

The Question of Zion and the Future of Israel/Palestine¹

Warren R. Bardsley

At the end of November 2008, I returned from Jerusalem, where I lived for three months as a human rights observer with the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Israel/Palestine. I was a member of a group of 24 internationals from 14 countries, serving in 6 'placements' on the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where the Israeli Occupation of these territories (including Gaza), impinges on every aspect of the individual and communal life of the Palestinian people. It was a life-changing experience. Although I have read in the various histories and background studies of the 60-year old conflict, I felt I needed to re-visit these sources and try to understand how the children and grand-children of victims of the European Holocaust have become perpetrators of policies which effectively condemn millions of Arab Palestinians to an existence as prisoners in their own land. The basic rationale of this essay is that a proper appreciation of the present state of Israel demands a serious attempt to understand the reality of Zionism; why it appeared when it did; how it developed in the fifty-year period from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of World War Two and the events which followed the founding of the state of Israel in May 1948. We will examine the psychology at work behind the Zionist project, and drawing on my recent experience attempt to show its practical consequences in the ongoing conflict and what hope exists for a different future.

1a) Beginnings: the origin and meaning of Zionism

There are echoes of Zionism in European Jewish political movements, notably in the 17th century messianic uprising in Smyrna led by the bizarre mystic *Shabtai Zvi*, who saw his historic task in terms of returning the Jewish people to Palestine and was a partial inspiration behind Cromwell's decision to invite Jews to return to England. However, the word itself was first used in 1885 by the Viennese writer, *Nathan Birnbaum*, Zion being one of the Biblical names for Jerusalem. Essentially, Zionism was an attempt to address the Jewish problem centred on the Diaspora. Scattered among various countries, they constituted a minority; the Zionist solution was to end this anomalous existence and dependency, to return to Zion and attain majority status there, with the ultimate aim of political inde-

pendence and statehood. Although for 2500 years, after the Babylonian exile, Jews had longed to return to Palestine, (as reflected in liturgies and intermittent periods of messianic fervour), modern Zionism was largely *a secular movement, with political orientation towards Palestine*. It may be succinctly defined as *Jewish nationalism*.

The father of political Zionism was **Theodore Herzl (1860–1904)**, a Hungarian-born Jew, who lived and worked as a journalist and playwright in Vienna. In 1897, Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel. The Congress stated: ‘The aim of Zionism *is to create a home for the Jewish people, a home in Palestine, secured by public law*’. To his diary, Herzl confided, ‘At Basel, I founded the Jewish state . . . in fifty years everyone will know it’.² Following the Congress, Herzl dispatched two rabbis to Palestine on a fact-finding mission. The cable they sent back encapsulated the problem with which the Zionist movement had to grapple from the start:

The bride is beautiful but she is married to another man. In other words, there was an Arab population of close on three-quarters of a million, already occupying the land on which the Zionists had set their collective heart. The major concern at this point, however, was the Jewish problem; although vaguely aware of the Arab population they underestimated its seriousness and hoped that a solution would eventually emerge. It was to prove a tragic mis-calculation.

1b The legacy of Balfour and the British Mandate (1917–47)

Following the end of the First World War, the break-up of the Ottoman Empire which had ruled large parts of the Middle East for almost 400 years, led to the passing of political control into broadly British and French spheres of influence, (the fruit of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916).³ The chief architect of the alliance between Zionism and Britain was **Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952)**. Weizmann was a Russian and a skilful diplomat. He lived in London from 1904 and his efforts were directed towards enlisting British Government support for the Zionist project in Palestine. He appealed both to the British imperial interest in having a friendly nation in the Middle East and to British idealism. The outcome was the now famous ***Balfour Declaration*** of the 2nd November 1917. It was contained in a letter to Lord Rothschild which stated:

‘His Majesty’s Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being

clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country’.

The declaration is notable as much for what it omits as for what it contains. At a time when Jewish people in Palestine (56,000) numbered less than 10% of the total population, here was a statement which totally ignored the political rights of the Arab majority . For Weizmann and his colleagues, the Declaration handed the Jews a golden key to unlock the doors of Palestine and ultimately make themselves masters of the country. It should be noted, that until the start of the 20th century, most Jews living in Palestine were concentrated in 4 cities of religious significance, (Jerusalem, Hebron, Safad and Tiberias). Most spent their time studying Torah, depending for support, on world Jewry and were neither involved in nor supportive of the Zionist project, which began in Europe and was brought to Palestine by immigrants. ***Modern Israel is largely a European construct.*** Most of the Jews who came from Europe during the years leading to the 1939–45 World War were secular, non-religious and were committed to the creation of an independent Jewish state. This migration was prompted in the main by the anti-Jewish pogroms in eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and was supported by the West. During the Mandate years and especially in the 1930’s, Jewish migration into Palestine increased significantly.

