MUSTAFA BARGHOUTI

PALESTINIAN DEFIANCE

Interview by Éric Hazan

Could you tell us about your origins and early trajectory?

I WAS BORN in Jerusalem, in 1954, but I spent my childhood here in Ramallah. My family is from Deir Ghassaneh, a village about fifteen miles away, near Bir Zeit; but after 1948, my father became the municipal engineer for Al Bireh, adjoining Ramallah. The Barghouti family, a large one, has always been very political, very active. Under the Mandate, my grandfather and his brother were jailed by the British. During the 1950s, the whole village was part of the left opposition to Jordanian rule. It was the beginning of the Nasserite movement, of Pan-Arabism; the influence of the Jordanian Communist Party and other left forces was also very strong. I grew up surrounded by internationalist, progressive literature—our family's viewpoint was always shaped by opposition to social injustice, rather than by nationalism. My father used to speak to us of his Jewish comrades in Tiberias or Acre. All through my childhood, I heard talk of prisons. I've been told that the first time I went to a prison I was two years old, taken to visit one of my uncles who'd been jailed—for political reasons, of course. Then during the 1960s there were many waves of mass demonstrations and protests.

You were fourteen at the time of the 1967 war. What were its effects for you?

Those few days reshaped me. I felt a huge amount of responsibility. My childhood ended then. We were now under occupation. It was the

beginning of a life mission: how do we become free? The feeling of injustice was very strong. Though still a child, I felt the whole world sitting on my shoulders. There was also the sense of failure—that the Nasserite approach had failed, and we had to find something else. How had such a tiny country as Israel been able to beat all the Arab armies? How to explain the gap between the grand speeches and the reality? It was a lesson never to be cheated by propaganda again. Some gave in to defeatism—Nasser had it wrong, it was better to adopt a pro-American stance—but our position was: no, we have to resist, but in a stronger, better way. I've never felt I was fighting for the liberation of the Palestinian people on purely nationalistic grounds, one people against another. It was a fight against oppression, against occupation.

Where did you study medicine?

In Moscow. I went in 1971 and had to stay there for the whole seven years to complete my training, because the Israeli army would harass anyone studying abroad if they tried to come back, and I'd been very active in the student movement. Naturally I followed the events at home—it was a very harsh period. I came back as soon as I'd finished my training, in 1978, and specialized in internal medicine and cardiology at Maqased Hospital in Jerusalem, the best one in Palestine at the time. I was still politically active, of course, in the Palestinian Communist Party, but at that time all political activity was banned, every movement was underground. We were part of a new form of resistance to the Occupation that developed after Jordan crushed the Palestinians during the 'Black September' of 1970, putting an end to the first phase of armed struggle. The new movement was one in which the people were democratically involved in decision-making. This is a period that has not been properly studied, as the media's attention was concentrated on the PLO's adventures in Lebanon or Tunis. People did volunteer work, helping with the olive harvesting or assisting the medical crews. By the end of the 1970s, several resistance committees had been formed: the National Guidance Committee, which coordinated activities, the Palestinian National Front, as well as local committees across Palestine. This was where the embryo of the first Intifada took shape.

An important turning point came when Sadat addressed the Knesset in 1977 and the Camp David Accords were signed the following year: a 'peace' agreement, without solving the problem of the Israeli Occupation!

We realized then that we couldn't rely on Egypt, Syria or any other country, that we could expect nothing from outside. We would have to be self-reliant, self-organized. Resistance would have to mean defying the Occupation, defying the Israeli rules.

How did you come to set up Medical Relief?

At Maqased I soon realized that, under the Israeli Occupation, even the most basic health needs were not being met—unsurprisingly, since yearly government spending per person was then $600 for Israelis and $18 for Palestinians. Three quarters of the Palestinian population lived in villages or in refugee camps without proper water and sanitation systems, let alone medical provision. In 1979 the Israelis imposed a very long and severe curfew in Hebron. A group of progressive doctors from Maqased set off to help the people there, but the Israeli army wouldn't let us through. Instead of turning back, we said: 'We can't get into Hebron, but we're still going to do something'. We went to Deheishe, the nearest refugee camp. The welcome they gave us there—I'll never forget that day. The people couldn't believe that doctors were actually coming to them, to treat their problems. We went back the next week, and the next. This was the origin of Medical Relief, a volunteer organization founded with five or six colleagues. Since then, we've set up a whole network of primary health-care centres, mobile clinics and outreach programmes. We also try to publicize the effects of the Occupation on health provision—the ambulances turned back at checkpoints, medical staff detained or arrested, the helicopter gunship attacks on the Medical Relief centre in Gaza, ambulances coming under fire from Israeli Occupation forces. It's very common for ambulances to be held up for many hours at Israeli checkpoints; women have gone into labour and delivered babies there, without being allowed through.

