

Palestinian Zionism

Author(s): Sadik J. Al-Azm

Source: *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Bd. 28, Nr. 1/4 (1988), pp. 90-98

Published by: [Brill](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1571166>

Accessed: 11-10-2015 10:13 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Brill is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Die Welt des Islams*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

PALESTINIAN ZIONISM

BY

SADIK J. AL-AZM

Damaskus

A basic maxim of Marxist socio-political analysis states that similar infrastructural conditions tend to produce similar superstructural phenomena. Some of us who have been in close and protracted contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), (particularly with its political militants, higher cadres and more outspoken ideologues), certainly have sensed something of the importance of this maxim, not as an abstract principle but as a concretely lived series of organically developing situations, ideas and experiences. I am referring, here, to the Palestinian comparisons drawn between the modern Jewish and Palestinian diasporas and the superstructural (particularly political) phenomena generated by them.

Prior to the Arab-Israeli October War of 1973, informal discussions in the PLO often apologized for the multiplicity of Palestinian armed organizations by arguing that the very similar multiplicity of Zionist armed organizations did not hinder the Zionist Movement from achieving its aim of establishing the state of Israel. The same apology went on to argue, analogically, that: (a) The Palestinian resistance organizations could go on functioning under the PLO umbrella, regardless of their political squabbles, ideological disputes, institutional rivalries, incompatible alliances and allegiances, pretty much the way the Zionist armed organizations managed to operate and carry on their fight, under the protective umbrella of the World Zionist Organization and in spite of the violent quarrels, numerous disputes and deadly contests that often characterized relations among them. (b) The efforts and energies of every segment of the Palestinian people (moderates and extremists, wealthy and destitute, right-wing and left-wing, combatants and in-

tellecuals etc.) should be mobilized in the struggle for the realization of the territorial aims of the Palestinian people, much the same way as the Zionist movement managed to mobilize almost all sectors of the Jewish people, regardless of ideological persuasions, political inclinations, social status etc., to realize the ultimate territorial Zionist aim.

Underlying these political and institutional comparisons rests the following more basic but silent analogy: The larger portion of the Palestinian people lives in a diaspora identical in many a way with that experienced by the Jewish minorities in modern times. Due to this circumstance, the Palestinians lack the territorial base on which to carry on the productive economic, political and cultural activities normal to almost every other people in the modern world, much the same way as the Jews lacked their territorial base prior to the establishment of the state of Israel. Furthermore, the Palestinian diaspora did produce a significant number of social phenomena traditionally associated with the life of the Jewish communities in their respective host societies. Following are some of the more important instances: (a) The predominantly urban character of the Palestinian diaspora and of the urban nature of the activities carried out by its members. (b) The much higher percentage of the literate, educated, technically trained, highly skilled etc. among diaspora Palestinians, than is the case among the peoples of the Arab host societies. (c) The remarkably dynamic, effective, audacious and successful role of the Palestinian bourgeoisie in the life of the host countries, hence Palestinian prominence in the liberal professions, ascendancy in the various realms of cultural production and superiority in such fields as trade, finance, banking, industry and entrepreneurship in general. (d) The progressive proletarianization of broad strata of the Palestinian diaspora by the host societies, considering that the refugee camps have always constituted a good source for a cheap and highly mobile labor force.¹ Hence, the conspicuous absence of the ordinary and direct exploitative relationship between the Palestinian bourgeoisie and its working class. (e) The strong (and increasing) presence of a lumpen sector among the Palestinians of the camps. (f) The persistent rela-

¹ This applies also to the Palestinians under direct Israeli rule and occupation.

tions of tension and oppression generally governing the ties of the Palestinians to their host societies and governments, ranging from ordinary friction, rivalry and hatred to outright physical repression and collective persecution to the point of waging campaigns of “encirclement and annihilation” against them. (g) The rejection of assimilationism both in its nationalist and radical left-wing forms, i.e., the rejection of Palestinian absorption either in the general nationalist fight for Arab unity, genuine independence etc., or in the overall revolutionary Arab struggle for socialism, communism etc.

