quite apart from destroying more Arab land and separating towns from their farms on a vast scale, is designed in fact to blot out the existence of the Palestinians. This is what is meant, in effect, by separation, a kind of hallucinatory delusion by which an entire people is removed from sight. Several members of the Israeli government speak without the slightest embarrassment about removing all the Arabs, as if, as they are insultingly called from the West Bank, Gaza and even Israel, as if those millions of Palestine's native inhabitants were so many insects to be swatted aside, out of sight and out of mind.

All of this has gone on with the full support, now amounting to over \$135 billion of the United States and us, its passive taxpayers. This tremendous assault on memory, to say nothing about current reality and human decency is quite without precedent or analogy in our post-modern times, not in former Yugoslavia nor in Africa, nor elsewhere in Asia and Australia. By contrast, I would want to remark that all these efforts on such a scale have not achieved their goal. In every possible way, the diverse affirmations of Palestinian identity far from being a negative or passive thing, have grown first and foremost, a culture of human rights and democratic process at the grassroots level that has included a sensitive register of the claims of memory, the demand for attention and justice despite the world's indifference, and a healthy awareness of the ironies of unequal power.

The other fact I'd like to note here is that even in the U.S. and parts of Western Europe, the notion of Palestine is associated invidiously with violence and terror. There is, as I said earlier, a serious contradiction to that superficial association in an ongoing and recognized Palestinian national life which has a quite peculiar if not outright tenacity to it that has simply overcome most of the terrible ordeals placed in its path. There is today a Palestinian cinema, a Palestinian literature, a Palestinian political, legal and scholarly discourse, a Palestinian theater, a Palestinian oral tradition, a large number of Palestinian grassroots organizations all over the world, in short, a Palestinian style that invigorates and informs all aspects of this far-flung community's existence.

The main thing about it, to say again, is that it is quite irreversible and is fully an organic part of the universal debate on human rights, injustice, and the narrative of human freedom. Moreover, it is situated in contemporary awareness in all sorts of interesting and noteworthy ways. The habit of considering everything about Palestinian identity as its bottom being anti-Israel and only anti-Israel, does an extreme disservice to the richness of the achievement I've been discussing here. As Rashid Khalidi has pointed out in his book, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, there was a coherent Palestinian national life well before the onset of Zionism, which despite the crisis of 1948 and the years of dispossession, has never really been broken.

Moreover, the universality of the drive for Palestinian self-determination has acquired an unbudgeable place in the world's agenda for liberation, peace, sustainability, and resistance. Every major United Nations conference for the past two decades, whether concerning the place of women, the environment, racism, human rights, disarmament, health and human development, has had an important place in it for the question of Palestine. Paradoxical though it may seem, the Davos meetings in Switzerland for governmental and corporate leaders, had an important component of its agenda devoted to Palestine, while at the other end of the world in Porto Alegre in Brazil, the anti-globalization meetings featured the presence there of a large Palestinian contingent whose attendance assured an additional progressive dimension to the debates there.

Any discussion of Middle East peace, including peace in Iraq, turns out inevitably to take us back to the question of Palestine. If in the period after 1948 as part of the post-war reemergence of Europe, Israel had the status of a progressive cause, it is now Palestine that is the progressive cause. One need only think of the support Israel had in the post-war period from such people as Sartre and de Beauvoir to judge how far from that position it has today fallen. As some of its homegrown critics like Amos Elon and Avishai Margalit have noted sadly that since the first intifada of 1987, Israel has been transformed dramatically into a symbol of oppression and injustice lumped together with

the United States for its imperial arrogance, its supremacist attitudes and for its inhumane policies towards the Palestinians over which it has ruled for so long.

Divestment campaigns reminiscent of the anti-apartheid movement of the '70s and '80s are now an important item on American campuses and in Europe. Numerous academics and intellectuals, artists and writers, discuss boycotts of Israel that were unthinkable a mere 20 years ago. Problematic and humanly a very compelling issue: the challenge posed to conscience and consciousness by the Palestinian people raises a whole raft of questions about the post-Cold War political order that are quite unique in their density and difficulty.

Contentious and noisy though some of these may be, I want to bring this lecture to a close by looking at three of them as dispassionately as I can. I won't minimize my partisanship at all, but I also won't let it get in the way of a universalizing and appreciation of the issues as I can.

If it is true, as I firmly believe, that the cause of Palestine and of Palestinian human rights in particular, is one of the great idealizing symbols of our time, it is just as true that its bristling complexity is partly what makes it so. There are at least three very difficult, very thorny problems that I want to look at now, not from the viewpoint of a policy expert which I'm not, offering solutions and pragmatic answers, but rather from the perspective that I can bring that of a humanist and intellectual who is profoundly engaged in the matter but who is independent and I would like to think as free as it's practically possible to be of doctrinal or ideological blinkers.

