

In Palestine, a Dream Deferred

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Since occupying the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, Israel has been the only sovereign state in British Mandate Palestine. Palestinians have been living either as second-class citizens in the Jewish state; or as colonized residents of the West Bank and Gaza with no human or political rights; or as refugees dispersed and stranded in neighboring Arab countries, in often extremely difficult conditions. The chances of Palestinians overcoming exile and exercising their right of return seem as far away as ever. Hardly more promising are the immediate prospects for ending the Israeli occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza in accordance with the international and Arab consensus, in place since at least 1976 and rejected by the United States and Israel.

Neither armed struggle from bordering Arab countries and the occupied territories nor popular mobilization and political struggle have brought liberation and decolonization. The defeat or containment of one intifada after another has only strengthened the Israeli colonial presence in the West Bank. Despite the withdrawal of 8,000 settlers from Gaza, the area's 1.3 million Palestinians are under intensified blockade and siege. Since the summer nearly 400 Palestinians have been killed, many of them civilians, as in the recent Beit Hanoun massacre. Haughtily told by the United States that the lack of Palestinian "democracy" was the main obstacle to peace, Palestinians freely cast their ballots in the legislative elections in January, only to be punished for their democratic choice: threatened by Israel with "starvation" and denied the funds needed to pay the salaries of civil servants, the breadwinners for much of Palestinian society. Walls, checkpoints, closures, collective punishments, roadblocks, Jewish-only roads, massacres by shelling, assassinations, mass imprisonment and a poverty rate of 70 percent have come to define the Palestinian condition under occupation.

The diplomacy of the Oslo period has also failed to restitute—even some—Palestinian national rights. In fact, as far as the Israeli elite were concerned, the Oslo framework was never intended to end the occupation or to bring about withdrawal to the 1967 borders. Oslo has proved to be yet another version of the Allon Plan, first presented after the 1967 war by Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. The Allon Plan proposed a truncated autonomy for Palestinians in the West Bank (Allon suggested that Arab-majority areas be placed under Jordanian jurisdiction), with substantial quantities of their land annexed to Israel, which would control all borders and entry points to the territory as a whole.

Since 1993, under the guise of peacemaking, Israel has doubled the

number of settlements and settlers (around 400,000) in the occupied territories. For Israel "peace" and "security" have come to mean a Palestinian population cut off from Israel yet at the same time totally dependent on it—a recipe for continuing Palestinian subjugation and Israeli domination. Palestinians have, as a result, been undergoing their worst ordeal since their dispossession and expulsion from most of Palestine in 1948 and their occupation by Israel in 1967. As John Dugard, the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied territories, put it in his recent report, Palestinians are the first occupied people in history on whom international sanctions have been imposed—sanctions that are "possibly the most rigorous form...imposed in modern times." Palestinian democracy, he concludes, is as curtailed by the international community as Palestinian freedom of movement is by Israel.

This bleak picture is compounded by grave internal divisions between Fatah and Hamas, which in the past year have spilled over into street confrontations and killings. For the first time in Palestinian history there looms the possibility of civil war. The political contradictions between those who seem ready to accept whatever Israel offers (Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and the Fatah elite) and those who seek the complete decolonization of the 1967 lands (Hamas, grassroots elements in Fatah and the majority of Palestinians) are rapidly sharpening. Though the Palestinians' steadfastness is intact, living under near permanent siege and without hope of immediate real change could intensify the tendency toward self-destruction, a prospect that Israel's leaders are happy to encourage.

How then to respond to this deepening Palestinian crisis and to Israel's relentless drive toward consolidating and expanding the settlement project? Thus far, there has been no collective or national Palestinian self-reckoning. But conversations are beginning to take place in Palestinian communities all over the world. Activists and intellectuals are beginning to ask the central questions: What is the nature of the Palestinian crisis today, and how can it be overcome?

The new books by Rashid Khalidi and Ali Abunimah are important in this regard. Both writers have longstanding records of engagement with the Palestinian question: Khalidi holds the Edward Said Chair in Arab Studies at Columbia University, has published several fine books on Palestinian nationalism and advised the Palestinian delegation at the 1991 Madrid talks; Abunimah is a founding editor of and frequent contributor to www.electronicintifada.net, an indispensable online source of alternative information on the occupation. Both men seek, in their different ways, to ignite more focused debate and discussion about fundamental Palestinian and Israeli concerns. Khalidi's *The Iron Cage* examines the causes of the Palestinian failure to achieve statehood, from the British Mandate in 1922 to Hamas's recent electoral victory, while Abunimah's *One Country* makes the case for the creation of one state for Arabs and Jews in all of Israel-Palestine.

