

The heart of the matter: Palestine in the world today

Last week's Beit Hanoun massacre is just one more war crime in a long chain of atrocities committed by Israel for over half a century now. Ahdaf Soueif argues that if the world is to be put back on an even keel, it has to be a world in which the Palestinians achieve equality and justice.

Al-Ahram Weekly, 16 - 22 November 2006

The first time I visited Warwick was in the summer of 1985. I visited the Castle and as I walked through the State Rooms and the Towers, I was touched by sadness that what had been a real life, with ambitions and sorrows and loves, with continuity, had become -- merely -- a spectacle for tourists.

Then, I came across the "oubliette". An oubliette is a deep hole in the ground where you throw people who are to be, well, *oubliés* : forgotten. It was terrifying, in its simplicity, its blatancy, its everydayness. You did not even need great skill to build your own oubliette. And at this point, the fact that the Castle had mutated into a tourist attraction became a comfort. That a life in which balls and banquets or a quiet family evening by the fire could take place while some wretch was forgotten in a hole in the ground not 50 metres away -- that that life had become untenable was OK. It was medieval, I told myself. It was how they did things then. It was over.

How weird, then, how nightmarish, that it isn't over; that we still have oubliettes today. And how obscene that they should be run, not by some individual local baron or war-lord, but by the most powerful state in the world. A democratic state. A land of the free. The articulator, in modern times, of the Rights of Man. And that for all the rhetoric of human progress and development, what it amounts to is that those who have the power also have their choice of destination and transport: 'undisclosed locations' on the planet, and flying machines in which to freight those who are to be forgotten through the skies to their modern oubliettes.

In the 14th Century, the farmer harvesting his crop within sight of the Castle walls did not necessarily know about the prisoner within those walls. Today globalisation, technology and democracy make accomplices of us all.

And of course, the phantom flights and facilities are just one aspect of the general nightmare that our world is being led into. Which, like the best nightmares, has an element of absurdity: how is it that when we should be united in the urgent search for solutions to our environmental crises, when our clear priority should be to nurse our beautiful, damaged planet back to health, we are running around fighting a bogus 'War on Terror'?

The Twentieth Century, for all its problems, can be seen as a progression towards a world community. Institutions were set up to regulate the relationships between nations, to fashion laws that would move us away from physical violence. Discourses of liberation

were articulated. We had moved into a post-colonial era, an era of civil rights, of equality for women and minorities, of anti-discrimination and human rights, of celebrating -- some would say to a fault -- cultural diversity and regional variation.

It wasn't perfect, of course not, but it seemed that we were on the right path.

Today, we have a world in chaos: the country that sets itself up as the arbiter and policeman of the world engaging in an illegal war, aided and abetted, principally, by Britain. To engage in the war against Iraq the US administration lied to its people, it lied to the UN and to the world. It continues to lie -- about its motivation for the war, its execution of the war, its performance in the war and, now, its possible exit strategy from the war.

While it limbers up for another war, this time on Iran.

And when its friend and ally, Israel, bombs Lebanon, the US -- again and Britain -- block efforts to call a ceasefire.

Meanwhile, Israel's occupation of the West Bank continues. More UN resolutions have condemned this than any other matter since the UN was established. Israel stands in violation of the hundred-year old Hague Conventions, the Atlantic Charter of 1941, the Articles of the Geneva Convention, the judgement of the International Court in the Hague in 2004. Look how far we have not come!

Edward Said's *Orientalism* was published almost 3 decades ago. For all the change that the book wrought, for all that it created a new discourse and a new discipline which has spread the world over, for all that US Intelligence witnesses believe it so affected Middle East studies in the US that American experts who've fallen under its spell are now useless in the 'War on Terror' -- for all that, when the book was reissued in 2003, Said wrote, in a new preface for it: "I wish I could say that general understanding of the Middle East, of Arabs and Islam in the United States has improved somewhat, but alas, it really hasn't."