The Israelis refused to recognize MR as an organization, but we decided to take no notice. By 1986, on the eve of the first Intifada, there were MR committees all over the Occupied Territories, including Gaza. When the Israeli military governor came in person to the Jabaliya camp to arrest our medical staff, on the pretext that they were infringing a 1911 Ottoman law—a common tactic: they invoke a whole range of laws, Ottoman, British, Jordanian, Israeli, and if that doesn't suffice they create a military order—we sent a fresh team; they were also arrested, and we sent in more, week after week, bringing in foreign and Israeli doctors, too.

Meanwhile, our colleagues were appearing before the courts in Israel. After a while the Israeli authorities simply couldn't cope, especially when articles about Jabaliya began appearing in the international medical press. Characteristically, they closed the case without withdrawing charges. Initially, the Palestinian medical associations were also against us. They were dominated by the most traditionalist layers, whereas most of our people were from poor backgrounds or refugee families, and had become doctors in order to help people, not to make money. They called us Berbers, because we travelled to the camps with our doctor's bags. But the work we did then laid the basis for a modern public health policy. Since 1980, infant mortality in Palestine has fallen from 150 to 20 per 1,000. It's one of the reasons for the country's demographic growth, which is also a form of resistance.

You say the first Intifada grew out of these types of self-organization. How did the uprising start, and what were its outcomes?

It was sparked in December 1987 when an Israeli military truck rammed a car near the Jabaliya camp, killing the passengers, who were Palestinian workers. The Intifada spread rapidly from Gaza throughout the West Bank. It was a mass popular uprising: everywhere, people flooded into the streets, unarmed—a few stone-throwers, that's all. The IDF's response was extremely harsh: 120,000 were arrested in the first two years. Rabin, the Defence Minister, gave the order to 'break bones'. He meant it literally. I remember young men arriving every day in Ramallah hospital with shattered hands—Israeli soldiers would line them up with their palms pressed against a wall and then smash their wrists and fingers with rocks. Many of our doctors were arrested. They organized health workshops in jail and formed Medical Relief committees; the prisons were becoming popular universities.

The resistance movement reached its peak with a huge demonstration in Jerusalem at Christmas 1989. Activists arrived from all around the world, as well as the Israeli peace movement, which was not what it has since become. Thousands of people formed a human chain around the city. This event, together with American pressure, forced Yitzhak Shamir to accept talks in Washington and Madrid. I am convinced that in 1988–89 there was a historic opportunity to resolve the situation on the basis of a two-state solution. We had reached the point where, to paraphrase Lenin, the Israeli army could no longer maintain the Occupation,

and the Palestinian people were no longer prepared to tolerate it. The costs for Israel were outweighing the benefits. For the first time, it was exposed as an oppressor state, using tanks against civilian resistance. The movement had attracted a lot of support internationally, and had the weight of popular opinion in the Occupied Territories behind it. This dynamic was broken by the Israelis and by the Palestinian politicians who were supposed to represent us. The opportunity was wrecked by the Oslo accords.

What was the relationship of the exiled PLO leadership to the first Intifada?

They were alarmed to see the indigenous nationalist movement growing so autonomous and powerful. The PLO had emerged on a small scale in Jordan after 1967, but in Lebanon during the 1970s it grew into something like a state. It was infected by a series of diseases that turned it into a bureaucratic structure, plagued by corruption and the pursuit of personal interests; the financial support it received from oil-producing countries was a crucial factor in this. A wealthy revolution is never a good thing. But that is a problem for Palestinians to deal with. During the 1970s the Israeli authorities made repeated attempts to create rifts between the PLO, the Palestinian diaspora communities and the West Bank and Gaza. They set up municipal elections, hoping to draw out a new batch of collaborationist leaders with whom they could do business. The bid failed, since 90 per cent of the elected deputies were pro-PLO. Then Sharon produced his 'village leagues', aiming to find a more pliable leadership from among the old tribes. The National Guidance Committee and progressive forces generally were in the forefront of the struggle against the 'leagues', and we succeeded in showing that they were just another bunch of collaborators, with no legitimacy among the Palestinian people. It was the popular struggle that eventually forced Israel to deal with the PLO.

After its evacuation from Beirut to Tunis in 1982, the PLO set about tightening its grip over the West Bank and Gaza by bureaucratic means—sending funds, winning over union leaders, setting up parallel structures. Serious strains arose between the internal, democratic movement and the leadership abroad. The Israelis skilfully exploited these differences, first during the Madrid talks and then in Oslo.