Why did the Palestinians fail to achieve statehood before 1948, and what impact did their defeat have on their national prospects thereafter? This is the main question that Khalidi tackles in *The Iron Cage*, a work of forceful historical analysis written in a spirit of self-examination. If the Palestinians take center stage in this critical survey of their leadership, it's not because Khalidi is "blaming the victims." Rather, he is holding them accountable for their actions and decisions," as he puts it. Ridiculing Palestinian leadership has long been a veritable pastime in the West, from Abba Eban's oft-quoted line "The Palestinians never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity" to the myth that Arafat consigned his people to continuing occupation by rejecting Ehud Barak's "generous offer" at Camp David. Khalidi, in contrast, never loses sight of the fact that the Palestinians had few good choices, and that the odds against their struggle for self-determination may have been insurmountable. Those odds are well suggested by a remark made in 1919 by British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour, author of the 1917 Balfour Declaration supporting a Jewish "national home" in Palestine: "Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, in present needs, in future hopes, of far greater import than the desires and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land." Since then, denial of Palestinian national aspirations has been a constant of Western and Zionist policy in the region, and Khalidi emphasizes its crucial significance. He minces no words appraising the US record: "In practice the United States is, and for over sixty years has been, one of the most determined opponents of Palestinian self-determination and independence."

As Khalidi underscores, it is these British and American commitments to Zionism that are centrally responsible for continuing Palestinian statelessness and dispossession. It has long been argued that Palestinians—alone among Arab nations—failed to establish their independence because of their internal weaknesses: the petty quarrels and betrayals of their elites, their lack of social development, even an absence of genuine national consciousness. In fact, Khalidi shows, Palestinian society compared favorably, economically and socially, to other Arab societies that had emerged from Ottoman rule. Indeed, it "was manifestly as advanced as any other society in the region, and considerably more so than several."

Palestine's history diverged from its neighbors' because of the external interest that no other territory in the Arab world attracted: Zionism's desire to create a Jewish state and Britain's sponsorship of its settler-colonial project. Indeed, without Britain no Jewish state would have been possible. Britain did everything in its power to nurture Jewish state institutions and to prevent Palestinian ones from taking shape, creating, in Khalidi's words, "a kind of iron cage for the Palestinians, from which they never succeeded in escaping." Fundamental inequalities of policy defined British imperialism in Palestine. For most of the Mandate period, Britain facilitated and supported Jewish immigration from Europe against the wishes of the Palestinian majority.

Although the British and the Zionist movement came to blows over the 1939 White Paper limiting Jewish immigration and land purchase, Britain's colonial policies ultimately led to Zionist control of most of Palestine in 1948, when Jews still constituted only a third of its population and owned around 6 percent of its land.

But why, Khalidi asks, were the British able to achieve their objectives against the obvious desires of Palestine's Arab majority? At times, his answer skirts dangerously close to circularity—the Palestinians didn't achieve statehood because they failed to build state structures that would contest the British Mandate. But what accounts for this failure? Khalidi's answer is tough-minded and unsparing. Rather than establish "alternative sources of legitimacy" and fight the Mandate, the notables who led Palestinian society were all too trusting of the British as intermediaries, with whom they engaged in "ineffectual beseeching." Thus did they deprive themselves of political leverage to substantially affect, much less reverse, the British policy of supporting the creation of a Jewish national home. If Palestinian leaders were co-opted and contained by the Mandate's iron cage, Khalidi suggests, it was in part because they lacked any real willingness to move against British imperialism until it was far too late. (The Palestinian elite's tendency to entrust their people's fate to imperial powers would re-emerge during the Oslo period.)

Even more than this dependence on the Mandatory system, what set the Palestinian leadership apart from other Arab nationalist elites was its specifically religious character. These were, in fact, intertwined, as Khalidi demonstrates in a striking discussion of the role played by Haj Amin al-Husayni, the Grand Mufti of Palestine. The British created his office—raising his stature in order to help them administer the Mandate—and invested it with powers that no mufti had ever enjoyed in the history of Islamic religious institutions. This put the Palestinian national movement at a severe disadvantage: "Lacking effective vehicles for building toward statehood, either pre-existing, provided by the British, or developed by the Palestinians themselves, the Arab population of Palestine was instead granted a religious leadership, authorized, encouraged, legitimated, subsidized, and always in the end controlled by the British."