He speaks of "the hardening of attitudes, the tightening of the grip of demeaning generalization and triumphalist cliché, the dominance of crude power allied with simplistic contempt for dissenters and 'others'." This Preface was one of the last pieces of writing that Edward Said published in *Al-Ahram Weekly* before his death.

THE ISRAEL COMPONENT: What I would like to do here is to trace the effect of one component in the situation the world finds itself in. The Israel/Palestine component.

"Palestine," Edward Said argued in 1992, "is today the touchstone case for human rights ... there is hardly an instance when the connection between freedom and interpretation is as urgent, as literally concrete as it is for the Palestinian people, a large part of whose existence and fate has been interpreted away in the West in order to deny us the same freedom and interpretation granted Israeli Jews. The time has finally come to join and recognise these two peoples together as indeed their common actuality in historic Palestine already has joined them together. Only then can interpretation be for, rather than only about, freedom."

This, for me, would be a good enough reason to put Palestine at the centre of this, the Edward Said Memorial Lecture which it is my honour to deliver. But I think a good case

can, in any case, be made, for placing the Palestinian issue at the centre of the troubles that beset our world today.

So, my subject is this: the Zionist project in Israel/Palestine is failing. A central question to be answered is what are the possible outcomes of that failure? And what can we do to promote the outcome we prefer?

THE FAILURE OF ZIONISM: A letter in the London *Independent* last year reads:

"Sir: More and more Jews are coming to see what my great grandfather failed to see, that the only just solution in the Middle East is a Palestine in which Jews and Muslims, Arabs and Europeans, live alongside each other with equal rights and an equal stake in the state; a solution in which the Balfour Declaration is finally put to rest."

The letter is signed by Dan Mayer, the great-grandson of Sir Leon Simon, who helped draft the Balfour declaration.

This perception, while not yet mainstream, is, as Mr Mayer writes, gaining currency.

The Zionist project is, after all, anachronistic. When it first started, at the end of the 19th Century it caught the tail end of colonial expansionism. But even then the geography of the enterprise was wrong. Most colonial projects were predicated to some extent on the colonised lands being geographically distant from the colonising power. The home society could be kept largely shielded from the brute mechanics of colonisation.

A completely settler colonial project can only work, history shows us, by getting rid of the original inhabitants. Either by exterminating them or coming so close as to make no difference -- as happened in North America. This is what (Israeli historian) Benny Morris, for example, recognizes, when -- in the context of documenting what the Zionist project did to the Palestinians in 1948, he adds that they did not do enough because, essentially, they left the job undone: "If he [Ben-Gurion] was already engaged in expulsion, maybe he should have done a complete job. I know that this stuns the Arabs and the liberals and the politically correct types. But my feeling is that this place would be quieter and know less suffering if the matter had been resolved once and for all. If Ben-Gurion had carried out a large expulsion and cleaned the whole country -- the whole Land of Israel, as far as the Jordan River. It may yet turn out that this was his fatal mistake. If he had carried out a full expulsion -- rather than a partial one -- he would have stabilized the State of Israel for generations."

The Israeli Zionist project now has 3 problems: the existence of over one million Palestinian citizens of Israel (who were not 'cleansed' in 1948). The existence of some 3 million Palestinians in territories which Israel is not willing to give up. The existence of some 4 million Palestinians in various conditions across the world -- who have not given up the Right of Return granted them by international law. Actually it's really one problem: the existence of the Palestinians.

The 'Peace Process,' culminating in the Oslo Accords in 1993 provided a comfortable screen behind which settler expansion raced ahead. It also made it possible for the majority of Israelis to ignore the problems of Zionism while advocating a separate state for the Palestinians. Problems such as how much democracy a Zionist state can allow to non-Jews, or what the role of Zionism was in the Palestinians' dispossession in 1948 could be

ignored for a while. The end of the 'Process' came in the failure of the Camp David II talks and the eruption of the Second Intifada at the end of 2000. The Israeli state came face to face with the failure of the Zionist project.