It is hardly surprising that Arab-Jewish relations deteriorated badly following the Balfour Declaration or that Palestinian resistance stiffened through the years of the British Mandate. This led to a gradual retreat by the British government from the promise contained in the Declaration and was expressed in Churchill’s 1922 White Paper, which limited both Zionist territorial and political ambitions. However, British support on the ground for the Jewish Agency and its resistance to the emergence of any Palestinian political institution was expressed in a little-known statement by Balfour in which he said, ‘Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long traditions, present needs and in future hopes ***of far greater import than the desire and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land***’.⁴ It was a classic colonial statement. Meanwhile, the Zionist cause was invigorated by ***Ze-ev Jabotinsky (1880–1940)***, a Russian Jew who founded the ***Zionist Revisionist Movement***. His contention was, that the territorial integrity of ***Eretz Israel*** (the land of Israel), over both banks of the river Jordan was non-negotiable and that

the Jewish right to political sovereignty over the whole of this area should be immediately declared. Jabotinsky famously and ominously wrote, *'A voluntary agreement with the Arabs, inside or outside Palestine is unattainable. Settlement can only develop under the protection of a force that is not dependent on the local population, behind an IRON WALL which they will be powerless to break down.'*⁵

1c Palestinian Resistance: The 1936–39 Revolt

The Arab revolt began with a 6-month general strike, which up to that time was the longest anti-colonial strike in history. The nationwide insurrection which followed was eventually put down with brutal ferocity by British forces, during which 5000 were killed and 10,000 wounded. Many others were forced to flee or went into exile. In an Arab Palestinian population of around 1 million, this represented 10% of all adult males. The revolt expressed not only the will of the Palestinian people for self-determination, but the deep divisions within their leadership. What has not been fully recognized is how the crushing of the revolt largely determined the outcome of the 1948 war which led to the creation of the state of Israel. The failure of the Palestinian leadership and the absence of any viable state structure contributed to their political and military defeat and this heavy legacy undoubtedly affected them adversely in the years that followed.

1d 'A land with no people for a people with no land'

The decade 1939–49 represented a tragic low point in Palestinian efforts to achieve independence and statehood. In the wake of the Holocaust, Jewish immigration increased dramatically; in the meantime, as the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has documented⁶ in a recent book, the Zionists were making detailed plans to take over the whole of mandated Palestine, pin-pointing hundreds of villages scheduled to be either cleared or destroyed in order to make room for new Jewish communities. They had meticulously mapped the demographic shape of the new state which would involve a massive displacement of the indigenous population. This became known as Plan Dalet. At the end of World War Two, leading elements of the Zionist movement in Palestine turned against the colonial power, initiating a series of attacks on British targets, carried out by militias such as the Irgun, the Stern Gang and Haganah, the latter eventually forming the basis of the new Israeli army. Once more, the Palestinians lost out, the British preferring to rely on their own resources. When they finally succumbed to a combination of American and international pressure (in the light of the

horrific revelations of the Nazi final solution), relentless Zionist attacks and exhaustion following WW2 the Palestinians were again exposed. No great power was on their side. The British and Arab rulers tossed the problem into the hands of the newly formed United Nations Organization.

On November 29, 1947 the UN General Assembly passed its historic Resolution 181, partitioning Palestine, granting 56% to the Jews and 44% to the Arabs, with Jerusalem designated as an 'international zone' administered by the UN. The Arab High Command denounced the plan as 'absurd, impracticable and unjust'. They claimed that the plan was illegal and threatened to resist it by force. In the following six months Jewish militias went on the offensive seizing Palestinian towns and villages, clearing the territory of potentially hostile Arab elements. Palestinian society disintegrated under the impact of this offensive; a large-scale exodus followed, heralding the start of the refugee problem. When the state of Israel was declared on May 14th 1948, the Arab Liberation Army invaded Palestine. It was Israel's war of independence, it was protracted and in terms of lives lost, both military and civilian it was costly.