It was only in the early 1930s, with the rise of the Hizb al-Istiqlal al-Arabi (the Arab Independence Party), that Palestinians turned to mass resistance to the Zionist project and its British patrons. In contrast to the mufti and other Palestinian leaders who denounced the British in speeches while quietly cooperating with them behind the scenes, Istiqlal advocated Palestinian independence and Arab unity and denounced cooperation with the Mandate authorities. Istiqlal quickly aroused opposition from the British, the Zionist movement and from the mufti, who would tolerate no challenges to his charismatic leadership. (As Khalidi ruefully observes, "The Palestinians were to suffer again many decades later from this damaging conflation of the national cause with the personality of an overweening leader in the twilight era of Yasser

'Arafat's dominance of the Palestinian national movement.") Under the weight of these pressures, the party disintegrated within two years of its founding. Yet its brief existence indicated a growing middle-class disenchantment with elite capitulation and a rising mood of popular militancy, particularly with regard to the deepening plight of Palestinian peasants and their increasing dispossession by Zionists. And in identifying the British as the main enemy of Palestinian national aspirations, Istiqlalists laid the groundwork for the armed struggle led by Sheikh Iz al-Din al-Qassam and for the general strike and violent rebellion of 1936-39.

For Khalidi "the crushing of the 1936-39 revolt largely determined the outcome of the 1948 war...for the Palestinians." He is aware that the anticolonial mobilization may well have been doomed to defeat, pointing out that no such revolt was successful in the interwar years and that Britain deployed more than 20,000 troops and the Royal Air Force against the Arab rebellion. But the revolt led the British to issue the White Paper, a small and ambiguous concession that the mufti rejected. Thus, writes Khalidi, the leadership "failed to take advantage of the momentary weakness of the British position or to win any political gains from the sacrifices that had been made by the rebels." Although the odds were stacked against them, he insists, "the Palestinians did have choices, and some of them may have been less bad than others," including mass organization, non-cooperation with the British and tactical concessions.

Khalidi rightly underscores the issue of leadership, which plays an important, at times decisive, role in the success or failure of political movements. But why does it always come back to haunt the Palestinians? The self-interest of the elite and their propensity to cooperate with the British are part of what needs to be explained. Was there something about the conditions of Palestinian life under the Mandate that accounts for the persistently bad choices of the leadership? Or were there more deep-seated social causes?

Palestinian writer and PFLP leader Ghassan Kanafani made a powerful case for the latter in his 1972 study on the 1936-39 revolt. According to Kanafani, the nature of the Zionist colonial project forced Palestinian society to undergo "an extremely violent transformation from an Arab agricultural society into a Jewish industrial one." This, combined with British colonial policy, produced a weak Palestinian bourgeoisie and a weak industrial working class and labor movement, neither of which could mount an effective challenge to the Palestinian elite's political hegemony. As a result, the resistance to Zionism was led by the peasantry—dispossessed, nationally disorganized, geographically dispersed and ultimately powerless. As Mona Younis writes in her excellent *Liberation and Democratization: The South African and Palestinian National Movements*: "Indeed, while peasant and migrant workers could wreak havoc through rioting, they lacked leverage with which to force either the British or the Zionists into aborting their colonization designs."

Crushed by the British and the Zionist movement, and unable either to reorganize or to gain support from Arab governments that were more concerned with maintaining friendly relations with the British than with defending Palestinian national rights, the mass rebellion of 1936-39 ultimately degenerated into incoherence and infighting. The road to the 1948 catastrophe was open. The Palestinians might have compensated for their lack of leverage with a more coherent anticolonial nationalism that combined principled mass mobilization of peasants and workers with violent insurrection. The Palestine Communist Party might have led such a struggle, as did other Communist parties in underdeveloped countries like China and Vietnam. However, the predominantly Jewish PCP was too weak among Palestinians to challenge the leadership of the notables. And when Stalin decided that partition was the best solution to the Palestine question, the party adhered to the new line.

The Palestinian defeat in 1948 dramatically altered the political landscape, resulting in the expulsion of more than half the Arab population and the creation of Israel on the ruins of most of historical Palestine. This left the Palestinians stateless and dispersed, and with even less leverage to recover their lands and achieve their independence. Palestinians in exile faced the challenge of transforming Israel from outside its borders, while those still in Israel were placed under Israeli military rule until 1966. From 1948 through the mid-1960s, Khalidi argues, Palestinians "paid scant attention to the problem of what form of state was appropriate for Palestine" and generally did little more than project the imagined past into the future.... In thus attempting to turn back the clock, Palestinians once again appear to have given little serious thought to the nature of the relationship between them and Israeli Jews who would remain in such a projected Palestinian Arab state, just as during the Mandate period, there was no appreciation of Zionism as anything more than a colonial movement that had dispossessed the Palestinians. Clearly, the fact that Zionism had also functioned as a national movement, and had founded a national state, Israel, was still not something that the traumatized Palestinians could bring themselves to accept, since these things had happened at their expense.