As ex-CIA workers Kathy and Bill Christison point out in *Counterpunch* (8 November 2003):

"-New wrongs in the occupied territories increasingly recall old wrongs from half a century ago;

"-Zionism finds that it cannot cope with end-of- conflict demands like the Palestinians' insistence that Israel accept their right of return by acknowledging its role in their dispossession;

"-Palestinian citizens of Israel are more and more demanding their civil rights."

Kathy and Bill Christison continue: "More and more Israelis are coming to accept that Zionism can never escape its past ... [and] that Israel has absorbed so much of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem into itself that the Jewish and the Palestinian peoples can never be separated fairly [in 'Introduction to the Politics of Verticality' <www.opendemocracy.net>, for example, Israeli architect Eyal Weizman deconstructs Israeli settling work, and argues that there was never an Israeli intention to withdraw from the West Bank.]

"The separation wall, says Haim Hanegbi, a non-Zionist Israeli, 'is the great despairing solution of the Jewish-Zionist society. It is the last desperate act of those who cannot confront the Palestinian issue.' One-time Zionist leader Meron Benvenisti, a Palestine-born and a contemporary of Hanegbi, also now supports a secular binational state. *Ha'aretz*, ran interviews with both men side by side. Both discuss the evolution of their thinking over the decades, and both describe a period in which, after the triumph of Zionism, they unthinkingly accepted its dispossession of the Palestinians. Each man describes the Palestinians simply disappearing when he was an adolescent ('They just sort of evaporated,' says Hanegbi), and Benvenisti recalls a long period in which the Palestinian 'tragedy simply did not penetrate my consciousness.' But both speak in very un-Zionist terms of equality. Benvenisti touches on the crux of the Zionist dilemma. 'This is where I am different from my friends in the left,' he says, 'because I am ... drawn to the Arab culture and the Arabic language because it is here. It is the land. Whereas the right, certainly, but the left too hates Arabs. The Arabs bother them; they complicate things. The subject generates moral questions and that generates cultural unease.'"

If it weren't so sad and so predictable it would be funny: the first town to be handed back to the Palestinians was Ariha/Jericho. That was where the reconstruction of the Palestinian nation was to begin. And what was the business enterprise that had been built there with 'international' money? A casino. The parallels with the Native American 'sovereign' homelands is glaring to the point of caricature.

But at the end of 2000 it became clear that the Palestinians were not going to allow themselves to be disappeared. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories adopted a policy of *sumoud*. Palestinian citizens of Israel demonstrated solidarity (and 13 of them were shot dead during a peaceful protest). Palestinians in the 'Diaspora' found their voice and

proclaimed their identity loud and clear. In the Arab world, despite their rulers, the people continued to see Palestine as their top foreign policy concern, a concern which spread to many countries in the non-western world. And even in the West, public opinion was shifting, was showing signs of a preparedness to see Israel as it really is and not through spectacles misted over with remorse and a certain romance.

Consider Israel's predicament: a militarily powerful state (the 4th in the world), unable to gain the acquiescence of those it sees as 'the enemy'. Former Israeli Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon has said that the army must "sear into the Palestinian consciousness that they are a defeated people." But as Edward Said used to say "You are not defeated until you agree that you're defeated." And Israel cannot get the Palestinians to say "OK we're defeated."

Do with us what you will. Break us up into cantons. Make us into an underclass. Ration our procreation. Erase our memories. Tighten the noose till we die or leave. We will pretend that all is well. That we are not here. That we were never here." The Palestinians will not say this; rather they are like Walter Benjamin's historian, who has the "gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past" because he is "firmly convinced that even *the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins."

SO WHAT CAN ISRAEL DO? Well, it could always have divested itself of Zionism: seen it as an ideology that had served its purpose, something to be outgrown, as Tony Judt, Avraham Oz and many other post-Zionists propose. Or it could have pulled back to the Green Line and made a kind of peace *manquz* as the mainstream peace movement in Israel has been urging since 1967.