After the Arab-Israeli War of October 1973, and on the basis of this normally silent analogy, the dominant Palestinian and PLO circles arrived at conclusions not significantly different from those of Ber Borochov² (the famous left-wing Zionist ideologue), concerning the proper solution of the Palestinian Question. Like Ber Borochov, they called for a “territorial solution”, which, under the circumstances, could take only the form of an independent Palestinian state comprising the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Thus, political territorial independence on a piece of Palestine became the official aim of the Palestinian people and revolution. For, like the Jews of the diaspora, the bulk of the Palestinian people is deprived of its territory and has to function under abnormal conditions of production which hinder it from developing and enjoying to the full its organs of national preservation, political independence and cultural expression. In other words, the establishment of the Palestinian state is supposed to “normalize” the situation of the Palestinian people, rendering it subject to the same general laws governing the social, economic, political and cultural development of the other Arab peoples and societies in the area.

Some of the more radical and enthusiastic supporters of this line of thought argue that just as the establishment of the state of Israel on a part of Palestine provided the required base for further territorial expansion, colonization and settlement (bringing the rest of Palestine under direct Israeli rule), similarly, the establishment of a Palestinian state, on a part of Palestine also, will provide the required territorial base for continuing the struggle of the Palestinian

² 1881-1917, See Arthur Hertzberg’s *The Zionist Idea*, Harper Torchbooks, New York City, 1966, pp. 353-366.

Revolution for the ultimate aim of establishing a secular, socialist, democratic state and society on the whole of mandatory Palestine.

At the level of tactics, this kind of argument points out that since the Zionist Movement was greatly helped in achieving its aims by a whole range of shifting (and often unprincipled) ties and alliances with major and regional powers, reactionary and progressive social forces, paramount and dependent ruling classes, it is natural to think that the Palestinian Liberation Movement also will be similarly helped in achieving its aim (the mini-Palestinian state) by a whole range of shifting and unprincipled alliances and ties with Western Europe and the Soviet Union, Saudi Arabia and Euro-Communism, the US oil establishment and the prince of Qatar, the State Department's proverbial Arabists and the American congressional lobbies. Similarly, since under the leadership of the middle bourgeoisie the Zionist Movement succeeded in mobilizing practically all Jewish social forces—right-wing and left-wing, rich and poor, moderates and extremists, fighters and intellectuals etc.—to serve the cause within the wide political framework of the World Zionist Organization, it is natural to think that the Palestinian Liberation Movement, under the leadership of the middle bourgeoisie, will succeed also in attaining its territorial objective by mobilizing all Palestinian social forces—right-wing and left-wing, rich and poor etc.—within the wide political framework provided by the PLO. In fact the Palestinian bourgeoisie of the American and Canadian diaspora has been making serious efforts at organizing itself and its constituency, for purposes political and otherwise, along lines which nicely mimic the work of the Jewish bourgeoisie in this domain. This trend is particularly evident in the creation of Palestinian Funds and philanthropic organizations. Thus, the charter of the Holy Land Fund, based in Chicago, amounts to a carbon copy (with the appropriate alterations) of the charter of the corresponding Jewish Fund and enjoys the same privileges, exemptions and rights granted under American Law. Similar things may be said about the Palestine Fund, based in San Francisco, and about the Palestine Red Crescent Association, based in New York City. Again, the repeated Palestinian calls for the mobilization of Arab resources, financial power, strategic location etc. to pressure American and Western governments into more accommodating

postures *vis a vis* the projected Palestinian state, always carry the not so implicit reminder that Zionism succeeded on account of its proven ability to generate the necessary pressure on the governments concerned, *via* the mobilization of Jewish financial power, political influence, electoral weight etc. Hence the continuing calls of the most prominent Palestinian Occidentalists in American Universities for the formation of an Arab-Palestinian lobby allied to American oil interests and capital.