What difference such an "appreciation" of Zionism as both a colonial and a national movement would have made, when it was obviously bent on displacing Palestinians and expropriating their country, is not made clear. Indeed, Khalidi shows that an accommodation with Zionism was never a real option precisely because of its exclusivism and unwavering rejection of the Palestinian right of national self-determination. While it may be true that Palestinians between 1948 and 1967 lacked sufficient realism in their understanding of Israel, much more evidence than the Palestinian National Charter of 1964 is needed to substantiate such a strong claim. It certainly doesn't ring true of those Palestinians who suddenly found themselves a besieged minority in a Jewish state, or of exiled Palestinians like Kanafani, whose novella *Men in the Sun* (1963) offered a powerful critique of Palestinian nostalgia

for the world they'd lost.

It is important to recognize, nevertheless, that a qualitative shift in Palestinian political history did occur with the emergence of Fatah and the PLO from the mid-1960s onward—a story that has been told in exhaustive detail by Yezid Sayigh in his study *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*. For Sayigh and most historians of the Palestinian national movement, the PLO has served in effect as a state in exile, seeking a territory to rule. Pointing to the Palestinian Authority's abject failure to achieve even the semblance of independence and sovereignty, Khalidi suggests that "this entire teleology, and the narrative about the PLO that is based on it, is very much open to question." He finds too much "clear evidence that it was not seriously preparing to build the Palestinian state that had been its formal objective for several decades," including contradictions between rhetoric and practice, armed struggle and diplomacy. Again and again, Khalidi attributes the PLO's failure to its lack of preparation. While he accepts the notion that the PLO was bureaucratized and that it had become "more and more of a quasi-state and less and less of a national liberation movement," he argues that this process never deepened into "regularization and organization on a legal basis of the organs of the PLO, their democratization, and their preparation for a move into the occupied territories." But if there was too little "regularization and organization," as Khalidi puts it, there was also far too much bureaucratization, authoritarian leadership and lack of accountability. The only way to overcome these impediments would have been to foster, not undermine, mass mobilization and democratic participation. But Fatah elites were always averse to participatory democracy. In such a milieu, self-deception all too easily took root in the leadership. Thus Arafat was capable, in 1972, of characterizing the Palestinian revolution as "a succession of temporary setbacks until final victory." Never mind that in 1970-71, the Palestinian resistance had been brutally crushed in Jordan (in the events of "Black September") and expelled to Lebanon. But how can such extraordinary defeats bring about victory? How can worsening conditions of operation lead to transformation without any thoroughgoing reassessment of the causes of failure and without devising more successful strategies of resistance?

Arafat's thinking has been far too prevalent in the Palestinian movement. It came into its own politically, as Gilbert Achcar has shown in *Eastern Cauldron*, after what he describes as the "catastrophic" liquidation of the Palestinian left's most progressive and committed cadres. This defeat led to a policy of increasing dependence on Arab dictatorships and the petrodollars of Gulf monarchies and to the deepening bureaucratization and corruption of the PLO, whose purse strings were controlled by Arafat.

Why did Arafat's conservative nationalist policies prevail after 1970? The reasons behind such developments were subject to considerable debate in the movement itself in that period, particularly on the Palestinian left; one wishes that Khalidi had examined more closely

the period between Black September and the PLO's expulsion from Beirut in 1982, which he too quickly brushes aside in phrases like "the futility of exile politics." For it was precisely during the exile period in the early '70s, and after Black September, that a serious and democratic critique of the PLO developed. Within Fatah it was voiced by Husam al-Khatib, a member of the central committee who recognized that the defeat of the resistance in Jordan was not just about "the question of leaderships" (*masalat al-qiyadat*) but about revolutionary clarity, organizational structure and political form. What Khatib championed was "revolution within the revolution," an internal transformation of the PLO's structures that would foster popular participation and advance the organization's ends more effectively. Interestingly, Khatib referred to this process as an "internal intifada."

