



PROJECTING JERUSALEM

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In May 1991, I was invited by the University of Capetown to deliver the A.W. Davies Academic Freedom Lecture which, as its title suggests, made the claim for academic freedom at a time when there was very little of it. Apartheid had still not ended, although a few months earlier Nelson Mandela had been released from prison after twenty-seven years. It was possible to meet with Mandela quite briefly; he was then at the center of national and international efforts to lead South Africa from apartheid into a nonracialist new state. After seeing him, I spent about an hour with his comrade Walter Sisulu who, like Mandela, had spent a very long time in prison and recently had been released. We discussed the history of the African National Congress's struggle, now for the first time in its history in the ascendancy; it was for me a deeply illuminating discussion with obvious points of difference and comparison with the Palestinian struggle, then, as now, very much *not* in the ascendancy.

The warmth and cordiality of my reception by Sisulu was slightly disturbed, however, by a copy of Teddy Kollek's coffee-table book about himself and Jerusalem propped up on a table. It was the only book in

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sight, so I wasn't wrong, I think, to conclude that with it Sisulu was making a point intended for me. After my visit I mentioned to one of Sisulu's advisers the dissonance I felt because of Kollek, who to most Palestinians is a symbol of Israel's annexation policy. She later told me that Sisulu's idea had been to make me feel more at ease by displaying Kollek's book: Kollek, Sisulu had said, was a representative of liberalism and of Arab-Jewish cooperation, and he had wanted to show his support for that process too.

Alas, I never saw Sisulu again and never had a chance to inform him, for instance, that only a few days after the Israelis conquered the Old City in early June 1967, Kollek, along with Moshe Dayan, threw out almost a thousand Palestinians from their ancestral dwellings in the Haret al-Maghariba, razed their homes, and built the monumental plaza that now stretches before the Western Wall, an area that has thus become *Arab-rein*, purely Jewish. While I was in South Africa I had heard about similar tactics by Afrikaaner officials in downtown Capetown, which had formerly contained large numbers of Black and Colored peoples, who had been moved out to the townships, their districts destroyed, so that the inner city could remain purely white.

How was it that instead of seizing on this extremely similar episode from Kollek's past, Sisulu had instead fastened on his carefully marketed international image as a humane, liberal, pacifying man? This image, of someone whose open-collared wisdom and improvisatory style endeared him to the world, has made Kollek the overriding symbol of Jerusalem—Israeli-held Jerusalem, it is true, but somehow everyone's mayor and honored as such everywhere.

I need not dwell for long on how poignantly and ironically this episode resonates as we consider the current status of Jerusalem and the future of the peace process. In 1991, Jerusalem already had been annexed by Israel for twenty-four years, its topography, environment, and historic aura massively intervened in, forcibly changed, demographically tampered with. Yet what had communicated itself of this unpleasant history to the outside world was a cheerful symbol of pioneering, humane enterprise. The first thing to be noted, then, is not just Israel's power to do what it did in the face of initial resistance and international demurrals—there were, after all, a number of United Nations resolutions protesting unilateral Israeli measures in Jerusalem—but its ability also to have communicated to the world that what it did so pre-emptorily set

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right all the piddling objections that might have stopped other countries. Israel was thus able to project an idea of Jerusalem that contradicted not only its history but its very lived actuality, turning it from a multicultural and multireligious city into an "eternally" unified, principally Jewish

city under exclusive Israeli sovereignty. Only by doing so first in projections could it then proceed to the changes on the ground during the last eight or nine years, that is, to undertake the massive architectural, demographic, and political metamorphosis that would then correspond to the images and projections.

The Loss of the City: 1948 and 1967

This process of projecting first, building and displacing later, began in 1948 with what was then known as West Jerusalem, the part of the city in which I was born and where for a time I grew up. It is crucial to recall here that, as Rashid Khalidi put it in his 1990 Antonius Lecture at St. Anthony's College, "much of what today is commonly thought of as 'Israeli West Jerusalem' in fact consisted of Arab neighborhoods before the fighting of the spring of 1948, when over 30,000 of their inhabitants were driven out or fled from their quarters like [Upper and Lower] Baqa', Qatamon and Talbiyya, several months before some 2,000 Jews were forced out of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City."