Although the 1948 war was by no means a foregone conclusion and there were points at which Palestinian forces backed by the Arab League appeared to be holding their own, the outcome was never seriously in doubt. The Jewish forces were superior both in numbers and strategy. The taking of the hilltop village of Al Quastal near Jerusalem in April and the massacre of the inhabitants of the nearby village of Deir Yassin was a body blow from which Palestinian forces never recovered, although sporadic fighting continued into 1949. By the time the armistice was signed, 750,000 Palestinians had become refugees, hundreds of villages destroyed or evacuated and within weeks, the demographic picture of the territory had changed dramatically. Now there was a significant Jewish majority. For the Palestinians there was no way back. Under the terms of the initial UN Partition plan the land was to be more or less equally divided. By the time the armistice was signed, the new state of Israel had 78% and the Palestinians 22% – comprising East Jerusalem and the hill country of central Palestine (West Bank), governed by Jordan, with Egypt having jurisdiction over the Gaza Strip. *The Palestinian State envisioned in the UN Partition plan was never established.*

To the Palestinians 1948 is known as 'Al Naqba' – the Catastrophe. It was the beginning of 'nish'ul', the dispossession of their ancestral lands, their future and their human rights. The next 60 years were to witness the inexorable worsening of their already desperate plight.

2 The Psychology of Zion⁷

To fully appreciate the difficulty faced by many Jews in identifying with the sufferings of the Palestinian people one has to know something of the long history of persecution and anti-semitism which they have endured down the centuries – and especially the Holocaust, which haunts the collective memory like nothing else, generating fear, and the fierce determination never to be victims again. As Edward Said observed so perceptively, ‘The Palestinians are the victims of the victims’.⁸

In October I visited Masada, where in AD70, Roman forces led by Titus were on the point of crushing the last remnants of Jewish Zealot resistance on the mountain fortress where, years before, Herod the Great had built his fabulous palace. I watched a group of Israeli Defence Force teenage recruits taking part in a ceremony, endlessly repeated since 1948, through which every young soldier is obliged to pass and during which the words are said: *Masada shall not fall again*. Here, following a lengthy siege, over 1000 men, women and children perished in a suicide pact rather than surrender to the Gentile occupiers. For many Jews, this historic moment raises uncomfortable questions. Was it a noble act, or a gesture of despair? There is no ambiguity in the use made of it by the state of Israel. It is a potent reminder of resistance in the face of hostile enemies and provides an important window into the Zionist mindset. It is perhaps not co-incidental that Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, was subject throughout his life to bouts of severe, prolonged depression, sometimes writing lyrical utopian passages about the Zionist dream, sometimes languishing in the depths of despair. Two of his children committed suicide and a third spent much of the latter part of her life in a mental institution. Hannah Arendt said of the early Zionists, ‘they escaped to Palestine as one might wish to escape to the moon.’⁹ It may partly explain why some of the more bizarre excesses of the state of Israel appear to the objective observer to be the expression of a sort of communal madness. (It should be noted that Zionism pre-dates the Holocaust). Moshe Ya’alon, Israeli Chief of Staff during the 1980’s and ‘90’s told some of his soldiers that he did not care if the military ‘looks like lunatics’.¹⁰ The IDF dreads dissent and deals harshly with its refuseniks.

There is, however, another strand of Zionism, found in writers and thinkers such as Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt and Hans Kohn, who sensed from the beginning the dangers of uncritical Zionism. They held to the central Zionist doctrine, but believed that it could have taken a different path than its proclaimed destiny. Writing in 1948 Buber said, ‘Today, the Jews are succeeding to a terrifying degree in becoming a *normal nation*

(italics mine). What nation (the Arab Palestinians) will allow itself to be demoted from the position of majority to minority without putting up a fight? Where do truth and justice determine our deeds?'¹¹ He was warning that the outward injustice done to the Palestinians, not only harms them but would have damaging consequences (inwardly) for the new nation. After 1948 Büber stated, 'this sort of Zionism blasphemes the name of Zion'.¹² Hans Kohn, a contemporary of Büber's wrote of the *slow, but steady infiltration of fundamentalism into civic life*. 'Nationalism has become an idol and allows you the illusion of mastering the unmasterable'¹³ Hannah Arendt, another prophetic voice within early Zionism, when anticipating 1948, predicted, 'the . . . victorious Jews would be absorbed with physical self-defence to a degree that would submerge all other interests and activities. Political thought would centre around military strategy; economic development would be determined exclusively by the need of war'¹⁴ Arendt foresaw what has indeed come to pass – the militarization of almost every aspect of Israeli society. Six-year old children if asked about their ambitions will invariably reply, 'to defend the state of Israel against her enemies'. The ideal is no longer the pioneer but the warrior. It turns all its citizens into soldiers. Yaakov Perry (Shin Bet 1988–95) warned, 'if we continue to live by the sword we will continue to wallow in the mud and destroy ourselves'.¹⁵