A similar critique of the PLO was advanced by Syrian Marxist philosopher Sadek Jalal al-Azm, who attributed the defeat of Black September to Fatah's capitulation to King Hussein and its policy of "non-interference" in Arab authoritarian regimes. For the PLO to achieve its desired objectives, he argued, it needed to assume the mantle of democracy and revolution in the whole Arab world. Only then could the Palestinians establish the political leverage that they lacked as a nation-in-exile. This would help them correct the balance of forces and push Israel and the West to recognize Palestinian self-determination. This road was arguably available to the Palestinians; at the very least it should have been considered among their historical options. Such a revolutionary road may well have been blocked and defeated by Israel and the United States. But it remained a road not taken, and it marks a possible alternative in the Middle East of the 1970s, destroyed by Arab authoritarian brutality, with the backing of Israel and the West. By re-examining this radical period in Palestinian history, Khalidi may well have recognized that bad leadership after 1948, as in the Mandate period, is a symptom of deeper causes. Nevertheless, *The Iron Cage* compels us to reflect more deeply on the problems that continue to bedevil the Palestinian movement.

Focused on the sources of the Palestinians' failure to build a state of their own, Khalidi does not explicitly advocate a particular solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (although a longstanding supporter of a two-state solution, he expresses doubts about whether even this will come to pass, given the enormous odds Palestine now faces). Since the 1967 war, the Palestinian national movement has formally adopted two main solutions to end the conflict with Israel: from the late '60s to the early '70s, a single democratic state in Palestine, which would incorporate all religious groups and existing populations; and, since 1974, a commitment to building a state on any liberated part of Palestine, formalized at the Palestinian National Council's 1988 meeting in Algiers into a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the international consensus. Contrary to conventional wisdom in the West, the two-state solution has long been the dominant program of the Palestinian movement,

still supported by a majority of Palestinians and their representatives, including, implicitly, by Hamas, despite its maximalist rhetoric. Though most Palestinians have never regarded the creation of a state in 22 percent of their land to be a just resolution of the conflict, they have also viewed the end of the occupation as a necessary condition before other issues, such as the right of return and Israel's status as a Jewish state, can be discussed.

Ali Abunimah's principal argument in *One Country* is that Israelis and Palestinians are so deeply "intertwined" geographically and economically, and the occupation so deeply entrenched, that binationalism, or a single democratic state with equality and self-determination for both peoples, is "the only viable solution." (Similar arguments have been made in recent years by, among others, Tony Judt, Virginia Tilley, Meron Benvenisti and the late Edward Said.) For Abunimah, binationalism resolves many inherent problems with Zionism: its exclusivism; its ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians (which is becoming increasingly popular in Israel, where Russian-born settler Avigdor Lieberman, an advocate of "transfer," recently joined Ehud Olmert's Cabinet); and its racist obsession with demography. It would also crucially allow the Palestinians to return to their usurped lands and to live in peace with Israelis on an equal basis.

What's missing in his account, however, is an appreciation of immediate Palestinian needs and strategies. Although Abunimah draws on a number of examples to support his proposal, including Northern Ireland and South Africa, the creation of a single democratic state is not a pressing demand for most Palestinians. Indeed, he concedes that today neither Palestinians nor Israelis want to live together in one state. What is more, if Palestinians have been struggling to no avail to implement the much less demanding two-state solution with international laws and resolutions solidly on their side, how can they be expected to work toward an end that is even less feasible than it was thirty years ago, namely ending political Zionism? Abunimah consoles us with the assertion that Israelis "do aspire to progressive values." It's hard to share his faith, however, with the erosion of the Israeli peace camp and a society permanently lurching to the right. So one cannot help but wonder: Is it fair to ask 3.5 million occupied Palestinians to wait for redress of their daily sufferings and national humiliation until there is sufficient support among both peoples for a binational solution?

When Palestinian and Jewish socialists, notably Noam Chomsky and the Israeli Matzpen group, advocated a binational state in the 1970s (an issue ignored by Abunimah), its realization was premised on large-scale social and political transformation: Radical movements on both sides, with strong and capable constituencies, would pull toward each other and end their separation. When that option evaporated with the deepening colonial expansion of Israel and the rise of Jewish fundamentalism, many socialists shifted toward advocating a two-state solution, while remaining hostile to political Zionism. With the global

retreat of radical politics since the mid-'70s, there is even less reason to believe a binational constituency exists in Israel-Palestine today. "Binationalism without social, political agents on the ground is an idea: an interview here, an article there," says Azmi Bishara, the Palestinian leader of the National Democratic Assembly in the Israeli Knesset, who, as a supporter of a state for "all its citizens," can hardly be accused of hostility to binationalism. "Are there masses—social movements—that are raising binationalism? I say no. There are not.... Among the Palestinian masses, the mood is still national. National-Islamic. Not binational." And if the binational idea remains largely divorced from politics, it has no legs to stand on.