Before returning for a visit in 1992, I had last been in Talbiyya, where the family house still stands, forty-five years earlier, in late 1947. My oldest cousin Yousif remained in the house until early 1948, but with a young and pregnant wife he soon found it difficult to get in and out of Talbiyya, which was in a different zone from his business near the Old City walls. He then moved to a rented house in Baqa' where he remained till late April. By then, the area had become unlivable: The panic caused by the Dayr Yasin massacre on the outskirts of Jerusalem on 9 April was amplified by the fall of Haifa and the Palestinian exodus from the city later in the month. Since early spring Haganah patrols with loudspeakers would periodically make the rounds in West Jerusalem announcing that the whole area was about to fall to Jewish forces and that residents should leave. Shooting and bombing at night frightened the mostly unarmed and totally unorganized Palestinian residents. What made matters worse was that the Palestinian leaders had left by the end of April. There was no protection, and the Mandate government, still nominally responsible for providing law and order, seemed also to have abandoned the Palestinians to their well-armed and organized Zionist opponents. When my cousin took his wife to safety at the end of the month, he asked a single male relative of ours to say in the Baqa' house. In the meantime the house was broken into by the Haganah, and because they found my cousin's hunting gun they first beat, then imprisoned the hapless relative for six months. And of course they simply commandeered the property, like all other Arab properties.

None of this concrete history of loss ever made it into official records of Israel's War of Independence, as it is rather callously called, and the

world heard little from people like my cousin who, in the years after 1948, were too engrossed in the daily struggle for survival in new and usually hostile environments. Jerusalem, *Israel*, quickly accounted for much of the world's approbation after 1948. This, after all, was the most famous city of a country that was celebrated as one of the great postwar achievements; the country that made the desert bloom, farmed the wastelands, redesigned the environment, created democracy. It remained for a later generation of Israelis, the so-called revisionists like Benny Morris, Tom Segev, and others, to reveal some of the costs of Israel's creation borne mainly by the essentially silent and unheard Palestinians. Moreover, only in the past year have some Israeli cabinet records for 1948 come under scrutiny. They, too, tell a tale of programmatic policies designed to remove Palestinians, officially erase their traces, consign them to legal and institutional nonexistence.¹

It was East Jerusalem's turn in 1967. Within a month of the June conquest, the barrier between East and West had been eliminated and East Jerusalem and its surrounding villages had been engulfed in the city's new municipal boundaries, extended to twenty-eight square miles. Kollek took over the city council, the Arab component was summarily dissolved, and over the years the two halves of the city were welded together. Although the Palestinian population doubled from 70,000 in 1967 to about 150,000 in the early nineties, they were allowed to build on no more than about 10 percent the land. Land expropriations in and around Jerusalem have been massive and systematic, but the housing built has been for Jews, not Arabs.² The ring of massive (and massively ugly) Jewish settlements that surround the city dominate the landscape, stating the provocative idea that Jerusalem is, must be, will always be a Jewish city, despite the existence of a sizeable, albeit disabled and encircled Palestinian population. Although East Jerusalem has been annexed, the Palestinian residents have the legal designation of "resident aliens," and the question of whether or not they will be allowed to vote in the elections being negotiated by Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) has been a thorny one.

It is a sign of Palestinian powerlessness and, it must be said, collective incompetence that to this day the story of Jerusalem's loss both in 1948 and 1967 has not been told by them, but—insofar as it has been told at all—partially reconstructed either by Israelis sympathetic and unsympathetic or by foreigners. In other words, not only has there been no Palestinian narrative of 1948 and after that can at least challenge the dominant Israeli narrative, there has also been no collective Palestinian projection for Jerusalem since its all-too-definitive loss in 1948 and again in 1967. The effect of this quite extraordinary historical and political neglect has been to deprive us of Jerusalem well *before* the fact.

Israeli Plans, Palestinian Insouciance

Meanwhile, Israel's building spree all over Jerusalem's gently rolling hills, its once green valleys, continues even as we speak. High-rise hotels and office buildings right up against the ancient walls blot out everything Arab and Muslim in keeping with the aims of the lamentable Likud mayor Ehud Olmert, who makes one almost sentimental about Kollek. Jerusalem in its current expanded form accounts for about 25 percent of the West Bank. Roads, apartment houses, malls, and the like are creeping up everywhere, so much so that the five kilometer "urban distinction" between Bethlehem and Jerusalem is being erased.³ On the other hand, the closure of Jerusalem to the inhabitants of Gaza and the rest of the West Bank has created great hardship since, as Israel well knows, East Jerusalem is the hub of the West Bank; any design terminally to fortify, isolate, and incorporate it into the scheme of "separation" now being pursued by the Labor government in effect means amputating it from its natural connections with the rest of the Palestinian territories, as well as gouging out a gaping hole in the territories that would permanently impair them.