But of course it did neither; it carried on with the Zionist programme: the assassinations, the demolitions, the re-invasion of the West Bank, the construction of the Wall. In doing so it knowingly created a blue-print for other, future wars.

In *Hollow Land, Israel's Architecture of Occupation*, (to be published in 2007) Eyal Weizman has a chapter called "Walking through Walls". It deals with the Israeli military and I think it's probably the most chilling thing I've ever read. In an interview with IDF Chief of Staff, Dan Halutz, Halutz confirms that the Israeli army sees the conflict with the Palestinians as "irresolvable and permanent." The IDF has "geared itself to operate within an environment saturated with conflict and within a future of permanent violence." It sees itself acting "just under the threshold of international sanctions ... keeping the conflict on a flame low enough for Israeli society to be able to live and prosper within it."

Let me give you an example: an IDF team, co-operating closely with the US "Transformation Group" under Donald Rumsfeld, developed a concept for the "domination of the Palestinians after the evacuation of the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank ... through an invisible occupation: Israel should seal the hard envelopes [the Wall] around Palestinian population centres and manage the area by generating 'effects' within it ... the new form of control will no longer engage with territoriality but will be directed against the human elements of resistance, that is the killing of Palestinian military and political activists." This concept is already being implemented.

Clearly this tries to alleviate the burden I mentioned earlier; the problem posed to Israeli society by the geographical closeness of the Palestinians, and the unhappiness of world

opinion with the actions of the occupation. The solution: wall the Palestinians in and shoot them at will.

But back to 2000, and the card that Israel continued to hold: its relationship with the United States, now the one power in a uni-polar world. Soon into 2001 George W Bush became President and the US administration was staffed by neo- conservatives.

There is probably no need to rehearse how back in 1996, several of the neo-cons had presented a policy paper to the then new Prime Minister of Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu, urging "a clean break from the slogan 'comprehensive peace' to a traditional concept of strategy based on balance of power".

Or how in January 1998, another configuration of neo-cons wrote to President Clinton urging him to attack Iraq for the security of "Israel and our allies". Their view was that the road to a Middle East peace "goes through Baghdad". Among the signatories were John Bolton, Zalmay Khalilzad, Richard Perle, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz.

So here's the scene: in Israel, a stalled Zionist project, and in the US a Neo-con administration around a born-again president and a mobilized and growing Christian-Zionist population -- courted assiduously for years by Binyamin Netanyahu.

ISRAEL'S ROLE POST 9/11: The attacks of September 11 took place and played straight into the neo-con/Israeli dream scenario. That day four major Israeli politicians, Shimon Peres, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Barak and Binyamin Netanyahu, took to the TV screens to assert that the terror just suffered by the Americans was the identical terror endured by Israel since its establishment -- to drive home the point Israel had been pushing for years: that Israel's interests were America's interests, Israel's enemies were America's enemies.

The figure of the "Islamic Terrorist" was now fully realised. Edward Said, we should remember, predicts the emergence of this figure (but in a characteristically hopeful formulation) in his 1981 book, *Covering Islam*, when he asks "Is 'Islam' going to be confined to the role of terroristic oil-supplier?... Or will debate and reflection be better employed around topics more suited to world community and peaceful development?"

The question stands. And the role of Israel in influencing the answer becomes clearer by the day: the role of Israel, allied to its supporters, the neo-cons and the American Christian Right, (as distinct from the mainstream Christian churches which are, in fact, joining the Boycott Israel Campaign) is to exaggerate and escalate the conflict. Now, instead of the world's eyes being fixed on the Palestine/Israel issue, we have to take in Iraq and Afghanistan and Lebanon -- and we must fear for Syria, Iran and Sudan. Instead of a conflict over land and political rights in Palestine/Israel the conflict shifts into the metaphysical sphere: a conflict with an enemy so nebulous as to be found anywhere where resistance to American or Israeli policies might lurk; an enemy with whom no negotiation is possible, who 'hates us' simply because of 'who we are'.