Ironically, therefore, the Jews are not safe in Israel today, nor indeed at ease with themselves. It is a peculiarity of the Hebrew language that it has no present tense. Israel has never lived in the present. Ahad Ha'am speaks of 'the Jewish people speeding towards their destiny with unseemly haste.' The Zionist mentality illustrates to an unusual degree the truth that the human mind is a palimpsest. Latent within are traces of those parts of the personality our predecessors inhibited and which never completely disappear. Jacqueline Rose asks: 'what would Israel look like if it acknowledged its intimate affinity with its neighbours, its cousins, fellow-Semites? What would happen if it ..allowed its own capacity for evil..if it allowed that it was being hypnotized by the ancestral voices from which it insists the nation's authority stems? Or that it might be answerable for its activities in the Occupied Territories today at the tribunal of tomorrow?'¹⁶

'People listened to the victims and they listened to the politicians', wrote Staff Sergeant Liran Ron Furer, 'but the voice which says, 'I did this, we did things that were wrong – crimes actually', that's a voice I didn't hear'.¹⁷ Here is a deep identity crisis which carries within it the capacity for self-destruction. 'The moment I drove the tank into Jenin refugee camp', wrote Moshe Nissim, the D9 tank operator in 2003, 'I wanted to destroy every-

thing'. This is the nemesis of those who have made survival at all costs, a god, forgetting that survival, however necessary should not become the rationale of statehood but the means to something else.

3 The Politics of Zion: Occupation

David Ben Gurion (1886–1973), the first Prime Minister of Israel, said in his memoirs, 'We are choking with shame about what is happening in Germany, in Poland and in America – that Jews are not daring to fight back! *We do not belong to that Jewish people..we do not want to be such Jews*'¹⁸ This statement is revealing in two ways. First, there is the use of the word 'shame' to describe the Holocaust and the events leading up to it. Second, the total rejection of the kind of Jewishness, he and his fellow-Zionists had come to despise. It also goes some way to explaining why Zionists in the immediate aftermath of World War Two made little reference to the Nazi 'final solution'. It reminded them of their abject weakness, their inability or unwillingness to resist oppression. It was only after the 6–day war of June 1967 that the Shoah became more prominent in the Israeli narrative; the war which was widely regarded as a 'miracle' somehow reversing the shame and suffering of the extermination camps. Now says Ben Gurion, 'we must master our fate; we must take our destiny into our own hands.'¹⁹ For Ben-Gurion this was a divinely appointed task. There was a fierce, almost pathological determination to be strong at all costs. It is a journey from abjection to omnipotence which has passed through suffering. But suffering becomes a sort of national disgrace, an affront to the Jewish self. Violence is a form of creativity, of constructive aggression, and we begin to understand its roots in a fear of being dominated. Yossef Brenner in a poem written in 1905 portrays an adolescent Jewish boy explaining to the mother why he is joining a unit for Jewish self-defence. 'Hear O Israel: not an eye for an eye; two eyes for one and all their teeth for any kind of humiliation'.²⁰ The political father of that philosophy is Jabotinsky and its children are Menachem Begin, Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu – for whom Jewish power must be military before anything else. In other words; if they sense that you are strong they will yield to you and repress their hatred. If they sense you are weak they will dominate you. When we are weak we are attacked. Gaza is the logical outcome of this doctrine.

The paradox is that from the creation of the Jewish state, through to the present, in its convoluted relations with the Palestinians; its long-drawn out negotiations with neighbouring Arab states, its courting of the West and the United States in particular, Israel has always sought to negotiate from a position of superior strength, whilst at the same time portraying

itself as the victim. It has pursued its policies with a combination of 'hold what we have', aggressive 'preventive' wars and the relentless confiscation of Palestinian land. It is now the 5th most powerful military power on earth, with an established nuclear capability. Israel is no longer David, but Goliath. As Yossef Brenner asked perceptively, 'what path will be chosen by hands that are strong?'²¹ Lurking somewhere just below the surface is the desire for revenge, but who then do the Arabs represent? It is one of the tragedies of this conflict that the Palestinians have become the inadvertent objects of a struggle that whilst grounded in the possession of the land, *has nothing to do with them at all*. They are the archetypal fall guys. Allied to this brute expression of strength is the need to control and humiliate. During his secret library researches, Momik discovered pictures of a Nazi soldier forcing an old man to ride another old man like a horse. 'A soldier', writes Sara Roy,²² about the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, 'ordered the old man to stand behind the donkey and kiss the animal's behind. I saw similar incidents; young Palestinian men, being forced by Israeli soldiers to bark like dogs'. 'I have seen the humiliation', stated Desmond Tutu, after visiting the Occupied Territories in 2002. 'It reminded me of what happened to us in South Africa, where they . . . took joy in humiliating us'.²³ Psychoanalysis suggests that repression, if not dealt with, has a habit of re-appearing. This can be perceived in groups as well as individuals.