But this, I am sorry to say, is exactly Israel's plan which, in effect, is an assault not only on the geography of the city but also on its culture, history, and of course religions. For whatever else it may be, historical Jerusalem and indeed Palestine is a seamless amalgam of cultures and religions engaged, like members of the same family, on the same plot of land in which all has become entwined with all. Yet so powerful and, in my opinion, so socially rejectionist is the Zionist vision that it has seized on the land, the past, and the living actuality of interrelated cultures and traditions in order to sever, carve out, and unilaterally possess a place that it asserts to be uniquely its own. I will not deny what many scholars and religious experts have said, that Jerusalem occupies a special place in the Jewish religion and tradition, perhaps even more special than that of any other single group. Certainly for the last 3,000 years there has been a Jewish presence and, for a short period before and shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, there was a Jewish kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem. But the continuous Muslim presence and rule in Jerusalem has been longer, and there has been a very dense Christian presence as well. Indeed, during its recorded history of some 10,000 years, Jerusalem has had an almost unimaginable series of conquerors; coexisting traditions have maintained their presence, sometimes harmoniously, sometime precariously. To override all this by saying that only the Jews have a right to exclusive sovereignty over the city flies

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in the face of historical fact. For Israel—after all a modern state in the late twentieth century—to claim Jerusalem as its eternal undivided capital to the exclusion of the Palestinian population does justice neither to the nobility of the city’s unparalleled aura and grandeur, nor to its unequivocally rich-textured history of religious, cultural, and even political significance.

But it is one thing to examine the patterns of the past and quite another to confront the coarse interjections of the present, those, that is, which Israel since 1967 has adopted in Jerusalem. Israel’s plan for Jerusalem is nothing less than to dispossess Palestinians and turn them into a numerical minority, at the same time implanting a fortified Jewish presence that will dwarf or marginalize all the other of the city’s myriad actualities. Israel is aided and abetted in this plan by the stampede of members of the U.S. Congress who have started, as part of the feeding frenzy that descends on elected American officials as the campaign season approaches, a drive to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thereby breaking with a constant in U.S. foreign policy since 1948. It is true that a combination of internal and international pressures stopped Israel’s most recent expropriations in Jerusalem, but these measures were only “suspended” pending further ministerial investigation, leaving Israel with the option of taking more land in different circumstances at a later date. Indeed, what is remarkable is not just that, with the United States employing its Security Council veto to protect Israel’s delinquent behavior, the international community seems powerless to say or do anything, but that the Arabs and Muslims together, plus especially the Palestinians, have yet to mobilize their considerable resources. Why, for example, was the Arab League summit organized as a response to Israel’s announced expropriations summarily canceled? And why, despite endless evidence proving Israel’s bad faith, does the PA supinely proceed with its negotiations, all the while doing absolutely nothing either locally or internationally to mobilize Palestinians against Israel’s continued assault on Jerusalem?

To answer these questions we must first ask why in the Declaration of Principles (DOP) itself Jerusalem, already annexed illegally and aggressed against in all sorts of ways, was split off from the West Bank and Gaza and left, or rather conceded, to Israel from the outset of negotiations? The answer must lie in two closely connected facts: that Israel, being much more powerful and backed to the hilt by the United States, simply unilaterally reserved for itself the right to do what it wished in Jerusalem and elsewhere; and that the Palestinians made this and many other concessions because they were convinced that they had no alternative.