This is a logical move within long-term Israeli strategy. Israel has always sold itself to the West on the basis of the state's oppositional relationship to its chosen environment. Back at the end of the 19th century, Theodore Herzl assured the British Foreign Office that Israel would provide a civilised bulwark against the barbarian hordes of Islam. Now, again as Edward Said puts it in *Covering Islam* : "Israel's security in American eyes has become conveniently interchangeable with fending off Islam, perpetuating Western hegemony and

demonstrating the virtues of modernization... Three sets of illusions economically buttress and reproduce one another in the interests of shoring up the Western self- image and promoting Western power over the Orient: the view of Islam, the ideology of modernization, and the affirmation of Israel's general value to the West."

THE RACE: It was within this rubric that the 2003 war on Iraq was launched. The old language of colonialism surfaced once again and the old troopers crowded back on stage: the apologists for Empire, the instant experts on Islam and *Jee* had, the comprador intellectuals, the whole sorry, shoddy lot.

Meanwhile the US administration and Israel look like they're racing to get the world sorted the way they want it -- before the world catches up with them.

The role of Israel in promoting the war on Iraq is well documented. Indeed, Professors Mearsheimer and Walt argue in their study "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy" (*The London Review of Books*, 23 March 2006) that there probably would have been no invasion but for Israel and, above all, its partisans inside the US." Everybody remembers prominent neo-con Richard Perle taking the Iraqi pretender, Ahmad Chalabi, under his wing and -- against strong objections from the CIA -- installing him in the Pentagon. Perle resigned as Chair of the Defence Policy Board Advisory Committee when his and Chalabi's lies about Iraq started to be exposed. Now he has surfaced again and who does he have in tow? An Iranian Ahmad Chalabi: Amir Abbas Fakhrahar -- allegedly a leading student dissident -- except he's not. Laura Rosen reveals his provenance in "The Talented Mr Fakhrahar" (www.warandpiece.com [sic], 6 October 2006).

Now Israel pushes for an attack on Iran. And pushes for the US to go into Darfur as Gary Leupp reveals in a May essay in *Counterpunch*.

Then we have the devastation visited on Lebanon. It's true Hizbullah had captured two Israeli soldiers against the backdrop of an ongoing low- intensity border conflict; previous captures had led to negotiations and the release of prisoners. But Israel and the US had already planned a Lebanese war for the autumn. US Vice-President Cheney had, it is said, approved it in March. In their hurry to smash the Middle East into the shape they wanted they decided to bring their war forward. This is why the US and British governments opposed a ceasefire, because they *wanted* Israel to cause as much damage in Lebanon as possible.

Syria has recently repeatedly offered to talk, to try to solve the Golan issue. Neither Israel nor the US wants to listen.

Three years ago the Saudis put forward a plan that would give Israel normalisation with every Arab state in return for a solution for the Palestinian problem. That plan has been so thoroughly buried that you don't even see it in the history of Arab-Israeli peace initiatives.

And, of course, we have the current unspeakable situation in Palestine.

WHAT THE WORLD WILL LOOK LIKE: What we are seeing now is a taster, a trailer for what the world will look like if this symbiosis between a Zionist Israel and a neo-conservative America is allowed to continue.

The neo-conservatives, as we all know, espouse a doctrine of ongoing war, a conflict that will 'last for generations.' They have spoken of 'constructive chaos', as Israeli leaders have spoken of the 'opportunities' that war brings. And, as we've seen, the Israeli Army now thinks in terms of pitching permanent conflict at a level it can get away with.

Israel's re-invasion of Jenin, Nablus and Ramallah in Spring 2002, Weizman tells us, was "at the centre of the attention of foreign militaries, especially the American and the British, as they geared themselves to the occupation of Iraq." We need to get away from the traditional idea that these people go into wars to win them. War itself is the condition they desire for designated parts of the world. Happily, it also channels US taxpayer dollars into the pockets of friendly corporations. We need to understand the new calculus of profit and loss that the US and Israeli governments are using.