4 The Occupation in practice

In the last section I want to try to relate the foregoing analysis to my own recent experience in Israel/Palestine with the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment programme which was established in 2002 in response to an urgent call from Heads of Churches in Jerusalem to walk with them in the struggle of their people for freedom and independence. During 3 months living in East Jerusalem, and staying for short periods in areas of the West Bank, I and my colleagues gained first-hand experience of the Occupation and its effect on the daily life and health of ordinary Palestinian people, who live extraordinary lives. Our major tasks were to monitor on a regular basis, the operation of Israeli military and border police checkpoints, especially during the early morning and mid-afternoon when Palestinian adults and children travel to and from work and school and in these situations to observe and monitor human rights abuses (the whole system is inherently abusive) and act as a protective presence. In these tasks we work closely with UNOCHA and Machsom Watch, (a courageous group of Israeli women). We visit refugee camps on a regular basis, offer support to and work alongside the impressive Israeli Peace

Groups. It is important to bear in mind in respect of the underlying thesis of this essay that there is a growing minority of Jews in Israel – and outside – who are not obsessed by power and control and are strongly opposed to the policies of the state of Israel. But they are, without doubt, a minority at the moment.

So, what does the Occupation look like in practice?

a) Checkpoints/Terminals

According to UNOCHA,²⁴ there were, in October 2008, 602 checkpoints and terminals in the Occupied Palestinian Territories of East Jerusalem and the West Bank. 100 of these are permanent, others are semi-permanent and can be moved at any time without warning. Bearing in mind the size of Israel (which approximates to the land area of Wales), the restrictions on movement for Palestinians are extreme. The Jerusalem team monitored two checkpoints on a regular weekly basis; the huge terminal at Qalandia which separates Jerusalem from Ramallah and the northern West Bank deals with vehicles and pedestrian traffic and the smaller one at Zaytoun which separates Azariah (the Biblical Bethany) from the Mount of Olives. Palestinians who travel to work in Jerusalem can wait up to 2 hours and it takes on average 15–20 minutes to pass through the electronic controls at the terminal itself. This is a daily experience. Only holders of valid permits, issued by the Israeli authorities are allowed to pass. These are strictly controlled and need to be renewed every 3 months. The checkpoints are a major feature of what Jeff Halper calls ‘the matrix of control’.²⁵

a) Settlements

There are different perceptions of the Clinton summit at Camp David in 2000. Many Jews believed at the time (some still do), that Ehud Barak’s ‘generous offer’ to cede 91% of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the Palestinians had been spurned by Yasser Arafat. They express hurt that this has not been more widely recognized. Apart from the fact that Barak refused to have face to face contact with the Arab leader, President Clinton acting as go-between, the deal on the table was not as generous as it first appeared. On offer was 91% of the 22% designated as the proposed Palestinian state. No ‘final issues’ were included. No mention was made in the Agreement of the right to return of the several million Palestinian refugees, the status of East Jerusalem as capital of the new state, and no serious proposal to halt the growth of the numerous Jewish settlements, built on confiscated Palestinian land. There was no way that a Palestinian leader could have signed such an Agreement.

A major reason for the collapse of the Oslo Accords (land for peace) was the issue of the settlements. Even as the ink was drying on the paper, Israel continued to create 'facts on the ground' in the Occupied Territories. Today there are 129 settlements, with a population of 440,000, including 190,000 settlers in East Jerusalem. They are linked to one another and to Jerusalem/Tel Aviv by an intricate network of roads, which Palestinians are barred from using. Many of the settlers are 'economic'; some are fiercely orthodox and ideological. In Hebron, over 1000 Israeli soldiers guard an armed settler community of 500 in a Palestinian city of 140,000. The one thing these settlements have in common is that they are illegal under International Humanitarian Law.²⁶ The guarding of settlements is one of the chief reasons for the continuing Occupation and a major obstacle to a just, sustainable peace.