Bishara is hardly mentioned by Abunimah, who ignores much of the literature on binationalism. The binational idea has a history in both societies, and it cannot be encompassed in a few passing references to PLO documents and to Martin Buber's writings. Unlike Khalidi, Abunimah overlooks *Towards a Democratic State in Palestine* (1970), the only one-state proposal ever produced by Fatah, written in English by a group of Palestinian intellectuals at the American University of Beirut. (Written for foreign consumption under the aegis of PLO official Nabil Shaath, the document mainly sought to convince a Western audience that Palestinians accepted the Jewish presence in Palestine.) Abunimah's discussion of the PLO amounts to two paragraphs, one of which is a long quote. He ends with this: "But if a single state was unthinkable in the past, many of the conditions that made it so have changed. Perhaps the most important is that the majority of Israelis and Palestinians now understand that the other community is here to stay."

But the fact that they know this doesn't mean that the conditions for binationalism are emerging. Nor does it make sense to describe the Israeli-Palestinian relationship as "intertwined," as Abunimah often puts it. One can make that claim only about either Palestinians living inside Israel, however unequal their access to power and social goods may be, or about occupied Palestinians between 1967 and 1991, when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin started instituting his policy of closure and separation. Only then was Israel significantly dependent on Palestinians and their migrant labor. As Mona Younis argues, only then did Zionism make a partial exception to its exclusionary logic of expulsion and incorporate the Palestinians into the Israeli polity as subordinate laborers. And this, in turn, gave the occupied Palestinians some leverage to pursue certain forms of mobilization. The first intifada is a great example of what such inclusionary dynamics can generate, and it's the closest Palestinians have ever come to decolonizing Gaza and the West Bank. Even then their democratizing force was checkmated by an exiled PLO bureaucracy that feared losing its authority—and crushed by severe Israeli repression. Today the situation in the occupied territories is totally different, and much worse, leaving Palestinians with even fewer options for change and transformation than before. Israel has unilaterally cut Palestinians off and excluded them from access to its territory and settlements, even to their own surrounding areas. How can walls and closures be described as intertwining? In fact,

Israel is no longer and in no way dependent on occupied Palestinians, while Palestinians remain dependent on Israel in every way. And this, incidentally, may well explain why Palestinian terror attacks against Israeli civilians (shelved by Hamas for the past eighteen months, while Israel's deliberate targeting of civilians continues) were prevalent as a resistance tactic after Oslo and its institutionalization of closure. However morally indefensible and politically counterproductive, suicide bombings were the only way desperate Palestinians felt they could "get at" their occupiers. Notions of interdependence, then, are simply wrong, and miss what is fundamental about Zionist colonization since 1991: its powerful exclusionary form. Comparisons with American settler-colonialism and its treatment of Native Americans are, therefore, much more apt than comparisons with inclusionary settler-colonialisms like apartheid. One hopes that the Palestinian solidarity movement doesn't get too distracted by the surface similarities between South Africa and Palestine, like the question of violence or boycott, to understand their crucial differences—and that it aspires to be as uncompromisingly realist as it is hostile to political Zionism.

Palestinians are entering a critical stage in their history. More oppressive structures are firmly established now, raising the possibility of permanent dispossession and national disintegration. Geographically and politically divided, Palestinians around the world know neither their immediate goals nor their long-term objectives. Such a deep crisis requires widespread collective engagement and effort. It may be useful to take the recent Palestinian Prisoners' Document of National Conciliation, amended and agreed upon by both Fatah and Hamas on June 27, as a launching pad for emerging debates and discussions. The prisoners clearly call for the end of the occupation, dismantling of all settlements and realization of Palestinian national rights. Their position is supported by a majority of Palestinians in the occupied territories, who realize that it may well prove to be the strongest basis for national unity today. A national liberation movement can achieve success only if it is based on values of self-organization, independence, democracy and active mass participation, including women and workers. A new anticolonial national movement is still possible and ever more necessary. And if the outcome of decolonization also produces a constituency in Israel happy to live in peace and equality with the Palestinians without walls and borders, so much the better. But there's no shortcut around the struggle against the occupation.

P.S.

* From The Nation:

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