There is a valuable insight into the mentality that produced so catastrophically supine an attitude in Hanan Ashrawi’s *The Other Side of Peace*. Near the end of the book, Abu Mazin, the chief Palestinian nego-

tiator of the DOP, tries to allay Ashrawi's dismay at the text by telling her that after the document is signed she can bargain with the Israelis to try to get back the things the Palestinians conceded. Burhan Dajani, in his scrupulously careful study of the Oslo Accord,⁴ does well to remind us that it took the sovereign country of Egypt five years to win back the one square kilometer area of Taba, and this with a mobilized foreign office, enormous experience in diplomacy, and little interest in Taba by Israel. It is also perhaps worth recalling that the PA usually negotiates without consulting lawyers, with no experience whatsoever in settling international disputes, and with no real conviction in actually winning anything at all, except what Israel might deign to throw its way. The problem of Jerusalem in the peace process today is therefore largely a problem of the incompetence, the insouciance, the unacceptable negligence of the Palestinian leadership which has in the first instance actually agreed to let Israel do what it wishes in Jerusalem,⁵ and in the second instance evinces not the slightest sign that it is capable of comprehending, much less executing, the truly herculean task that is required before the battle for Jerusalem can really be joined.

What Can Be Done?

If, then, Jerusalem has been taken from the Palestinians by Israel, dispossessing them of it, what are the values and principles that need to be asserted? What are ways by which it can be repossessed in the future? Jerusalem, for all its vaunted sanctity and importance, is no different from the other occupied territories in principle: that is, according to international law, it is not Israel's alone to dispose of, or to build in, or to exploit to the exclusion of Palestinians and others. From the outset, then, we need a clear statement of purpose to guide our way, and if this in effect involves rethinking and redoing Oslo, then so be it. Israel has been reinterpreting, or rather violating, Oslo all along.

But simply to speak about East Jerusalem mechanically as Arab is not enough. I myself do not at all believe it is in our interests as a people to introduce another division in a city that has remained ethnically separated albeit municipally glued together in the manner that Israel has done it; I think it would be much better to set an example and provide an alternative to such methods as Israel's by projecting an image of the whole of Jerusalem that is truer to its complex mixture of religions, histories, and cultures than the one of Jerusalem as something that we would like to slice back into two parts. Of course East Jerusalem is part of the occupied West Bank, and this point needs to be made over and over again; as such therefore it has to be reconnected with the whole issue of liberating Palestinians from the burdens of Israeli occupation. But beyond that Jerusalem is the one place, which, for the reasons I gave earlier, really can be a site of coexistence and sharing between us and

the Israelis. For that reason, we should insist on speaking of Jerusalem as a city with joint sovereignty and a joint and cooperative vision, and in fact we are already doing so, based on the principle of our self-determination and independence as a people and as a society.

The present PA is, of course, incapable of providing a guiding vision on Jerusalem because it has become the prisoner, if not also the dutiful enforcer, of the Israeli occupation regime. I am firmly convinced that Israel and the United States have factored in Mr. Arafat's chronic disabilities and incompetencies and now count on him to continue to do what he has always done, with the same terribly mixed—I speak euphemistically, of course—results.

It therefore falls to the diaspora Palestinians, who constitute the majority of Palestinians in the world and who produced the PLO in the first place, to take the initiative on Jerusalem and the other occupied territories. We cannot accept the logic that the only role left for the Palestinians is to capitulate and accept the dictates of the strong, or that since the agenda is now peace—albeit peace on Israeli and American terms—we must forget our history of sacrifice. We cannot remain silent about reparations and restitution during negotiations that virtually require us to give up our own identity just to satisfy the paranoid demands of Israel's security obsession. We must, I believe, in our own minds take that very important first step, which is to tell ourselves that our goals are realizable and can—indeed must—be worked for. After all, Resolutions 242 and 338, the supposed basis of peace between Arabs and Israelis, are being contravened every day by Israel: Can these resolutions not ever again be mentioned? In addition, we need some fair and reasonable accounting of our assets. There is, as I mentioned, a considerable Palestinian rump in the diaspora, a group that has produced much that today's Palestinians possess, materially and morally.

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We constitute a formidable nongovernmental resource, and this must at last be mobilized. Jerusalem, so central to the land itself, is now the front line in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination. Therefore it must be the hub of all our efforts—subsidized, dramatized, and cam-

paigned for unstintingly, *collectively*. Whatever else it may be, Jerusalem has the merit of illuminating the difference between an exclusivist, narrowly ideological perception of history and society, and one we need to formulate and work for, a vision that is catholic, inclusive, and liberating. And it is also the place where the Israelis have staked their most determined, most uncompromising efforts.