b) The Wall/Separation Barrier

Jabotinsky's metaphorical 'iron wall' has become an obscene reality. Begun by Ariel Sharon in the wake of the second intifada (uprising), ostensibly for security reasons, it is made of reinforced concrete, stands 8–9 metres high and on completion will be over 700 km in length. It separates Israelis from Palestinians and Palestinians from family members and friends. In places it is a double fence topped by razor wire. At 1 mile intervals there are watchtowers manned by the Israeli military. In rural areas the Wall bites deep into Palestinian territory separating farmers from their lands and seriously affecting the economy. The barrier has been declared illegal by the International Court of Justice. Bethlehem, Like many other Palestinian communities is a virtual prison; surrounded on all sides by the wall, the only way in or out is via the Gilo terminal; men, whose only source of employment is in Jerusalem (5 miles away), begin queuing at 2–3 am in order to pass through the checkpoint when it opens at 6 am. Our Bethlehem team monitored this terminal on most working days. 'The danger to Israel is to fall in love with the Wall and refuse to move on' (Avi Shlaim).²⁷ If a basic human right is freedom of movement within one's own land, the Palestinians are suffering severe deprivation. To make any kind of journey, long or short is a major undertaking. The impact on morale, and on personal/communal life are devastating and far-reaching. Little wonder then that it has been described by Jimmy Carter and others as 'the apartheid wall'. That in fact is the Hebrew word, *hafradah* – 'separation barrier'.

One of the most difficult tasks EAPPI volunteers undertake is to be present at house demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem. Demolition or eviction orders can be issued at any time by the courts and may be carried

out within weeks, sometimes months or years. There is the uncertainty, but then it happens without warning. A child may leave home at 7 in the morning and arrive home at 3 pm to find that his/ her home has been reduced to a pile of rubble. It is little wonder that some of them grow up to be militants. On the other hand to sit with a Palestinian family in the ruins of their home and be told, 'we cannot offer you tea because our home has been demolished' is to recognize the amazing hospitality of these resilient people. Sometimes, because we often have a personal relationship with the families involved it is also deeply painful. It is estimated by ICAHD that since 1967, 24,167 Palestinian homes have been demolished in the Occupied Territories. Between 1994 and 2006, there were 670 demolitions in East Jerusalem alone. An indication of the acceleration of this policy is that two-thirds of these orders have been carried out during the last four years of that period. Increasing numbers of Palestinian families have been evicted from their homes during the last decade. The map of East Jerusalem clearly reveals the inexorable growth of settlements ringing and infiltrating Palestinian areas; it is hard to come to any other conclusion that this is part of a deliberate policy – to change Jerusalem into an exclusively Jewish city.

In these and other ways we seek to be alongside both Israelis and Palestinians on this hard journey to freedom and peace, to witness against injustice and be a voice for the voiceless; we work closely with Combatants for Peace, Breaking the Silence, Bereaved families, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), New Profile, Rabbis for Human Rights and other Israeli Peace Groups who are working to end the Occupation. As a Christian my motivation comes from my faith, and my understanding of the nature of God whose life and death involvement with humanity, I see expressed in Jesus of Nazareth, in whom is enfleshed God's compassion, passion for justice and the righting of wrong. I perceive his spirit at work in people of all faiths and none. One of our most moving encounters was with Rami (an Israeli Jew) whose 14-year old daughter was blown up in a West Jerusalem suicide bombing in 1995 and Mazzen a Muslim Palestinian brought up in a Bethlehem refugee camp, whose father was shot by an Israeli soldier while returning home in 2002. That they were sitting in the same room was a miracle in itself; that they work as brothers for reconciliation with both Israeli and Palestinian communities is a miracle of grace. They say, 'We are making small cracks of hope in the wall' If there is to be any viable solution to this conflict, Rami, Mazzen and those like them must surely be a significant part of it.

The 'Kairos Palestine' Document²⁸

In December 2009 a group of leading Palestinian Christians²⁹ launched at Bethlehem, a document, which is widely regarded as the most significant Christian theological statement to emerge from the Middle East conflict for many years. It was eighteen months in the making and was written for two groups in the main: firstly for Palestinian communities and secondly for the *international* Christian community – a 'word of gratitude for your solidarity with us', but also a call to repentance; to re-visit fundamentalist theological positions which support unjust political options. It has become known as the Kairos Palestine document, evoking memories of a call issued by the South African Council of Churches in 1985 sounding a note of urgency in the struggle against apartheid.