Interestingly enough, the proposed territorial solution to the problem affected the PLO in ways analogous to the impact of the proposed partition of Palestine in the thirties on the Zionist Organization. When the British authorities adopted the idea of establishing a Jewish state on a part of Palestine the Zionist Organization split into a large moderate majority supported by international opinion and allies, and a small extremist "Rejectionist Front" led by V. Jabotinsky. The minority fraction abandoned the internationally recognized Zionist Organization in favor of establishing a more militant and uncompromising alternative organization of its own. The moderate majority argued, in those days, that accepting the proposed mini-Jewish state will provide the movement with a firm base from which to continue the struggle for the realization of the more strategic aims of the Jewish people. The rejectionists accused the leadership of the Zionist Organization of capitulation before the pressures and lures of British imperialism, and argued that the historical Fatherland should be never subject to such cheap bargains and humiliating compromises, meanwhile, the aim remains its liberation in *toto*. After the October War of 1973, and the international and local floating of the idea of a Palestinian state on a portion of Palestine, the PLO split into a moderate majority supported by international opinion and allies, and a small extremist fraction led by George Habash. This minority deserted the internationally recognized PLO in favor of a more militant and uncompromizing Rejectionist Front which, at one point, contemplated seriously forming an alternative and more militant PLO of its own. The moderate majority argued that adopting the mini-Palestinian state project could provide the movement with a firm base from which to continue the struggle for the realization of the more strategic aims of the Palestinian people. The Rejec-

tionists, on the other hand, accused the leadership of the PLO of capitulating before the pressures of American imperialism and the lures of the reactionary Arab regimes (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states), and argued that the historical Fatherland could never become the subject of such humiliating deals and unprincipled compromises, for the aim remains always its liberation in *toto*.

In effect, the adherents and protagonists of the current territorial solution to the Palestinian Question have come to see in the Palestinian Liberation Movement a kind of Zionism in reverse, in spite of the fact that the dominant content of Zionism was white, European-settler, colonialist and pro-imperialist, while the Palestinian Liberation Movement continues to carry a brown, Third-Worldist, native decolonizing and anti-imperialist content. In the Zionist case the content eminently fitted the form and, hence, the project proved historically realizable. In the Palestinian case, since the content is in obvious and sharp discord with the form the project will, most probably, prove unattainable, i. e. as long as its substance remains constricted by this present uncongenial form.

In this connection I would like to refer to the published opinions of three prominent Palestinians. In a celebrated article, Walid Khalidi outlined a blue print for the proposed Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.³ In fact the article of this highly urbane Palestinian author and professor, whose real title is *The State of the Palestinians*, parallels very nicely that other famous tract entitled *The State of the Jews*, also produced by a highly urbane Viennese Jewish intellectual and journalist. His major contentions, justifications and rationalizations favoring the establishment of such a state are, interestingly enough, exact replicas of the classical Zionist arguments justifying the creation of a Jewish state on a part (or the whole) of Palestine. Like the traditional Zionist ideologues, Khalidi directs his arguments primarily at the ruling elite of the currently dominant imperialist power in the Middle East viz., the United States (hence, the publication of his article in *Foreign Affairs*). Secondly, his arguments are also directed at the ruling elites of the

³ "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 4, Washington D.C., July 1978, pp. 695-713. Walid Khalidi headed the Institute of Palestine Studies in Beirut, Lebanon.

other Western powers. In much the same way as the classical Zionist ideologues tried to convince those European (and later on American) elites that the most rational, realistic, and profitable solution of the Jewish Question is instituting a Jewish state in Palestine, Khalidi argues, also, that the most rational, realistic and profitable solution to the Palestinian Question, from the point of view of preserving and defending the vital interests of the West in the Middle East, is the creation of a Palestinian state. The Old Zionist spokesmen tried to make the project of the Jewish state look harmless to the Palestinians and very pleasing, attractive and profitable to the dominant imperial and regional powers of those days. Khalidi, in his turn, tries to make the project of the Palestinian state look quite harmless to the Israelis and very pleasing, attractive and profitable to the dominant imperial and regional powers of today.