I do not see how anything can be done to inhibit or somehow affect Israel's measures in Jerusalem without attending to the informational-ideological framework it has erected around the city. For it is in the

conceptual framework around Jerusalem that Israel is most vulnerable to intellectual and moral mobilization by its opponents. A coordinated, well-planned information campaign must be devised to bring the facts to the attention of Jerusalem's enormous worldwide constituency. As no one needs to be reminded, facts never speak for themselves. They must be articulated, disseminated, reiterated, and recirculated. We must take seriously the enormous impact of preparing minds and hearts with facts and figures, with information that counteracts the pernicious falsifications about Palestinians and Jerusalem that Israel has put about. This is something that, for reasons that I find completely mysterious, Palestinian leaders have always misunderstood, particularly at times like this, when Israel relies so heavily on the virtual absence of Palestinian voices and counterrepresentations. Why, for example, have Israel's plans for the festival celebrating Jerusalem's "3,000 years as a Jewish capital" gone without a serious organized response from Palestinians and others? To suggest that there has been an unbroken 3,000 years of Jewish sovereignty in the city is a fanciful projection foisted on minds assumed to be ignorant and gullible. Unless Israel's assertion that Jerusalem is and always was an essentially Jewish city is shown for the fraudulent claim it is; unless Jerusalem is reprojected and represented as a jointly held capital, not as an exclusively Jewish capital, the city will continue to be hostage to Israel's deeply offensive designs.

There is, in short, a generously eclectic history of Jerusalem to be excavated and inserted into the debate now dominated by Israel; there is also a redoubtable set of other, non-Jewish interests to be made clear; and there is, at the very least, a truer map to be drawn and clarified and mobilized around. Tacit acceptance or silence in the face of uncontested assertions must be dispelled and dissolved. This means explicitly advancing a much clearer, more principled Palestinian view of peace and, at the same time, rigorously criticizing the origins as well as the course of Palestinian participation in the negotiations.

Such a program does not seem to me either a quixotic or an unrealistic strategy to pursue. We have a gigantic Islamic and Arab constituency, a Western constituency, a Christian one. There is also a considerable, though partly submerged, readiness on the part of other Europeans, Americans, some Jews, and others to listen to an alternative, less unpleasant course by which real peace can be achieved. It is also the case that many Arabs in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, North Africa, the Gulf, and elsewhere are not ready simply to normalize or complacently fall into bed with Israel, no matter what the various autocrats say who somewhat mysteriously run things in a politically ossified Arab world. Obviously there is apprehension about stimulating (or even tolerating) debate on ideology, since that might spill over into criticism of Arab governmental policies on civil life, nationality, and human rights. But a

real campaign for Jerusalem cannot, in my opinion, be deterred by such considerations, nor will it be.

For perhaps the time at last approaches when the Arab world can begin to free itself from the miserable, impoverishing, and undemocratic life imposed on it by its leaders. A campaign for Jerusalem of the sort I have been speaking about is part of that process, and it is certainly a strong antidote to the drifting, impossibly unwise course now being undertaken by the Arabs, Israelis, and Americans beneath the tattered banners of the peace process. I do not see that overly praised and defended process as leading to the kind of peace most people can live with for any length of time: The tensions, disequilibrium, and dislocations generated by Israel's partially realized designs in Jerusalem prove this, since Jerusalem is not the exception but the real rule of what the ideological imperative dictates.

Perhaps Jerusalem, with its thousands of new Jewish residents, its dislodged Arabs, and its illegally acquired spaces, is already lost. If it is, then peace in this generation is not at hand. This needs to be clearly understood and acted on with intelligent determination. On the other hand, it is never too late for a vitalized and energized political will to spring into action, and then maybe—just maybe—a better peace can occur, although we may never see it with our own eyes.

NOTES

1. See Benny Morris, "Falsifying the Record: A Fresh Look at Zionist Documentation of 1948," *JPS* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1995), pp. 44-62.
2. See "Housing in East Jerusalem, 1994," prepared by the Jerusalem Information Center and reproduced in *JPS* 24, no. 4 (Summer 1995), p. 142.
3. See the recent report (April 1995) in the *Washington Post* by Elaine Ruth Fletcher.

4. Burhan Dajani, "The September 1993 Israeli-PLO Documents: A Textual Analysis," *JPS* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1994), p. 17.
5. According to *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 27 January 1995, Arafat conceded in a press conference that Jerusalem was an internal Israeli matter.