What is being spread is not just actual war and destruction but a way of looking at and dealing with the world. Edward Said's project in *Orientalism* was "to use humanist critique to open up the fields of struggle, to introduce a longer sequence of thought and analysis to replace the short bursts of polemical, thought-stopping fury that so imprison us... [to attempt] to dissolve Blake's 'mind-forg'd manacles' so as to be able to use one's mind historically and rationally for the purposes of reflective understanding." Today, to quote Weizman again, commenting on the language and the philosophical apparatus used by the IDF, "in no uncertain terms, education in the humanities -- often believed to be the most powerful tool *against* imperialism -- is being appropriated as a powerful weapon *for* imperialism."

In the last two years Israel has demolished more than 4000 Palestinian homes. Israeli soldiers have wrenched multiples of thousands of olive trees from the soil. In this past month Israel has killed 56 Palestinians and demolished 24 Palestinian houses. In September it killed 30. In August it killed 72 and wounded 98. In July it killed 162 and wounded 433. In June it killed 55 and wounded 220. In May it killed 42 and how far back should I go? Since the beginning of the Intifada in 2000, 760 Israelis have been killed and 5330 Israelis wounded. But I don't know that any of these dead and wounded matter to the Israeli state. Just as I don't know who -- apart from their families and friends -- cares about the dead young Americans in Iraq.

A way of looking at the world is being spread; a way that is *blasĀ* and thuggish and criminal.

We witness disregard for International Law and contempt for International institutions.

We witness Israel testing new weapons -- chemicals and nerve gases -- on the people in Gaza, phosphorus and uranium-based munitions in Lebanon, while the US uses phosphorus bombs and depleted uranium in Iraq.

Until recently Israel was the only state whose laws permitted the use of torture. Now that the US has joined it we have the spectacle of Harvard lawyers quibbling over precisely what levels of mistreatment have to be attained to be defined as torture. We also know that Israeli interrogators were present in Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and that Israel has been coaching US interrogators in interrogation techniques -- supposedly custom-made for Muslim men!

In the UK it can be argued that Israeli coaching led directly to the shooting of Jan Charles di Menezes in Stockwell underground station last year.

Then down to the details: the use of plastic wristbands pioneered by Israel and put to such good use in Iraq and Afghanistan. The use of barbed wire to control civilian populations. The use of home demolitions and collective punishment and arbitrary detention.

We witness the erosion of civil rights in the world's largest democracy.

The attempts to gag free speech: everyone now knows about the media uproar earlier in the year over the Mearsheimer and Walt article on the influence of the Zionist lobby in the USA. But on 4 October, Professor Tony Judt's talk for the organisation 20/20 in New York was cancelled after the Polish Embassy withdrew its offer to host it. The Polish withdrawal was ascribed to phone calls from the chairs of the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee. Judt, one-time secretary of the Labour Zionist youth movement in Britain, has, since 2003, called for Israel to transform itself from a Jewish state into a binational one. On 9 October, the French Embassy in New York cancelled a reception for distinguished Australian publisher, editor and author, Carmen Callil's book, *Bad Faith*, a masterly documentation of the harrowing stories of French Jews during the Vichy regime, because "it could not endorse a personal opinion of the author expressed in the postscript of the book."

What was that personal opinion? "What caused me anguish," wrote Callil, in the last paragraph of her 444-page text, "...was to live so closely to the helpless terror of the Jews of France, and to see what the Jews of Israel were passing on to the Palestinian people.... Like the rest of humanity, the Jews of Israel 'forget' the Palestinians. Everyone forgets; every nation forgets." She is now receiving the usual torrent of abusive mail.

What is being promoted is a Zionist way of looking at the world; a way that privileges one group of people over others because of who they are; a way that condones any means of preserving that privilege, however destructive, however illegitimate.

WHO WAGS WHOM: One of the debates that have come up repeatedly over the last couple of years is the debate on who is the agent and architect of this state of affairs, Israel or the US? But what matters is the confluence of attitudes between the US and the Israeli ruling establishments. Of course the military/industrial complex, the financial world and its interests, are movers and beneficiaries of conflict. But the political will and attitude of the ruling establishment is critical to making war, setting up detention facilities, changing laws, tapping phones, controlling the flow of information and so on.

