

APARTHEID OR ANNAPOLIS

Susan Abulhawa

In the 80s, Palestinians gave up 78% of their homeland to try to pick up the pieces of their lives on the remaining 22% of Palestine. This was, and remains, the only true (brave or otherwise) concession ever made in the so-called 'Middle East Conflict.' Next came Camp David, then Madrid, then Oslo, then another Camp David, Taba, Wye, (deep breath) Sharm el Sheikh, the Disengagement, the Road Map. Through it all, Israel continued to divide, carve out, confiscate and settle that 22%. They scattered Palestinians into a diaspora, shut down their schools, bombed damn near every inch of the West Bank and Gaza, herded them into ghettos, set up checkpoints all around and employed every tool of imperialism, times ten, to get rid of or subjugate Palestinians as a cheap labour force.

Now Palestinians arrive at yet another surreal meeting in the clouds: Annapolis. Everyone is invited except the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organisation)—the sole and only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people—and the democratically elected members, of the Palestinian Authority (that would be Hamas). At this meeting, Israel will throw Palestinians a few bones, like releasing some prisoners (who will most likely get rounded up again when the hype dies down) while it is intentionally starving 1.4 million human beings in Gaza, cutting off fuel, electricity and clean drinking water. Annapolis will serve only to move Israel a little closer to stamping out the “refugee problem,” those Palestinians and their descendants whose homes, farms, property and history Israel stole.

Palestinians are the natives of the land that was called Palestine for the last several thousand years until 1948 when Jewish foreigners changed its name to Israel. They are the natives in every sense of that word: historically, legally, culturally, ethnically, and even genetically! True there were Jewish tribes in that land some 3,000 years ago. There were also Canaanites, Babylonians, Sumerians, Philistines, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, and Brits. Palestinians are the natural descendants of all of these peoples who passed through that land, intermarried and converted between religions. When one understands this, it becomes clear why Palestine has always been a multi-cultural, multiethnic, and multi-religious society. In other words, the idea of “tolerance” and coexistence that the West fought to attain and claims to cherish and hold dear, was already a reality in Palestine. Israel has taken that ideal, turned it on its head, and beat it to a pulp so every Jew in the world can have a place where he or she can go and see none but fellow Jews. Remarkably, the world sees nothing wrong or out of the ordinary with this and would like Palestinians to simply live with it, negotiate with a juggernaut military power that made no secret of its desire and intent to take all of Palestine.

Never in history has the world so cruelly called on an oppressed, robbed, and battered native people to sit down with their oppressors to “negotiate” for their freedom. Even worse, what Palestinians are expected to negotiate away are their basic human rights, in order to have a few checkpoints removed so they can call

those ghettos—surrounded by a 20 foot concrete wall with guard towers—a “state.”

Palestinians are being asked to give up their natural right to return to the homes from which they were forcibly removed because, and only because, they are not Jewish. They are asked, as native Muslims and Christians, to give up their natural right to live and thrive in Jerusalem as they have for all of time. They are told that they should not expect to have the right to control their own water, economy, airspace, or borders. Why? Why should they accept such an inferior status and inferior fate?

Would anyone have thought to support the desire of White South Africans to live as separate and superior humans and expect Black South Africans to “negotiate” with the Apartheid government for their basic human rights? Of course not! Anyone with a mind and conscience took for granted that Blacks have equal rights as Whites. That is self-evident and non-negotiable. So is their fight as non-Jews in Palestine to be accorded the same rights and privileges as Jews in their ancestral homeland. Human dignity and equality simply should not be topics of negotiation in the 21st century.

Even more vulgar is Israel’s insistence that they recognise, its right to be state of the Jewish people. This country that stole everything from them—their homes, their holy places, their trees and farms, their institutions, their history and heritage, the cemeteries where their grandparents and forefathers are buried—because they are not the right kind of human being in their eyes. They want Palestenians not only to attest that such an affront to humanity, legitimate and appropriate, but that it is somehow a right! But Palestinians simply do not recognise such right. A right is something inherently and unquestionably just. Jewish exclusivity and entitlement at the expense of non-Jews is not a right, it is racism!□

[Written in December 2007]

—TWNF