It is, the authors say, 'a call to stand alongside the oppressed and preserve the Word of God as good news for all, rather than turn it into a weapon with which to slay the oppressed'. Despite the continuing injustice, the authors speak of hope, against hope, 'hope which remains strong because it is of God', even when there is no immediate expectation of release – 'God whose love and goodness will be victorious over the evil in which we now find ourselves'. This means a recognition that the Occupation is not only illegal and immoral, but a 'sin against God..distorting his image in the Israeli who has become the Occupier, just as it distorts that image in the Palestinian living *under* Occupation'. No legitimate theology can be based on such a distortion. Uniquely, the document calls on the international community to respond by supporting the call, rising from most sections of Palestinian civil society and a growing number of Jewish organizations both inside and outside Israel for the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign, 'against everything produced by the Occupation,'³⁰ carried out with courage, not in a spirit of revenge, but in order to bring to an end the existing injustice, 'liberating both the perpetrators and the victims of injustice, using tools of non-violence, for peace and security for all'. In this enterprise there can be no room for the spirit of sectarianism. The authors recognize that if this *kairos* moment is to be seized, Jews, Christians and Muslims must learn again to love and live together in a shared environment. Two key words in the document are 'resist' and 'love'. Action must be the non-violent expression of love, but action is the key word. Silence is no longer an option.

Conclusion

In the short term, it is hard to be optimistic about the future. 'Today', writes the Israeli novelist David Grossman, in something close to despair about Israel's future, 'Israel is more militant, nationalist and racist than it has ever been before'.³¹ Politically, if Israel is serious about the creation of an independent Palestinian state, it will eventually have to negotiate with Hamas; on their side the Palestinians will have to sort out their own internal divisions. The two-state solution will involve the dismantling of some if not all the West Bank settlements and will require sustained and critical engagement by the West and by the US in particular, which must become a priority of the Obama administration. Apartheid South Africa had to be moved by a combination of internal forces and external international pressure, action by individuals and groups in civil society – in concrete terms involving a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions. Although Israel/Palestine differs in significant details from that situation, there are striking parallels and the same kind of pressure needs to be applied. Following independent reports of war crimes during the recent operation in Gaza, there are calls for an arms embargo against Israel. Gila Svirsky chair of B'tselem the Israeli Human Rights Organization said to us *'The only friends of Israel now are critical friends. The Occupation must end, for our sake, as well as for the Palestinians. It is eating away our soul'*. The alternative is too ghastly to contemplate. Already, there is talk within Israeli corridors of power of 'transfer of population', the logical completion of the process of ethnic cleansing begun in 1948 and a tacit admission by Israel of the 'demographic time-bomb' which on present trends will see the Palestinian population overtaking Israel sometime towards the end of the next decade. So deep are the divisions in Israeli society that the possibility of civil war cannot be entirely ruled out. The Israeli historian Benny Morris ends his magisterial study of his nation's origins non-committedly, 'Whether 1948 was a passing fancy or has permanently etched the region remains to be seen'.³² Jacqueline Rose is less ambiguous. At the end of her book she quotes a former Israeli army general, Avner Azulay, 'What is now happening in Israel is bad for the Jewish people', and she concludes, 'In the ascendancy today is a vision of the Jewish nation, that is, I believe – precisely because it has (as it so fervently desired), made itself master of its own destiny – in danger of destroying itself'³³

Appendices

1a The Balfour Declaration (2 November 1917), to Lord Rothschild

His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice *the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine* or the rights and political status enjoyed by the Jews in any other country.

1b Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel: May 14th 1948

Pledges that the State of Israel shall be based on the principles of liberty, peace and justice, as conceived by the Prophets of Israel; shall uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex; and shall loyally uphold the principles of the UNN Charter. (The Declaration specifically promised equal rights to the Arab inhabitants of the State and extended the hand of peace to all neighbouring Arab states)

1c Likud manifesto, 1977 election

The right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is eternal, and is an integral part of its right to security and peace. Judea and Samaria shall therefore *not be relinquished to foreign rule. Between the sea and the Jordan there will be Jewish sovereignty alone.* Any plan which involves surrendering parts of Western Eretz Israel militates against our right to the land, would inevitably lead to the establishment of a 'Palestinian state', threaten the security of the civilian population, endanger the existence of the state of Israel and defeat all prospects of peace.

2. The Palestinians today

Today, some 5 million Palestinians live in former mandatory Palestine, west of the Jordan river, divided into 4 distinct groups. Over 1.2 million are citizens of Israel, as they or their families have been since 1948. They constitute almost 20% of that country's population, a large non-Jewish minority in the self-proclaimed state of the Jewish people, where they have negligible political influence. In 2006 the over 3.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, (which remains under effective Israeli control

The Question of Zion and the Future of Israel/Palestine

even after the disengagement of 2005), and East Jerusalem, were enduring their 40th year of Israeli military occupation (two generations in their lives and two-thirds of the lifetime of the state of Israel). Those in the 3 areas under occupation are hermetically sealed off from one another by Israel. Each of these 4 groups, those with Israeli citizenship; quarter of a million Arab Jerusalemites, who since the 1967 annexation of East Jerusalem are 'permanent residents' but not citizens of Israel; 2 million+ West Bankers and over 1.3 Gazans – is subject to a different legal framework; the West Bankers and the Gazans face stringent movement restrictions.