And the political will of the current White House and the Israeli government seem to be identical. Rather than seeking peace they seek to expand war. Rather than trying to understand the causes of tension they obfuscate them by positing cosmic conflicts and irrational enemies. Rather than searching for more equitable ways for us all to live on this planet they promote cut-throat -- and in many cases fraudulent -- global capitalism. Rather than celebrating or at least accepting diversity they preach exceptionalism and seek to force us all into one mould: their own.

It is clear to many people that the influence of the Zionist project on the ideology, the attitude and the modus operandi of the United States is doing major harm to the entire

world. This can be seen in its most flagrant form in the actions and preaching of the Christian Zionists in the United States, this very active population of some 30 million who actually yearn for and work towards promoting Armageddon and the end of the world.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT? In the last 2 months Israeli 'checkpoints' in the West Bank have increased by 40 per cent. They now number 528.

Israeli commentator Ran HaCohen recently observed that "Israel's atrocities have now intensified to an extent unimaginable in previous decades." Land confiscation, curfew, the "gradual pushing of Palestinians from areas designated for Jews" have accompanied the occupation all along, he wrote, but the level of oppression now "is quite another story.[This is] an eliminationist policy on the verge of genocide."

The Foundation for Middle East Peace, a Washington-based institution, came to much the same conclusion. Israeli actions, it wrote, "particularly the 'relentless' increase in territorial control have compromised not only the prospect for genuine Palestinian independence but also, in ways not seen in Israel's 36-year occupation, the very sustainability of everyday Palestinian life."

As the Christisons note: "What Israel is doing to the Palestinians is not genocide, it is not a holocaust, but it is, unmistakably, ethnicide. ... We are all made to think always about the existential threat to Israel, to the Jewish people. But the nation in imminent danger of elimination today is not Israel but the Palestinians."

Chris McGreal writes in the *Guardian* on 7 February 2006: "Perhaps the conflict will evolve into something ... that will produce parallels even more shocking than that with apartheid.

"Arnon Sofer has spent years advising the government on the demographic threat posed by the Arabs. The Haifa University geographer paints a bleak vision of how he sees the Gaza Strip a generation after Israel's withdrawal. 'When 2.5 million people live in a closed-off Gaza, it's going to be a human catastrophe. These people will become even bigger animals than they are today, with the aid of an insane fundamental Islam. The pressure at the border will be awful. It's going to be a terrible war. So, if we want to remain alive, we will have to kill and kill and kill. All day, every day,' he told the *Jerusalem Post*. 'If we don't kill we will cease to exist. The only thing that concerns me is how to ensure that the boys and men who are going to have to do the killing will be able to return home to their families and be normal human beings.'"

Now Ehud Olmert has invited Avigdor Lieberman into the Israeli government. Lieberman comes with 11 representatives from the "Israel is our Home" Party. He is a settler, a recent immigrant, a Moldavian ex-bouncer, and openly advocates the transfer of Arab citizens out of Israel.

AND ALL THIS, FOR WHAT? In his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Ilan Pappé describes what the Jewish National Fund does with the Palestinian landscape in Israel: "When it set out to create its national parks on the sites of eradicated Palestinian villages... the JNF... opted mainly for conifers instead of the natural flora indigenous to Palestine. In part this was an attempt to make the country look European ... in addition ... it was meant to support the country's aspiring wood industry." He goes on to quote the tourist brochures describing these forests, skipping a millennia of Palestinian villages and

referring to all things as 'Biblical' or 'Talmudic'. I would like to mention here the Israeli group, Zochorot, who challenge this obliteration and run a kind of guerrilla campaign to replace, and keep replacing Arab names and information on the sites of destroyed villages.

But the Zionist project is -- what ? To create Theme Park Israel where Jews can live on their own, ignoring the oubliettes a few miles from their homes where their army deals with 'the human element' by murdering it from the air?