Take the matter of victimhood as a start. For a Palestinian like myself who has had the most fortunate and the most luxurious of lives compared with the overwhelming number of my refugee compatriots, or those who have had to live under Israeli rule for decades and decades, it is still difficult for me to minimize how much more Palestinians have been sinned against than as a whole they have sinned. How much they have suffered terribly in an unacknowledged silence even today. As of this moment, not a single major Israeli political or intellectual figure has articulated any serious regret or contrition, to say nothing of accepting responsibility for the disasters and sustained human suffering of the Palestinian people. I know nothing at all like it in contemporary history, nothing at all quite like this amazing stone wall of obduracy and denial. And yet, I must also say that the legacy of persecution, genocide and anti-Semitism that is so much a part of Israel's history, is a background to be figured in and contended with by Palestinians just the same. Two communities of suffering I have called them, but one must I think make clear that at the present time, only one community has the tremendous balance of power in its favor, the other is, so to speak, the victim of the former victim. Israeli policies, as well as the meditations of many Western liberals who feel a collective

guilt for Christian and European anti-Semitism, nevertheless must be able to disentangle the past from the present, to make very clear distinctions between respecting the appalling past injustices heaped on Jews historically on the one hand and on the other, simply excusing what the state of the Jews has done to the entire Palestinian people ever since. There is simply no earthly or divine dispensation that would excuse a state or a people for wreaking havoc upon another while pleading the travails of its own past as an excuse.

Sharon's ideas are at least clear in that he believes, like George Bush, that his people own the land and the world for historical biblical reasons and that in making every effort to appropriate all of it at present and retrospectively, Israel is neither bound nor restrained by ordinary conventions of proper justice and proportionality. There are many Israelis, individuals and NGOs, groups, associations, that have tried to fight this. My argument here has been to say that such claims of unrestrained behavior - as Sharon says, we can do anything we like, nobody is entitled to criticize us - my argument has been to say that such claims do not at all correspond with universalism or the idea that human rights cannot be manipulated to accommodate what is a record of patent brutality and cruelty. Palestinians have been displaced. They have had their society shattered. They have had to live under military occupation. Their lands and lives today are systemically torn apart. There are no two ways about it, I believe, which is not to say that we must overlook, simply overlook the tragic history of the Jews. On the contrary, I would always want to say that as a Palestinian I should make my case to defenders of Israel on the basis of and taking full account of, and making due acknowledgment of, the history of discrimination against Jews. That kind of policy should never, ever be visited on anyone for any reason at all, least of all by Jews in the name of their safety and independence.

The second problem is the one concerning the clash between two different peoples, two different cultures. Cultures, peoples, and civilizations are not watertight, inert, unchanging things. Exactly the opposite is true, and if there is such a thing as culture or nationhood at all it is that each is and always will be enmeshed, constantly interacting and intertwined with other cultures and nations. Allowing for differences in kind, countries and peoples cannot really be separate and stand apart from their environment. It was historically one of the failures of British imperialism that in the Indian subcontinent, in Palestine, in Cyprus, in Africa, and even in Ireland, that it adopted the practice of partition or as it has been called, divide and quit, thereby leaving matters worse off than before separation.

Building walls, therefore, are a kind of folly that ought to be exposed exactly for what they are - namely, a delusion that neither can be made fully to work in theory or in practice. Ignorance of the other is not a strategy for

survival. All nationalisms at their most feverish and embattled fail this crucial test of awareness – a failure by no means limited to so-called underdeveloped or fanatical ideologies, cultures, or religions. Historically, Palestine is a palimpsest of an enormous number of peoples and civilizations, each of them leaving traces and effects that have lasted for many centuries. It must be said again and again that everything we know about ancient Palestine, for instance, speaks to a rich multiplicity of peoples and tribes, not just of Israelites but of Canaanites, Philistines, Jebusites, Moabites, and many others.

To extrapolate from that and say only one people dominated and is therefore entitled to lay exclusive claim to Palestine today, is simply a tragic misinterpretation and betrayal of something far richer and interesting. One can therefore interpret that history inclusively, giving rise to complexity and universalism, or far more narrowly as the exclusive possession of only one people and culture who prefer unending war against others to mutual recognition and coexistence. Civil wars are much more bitter and unyielding than any other kind. I think that's the essence of the problem we face today, namely whether as some believe Palestine ought to become and thereafter remain the principal homeland of just one dominant people, or whether it can become the homeland of the people who actually live there, regardless of race and religion, even though for the time being they are locked in mortal combat. I don't have an answer to that solution, but I do think that the way things are going now, this opposition, this deep antagonistic, adversarial relationship is infinitely worse than what I and many others have tried to struggle for the notion of coexistence and equality between two peoples who appear now to be locked in mortal combat.

The final point I'd like to mention is the antithesis between present bitter antagonism and future reconciliation. Antagonism is the structure that today binds Palestinians with Israelis in the land and in the diaspora. Neither people have been blessed with a Mandela nor even a De Klerk. We are very far from having a truth and reconciliation commission. The number of visionaries who have articulated thoughts that go beyond the wretched impoverished opposition is tiny if they exist at all. Yes, there have been Israelis and Palestinians who have tried together to work against injustice and intolerance but they are a minority, but that need not always be so, and there are other models than that of civil war.

I for one am full of optimism despite the darkening sky and the seemingly hopeless situation for the time being that encloses us all. Thank you.

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