Outside Palestine meanwhile, live between 4 and 6 million Palestinians (reliable figures are not available). They exist in situations ranging from the utter misery (since 1982) of those in refugee camps in Lebanon, to a wide diversity of conditions, some of them quite comfortable, in various Arab countries, Europe and the United States. These Palestinians of the 'diaspora' (*al-shatat* in Arabic) possess a variety of passports, laissez-passeurs and refugee documents, some of which are looked upon with great suspicion by certain states and some of them face harsh restrictions on their movements in consequence. The largest single group of Palestinians of the Diaspora, between 2 and 3 million carry Jordanian passports and most of them live in Jordan. *What unites the majority of these 4–6 million people is that they, or their parents or grandparents were obliged to leave their homes and become refugees in 1948 or afterward and that they are barred from living in any part of their ancestral home, Palestine.*

NOTES

- 1 This paper was originally presented to the Erasmus Darwin Society, March 25th 2009. It has since been edited and expanded to take into account recent developments.
- 2 Raphael Patai (ed.), *The Complete Diaries of Theodore Herzl*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1960), 2:581
- 3 Mark Sykes was a Conservative MP and British Diplomat; Francois Georges-Picot was an experienced diplomat, and the first servant of the French embassy in London. Between them they re-drew the map of the Middle East.
- 4 Quot. '*The Iron Cage*', Rashid Khalidi, One World Books 2006 p.36
- 5 Quot. '*The Iron Wall*', Avi Shlaim, Penguin, 2001, p.13
- 6 *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*: One World 2006
- 7 See 'The Question of Zion' by Jacqueline Rose, Princeton University Press, 2005. I am indebted to her for the thinking behind this section of the essay. She is Jewish, and is Professor of English at Queen Mary University of London and the author of several books.
- 8 *The Question of Palestine*, Vintage Books, 1992, p.xxi
- 9 'Zionism Reconsidered', (1944), in *The Jew as Pariah*, p. 138
- 10 Quoted in *The Question of Zion*, Rose, 2005, p103

The Question of Zion and the Future of Israel/Palestine

- 11 *Zion and Zionism*, Martin Büber, p. 221
- 12 Ibid p.221
- 13 *Nationalism*, p.86
- 14 Ibid. p.194
- 15 *The Question of Zion*, p.103. Shin Bet is the Israeli internal intelligence agency
- 16 *The Question of Zion*, p.103
- 17 Levy, 'I punched an Arab in the face', p.6
- 18 Memoirs, David Ben Gurion, 6:551ff, cited in Segev, *One Palestine Complete*, p.395
- 19 'Imperatives of the Jewish Revolution', p.609
- 20 Y.H.Brenner, Hu amar la, in *Kol Kitvei*, 6:29–33, cited in Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: the Zionist Resort to force 1881–1948* (OUP, Oxford, p.38)
- 21 Cited in Bensoussan, *Une histoire*, p.836
- 22 Save your outrage for the end, pp 208–9
- 23 Grossman, 'Yes Prime Minister', (1995), in *Death as a way of life*, p.21; cited in a letter by Joseph Eagle, 'Apartheid Re-visited', *Guardian*, July 24, 2002.
- 24 United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- 25 *Obstacles to Peace; a Re-framing of the Palestine-Israeli Conflict*, Halper, 2004 (2nd edition)
- 26 The Fourth Geneva Convention states, (Article 49), that any kind of transfer of the Occupier's population into the territory of the Occupied is illegal.
- 27 *The Iron Wall*, Penguin, 2000, p.564
- 28 *A Moment of Truth: a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*, December 2009, available from Friends of Sabeel UK, Oxford, info@friendsofsabeel.org.uk
- 29 Although the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem did not sign the document, it is prefaced by a message of strong support by leaders of all the major Christian denominations in the Holy Land.
- 30 The Methodist Conference resolution (2009) urged support for a boycott of goods from illegal Israeli settlements on sale in supermarkets and other retail outlets.
- 31 'Two years of Intifada' (2002), in *Death as a way of life*, p.177.
- 32 *1948: the first Arab-Israeli War*, Yale University Press, 2008, p.420
- 33 *The Question of Zion*, p.155