Israeli intellectuals wonder at the malaise that grips their country. Two Nobel Prize laureates, Professors Yisrael Aumann (Game Theory, 2005) and Aaron Ciechanover (Chemistry, 2004), sounding "as if they are fighting back tears" bemoan the "fatal disease: the depletion of spirit ... [the] cancer that has spread through Israeli society." They attribute it to a kind of generalised "selfishness" which they, oddly, think may be OK in Switzerland but not in Israel. It's nothing to do with "the enemy" they say, because the enemy they can handle with their "wisdom and technology".

Einstein, their distinguished predecessor, expressed grave doubts about political Zionism. A letter he signed in the *New York Times* in December 1948 warned against the emergence in Israel of (future Prime Minister) Menachem Begin's "Freedom Party". The letter cited Deir Yassin, where Mr Begin and friends, eight months earlier, had killed 240 men, women and children and "were proud of this massacre." "This," the letter goes on, "is the unmistakable stamp of a fascist party for whom terrorism ... and misrepresentation are means, and a 'Leader State' is the goal."

Does it really need Einstein to diagnose what's wrong with Israel today?

ROOM FOR HOPE: One of the most valuable examples that Edward Said set for us all was that he found hope in the most bleak circumstances. It was real hope, because he saw the bleakness clearly but never gave up presenting a vision of how things ought to be, and he always had proposals for how that could be made to happen, for how *you* could help to make it happen. In an interview first published in *Middle East Report* with Barbara Harlow in 1991, he describes the cause "involving justice, principle, truth, conviction" that the American intellectual needs to affiliate him or her self to; it is "that the relationship between the United States and the rest of the world, now based upon profit and power, has to be altered to one of coexistence among human communities that can make and remake their own histories and environments together. This is the number one priority -- there's nothing else of that magnitude."

We have seen the opposite happen, we have seen the neo-cons insist that power and profit would be the only determinant of American foreign policy in the "New American Century". This position was formulated in close alignment with Israel.

The American/Israeli symbiosis has to be broken. It will be broken. I believe we are seeing attempts to break it now. Dissenting groups are proliferating in the United States, in Israel and in the world. A community of human beings is determined to resist the deadly grid being imposed upon it.

John Pilger, writing recently in the *New Statesman*, recalling the demonstrations against the projected war on Iraq that swept the world in February 2003, admits they did not stop

the war but "the same universal power of public morality has, I believe, stalled attacks on Iran and North Korea, probably with 'tactical' nuclear weapons."

People being moved too far from their notion of their best selves, their image of themselves, are trying to reclaim that image. The names of the dissident groups are significant: in the USA, Not in Our Name, the World Can't Wait, If Americans Knew, etc. In Israel, Zochorot, Jews for Justice, Ta'ayush, Musawa. Words like 'empathy' or 'the common good' are making their way, once again, into American public discourse. So far they reach out to American society. They will need to embrace the world.

It is tremendously heartening to see the role that culture is playing in the resistance to power. Film, music, theatre, plastic art are all engaging specifically with Palestine and with the broader issues Palestine is coming to represent.

Every day that passes, each authentic expression of the Palestinian identity in film or music, painting or dance or embroidery, each act of violence that Israel commits against the Palestinians, articulates the Palestinian cause as the great cause of conscience for our world today. From Canada to Australia citizens of the world invent original ways to express their solidarity with the Palestinians. The internet buzzes with information, testimonies, news of activities, fund-raisers and calls to action. In the absence of a constructive response from Israel, the campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel is growing.

Edward Said wrote that "we need to be able to say what we are *for* in our world and in our lives ... we need a developed sense of what it is we care about." And a large proportion of the world's citizens now cares about Palestine. The sense is growing that if the world is to be put back on an even keel it has to be a world in which the Palestinians achieve equality and justice.

The writer is an Egyptian British novelist. The above text was delivered at Warwick University, UK, on 31 October 2006, as the Edward Said Memorial Lecture .