In another vein, Sabri Jiryis praises highly the PLO leadership for its newly acquired realism, reasonableness, moderation and pragmatism as evidenced by its total adoption of the limited territorial solution to the Palestinian Question.⁴ Jiryis explains frankly that this welcome development is the outcome of the tendency of the PLO's leadership to learn from and imitate the realism, flexibility, moderation and pragmatism of the classical leadership of the Zionist Movement. He also expresses high hopes that just as this kind of political behavior successfully led to the establishment of the Jewish state in the past, it will also lead to the successful creation of the Palestinian state in the reasonably near future.

The exquisite texts and photographs of the recently published book of the American Palestinian *par excellence*, Edward Said, are, tellingly enough, consumed by none other than the ancient cry: "If I forget thee..."⁵ His earlier book, *The Question of Palestine*, was a heroic attempt to establish a discursive Western reality and presence for the "Palestinian Question" comparable to the earlier European reality and efficacy of the famous "Jewish Question". Said unburdens himself thus:

⁴ "On Political Settlement in the Middle East: The Palestinian Dimension", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, No. 25, Beirut, Autumn 1977, pp. 3-25. Jiryis headed the PLO Research Center in Beirut, Lebanon.

⁵ *After the Last Sky*, (With photographs by Jean Mohr), Faber and Faber, London, 1986.

“... above all, despite the fact that we are geographically dispersed and fragmented, despite the fact that we are without a territory of our own, we have been united as a people largely because the Palestinian *idea* (which we have articulated out of our own experience of dispossession and exclusionary oppression) has a coherence to which we have all responded with positive enthusiasm. It is the full spectrum of Palestinian failure and subsequent return in their lived details that I have tried to describe in this book.”⁶

His approach, phrases and emphases will inevitably recall to the mind of the historically informed reader the discourses and theses of such classical Zionist ideologues as: Peretz Smolenskin, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Moshe L. Lilienblum and Leo Pinsker.⁷ The affinities of Said’s Hegelian-inspired “Palestinian Idea” to the equally Hegelian-inspired “Zionist Idea” and “Spiritual Nation” should not escape the attention of such a reader, either. À la Walid Khalidi, Said, also, tried his hand at convincing the ruling elites of the United States of America, *via* his sharply and widely debated book *Orientalism*, that it would be in their long-term best interests not to view the “Palestinian Question” through the heavily distorting discursive medium built by academic Orientalism in the West.⁸

Should we want to push these comparisons to their ultimate conclusions the results will look something like the following: Yaser Arafat, with his paternalistic attitude towards the whole Palestinian Resistance Movement, his constant travelling between international and Arab capitals, his unceasing dealings with a curious assortment of heads of state, Prime Ministers etc., his constantly open channels with each and every party with some interest in the Palestinian problem, plus his renown political flexibility, diplomatic expertise and pragmatic tactics, is a kind of Palestinian Chaim Weizmann who was famous for all these qualities and without which he could not have remained long at the head of the Zionist Organization, given the internal strife and contradictions

⁶ *The Question of Palestine*, New York Times Books, New York, 1980, p. x. Said’s emphasis.

⁷ See *The Zionist Idea*, part 2.

⁸ *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978, pp. 321, 322.

plaguing its life. George Habash, with his inflexible political stands, his uncompromizing opposition to the partition of Palestine under any pretext, his chauvinistic background, his temporary desertion of the PLO at the head of a determined minority, his constant criticism of the PLO leadership for its opportunism, laxness and unprincipled politiquing, his permanent inability to become the leader of the majority, his faith in a certain kind of elitist revolutionary violence, is the Palestinian mirror image of Jabotinsky (turned left-wing). Naif Hawatmeh, with his unlimited enthusiasm for the projected Palestinian state, his illusory belief in the improved negotiating position of the Arabs after the 1973 war with Israel, his irresistible desire to erect the state in the nearest possible future and his profound conviction that the mini-state will provide the Movement with the required base for the future liberation of Palestine, is a kind of pseudo-project for a Palestinian Ben Gurion, the builder of the Jewish state on a part of Palestine in preparation for its future conquests.