You participated in the Madrid talks, but have been a harsh critic of the Oslo accords. Yet many observers regard them as two stages of a single process.

Not at all! The two were completely distinct. On the Palestinian side, the negotiators were two quite different sets of people. The Israelis deserve credit for the subtle psychological manipulation of their interlocutors. They realized Arafat and the PLO leadership were terrified of being outflanked at home. In Madrid in 1991, the world media were filming Hanan Ashrawi and Haidar Abd al-Shafi, but there was no one from the PLO—the Israelis were then refusing to talk to them. The PLO panicked at the thought that these figures might assume the leadership of the Palestine national movement, even though Abd al-Shafi and others constantly flew to Tunis to consult with Arafat and his colleagues, and tirelessly insisted that the PLO was the real representative of our people, despite Shamir's threats to break off the talks if its name were mentioned. In Madrid we sought to consolidate Palestinian unity—it was crucial that Israel should not succeed in erecting a wall between internal and external representatives. Our team was also unanimous that it would not sign anything until Israel had guaranteed a freeze on the settlements. To us, this was an obvious precondition. If you sign, yet one side continues to make inroads into the territory by building fresh settlements and expanding existing ones, then the agreement is meaningless.

In April 1993 the PLO leadership in Tunis—already embarked upon the road to Oslo—blocked our negotiations altogether. Oslo was decided behind the back of the Palestinian delegation to Madrid, and by extension, behind the back of the Palestinian people. We were supposed to be partners in struggle, yet here were secret talks being held without informing even a man like Haidar Abd al-Shafi, the most respected leader in all Palestine, who had poured his energies into maintaining the unity of the struggle. The Oslo negotiations were a technical and political disaster. Where the Madrid team had been well briefed and had 600 experts at its disposal, the PLO's Oslo negotiations were conducted by amateurs. Abu Ala [Ahmed Qurei], Hassan Asfur and Mohammed Abu Kosh were completely inadequate in terms of experience, knowledge and intelligence—they didn't even have their own maps. In August 1993 Ashrawi and Faisal Husseini went to Tunis, expecting to discuss the progress of their own talks, and instead were presented with papers the PLO had already signed. That's how the Madrid negotiators found out about the Oslo deal, and the absurdity of what had been agreed—the

PLO had bowed to everything that the internal leadership had refused to accept, and made no conditions on the settlements. The PLO officials were laughing and crowing at them. It was really humiliating.

The Israelis used a classic negotiating technique—but here it pitted a team of highly prepared professionals against a band of amateur mediocrities. In December 1992 a meeting was set up in London between Abu Ala and two Israeli academics, Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak. As far as the Palestinians were concerned, this was unofficial: there were no minutes; the main thing was to be recognized. But Hirschfeld and Pundak treated every word Abu Ala uttered as a firm promise. When he'd agreed to what they wanted they said, 'Good, now we have enough documents to convince the government to talk to you. After all, we're just academics. From now on you'll be dealing with officials from the Foreign Ministry.' New talks began from scratch in March 1993, with everything that Abu Ala had conceded taken for granted, so that Israel could now be angling for more. Three months later, after gaining huge advantages, Uri Savir announced: 'I represent Shimon Peres, the Foreign Minister, but I can't speak for Rabin, and he may not be satisfied. So you'll have to start again with a Rabin representative in order to finalize the agreement'. A New York lawyer named Yoel Singer came in, a friend of Rabin's. For the third time they started from scratch—pressured by Singer into yet more capitulations. Singer later told an interviewer that he was stunned that, though the PLO had replied to a hundred questions, they hadn't asked a single one.

What the Israelis didn't realize was that by taking such gross advantage of the naïvety of the Palestinian negotiators, they were doing themselves a disservice, for the final accord was so disastrous, so unjust, that even the signatories couldn't make it stick. The Palestinian delegates thought, 'Let's keep going, then we'll see'. Completely irresponsible of them. This is why democracy is so important in these cases: because it renders the negotiators accountable to the people, answerable for every document they sign. But these leaders, cut off from their country, from their people, had no conception of the importance of every comma on every page.

Even with the Oslo accords totally skewed in their favour, Israel didn't keep to their side of the bargain. They prolonged the deadlines, arguing that extra time would foster a more trusting atmosphere; then used these delays, sanctioned by the accords, of course, to create a series of *faits accomplis* on the ground. A new current took hold in Israel after the

assassination of Rabin—though one that Rabin himself had played a key role in generating: it was he who first proposed the Separation Wall, in 1995. If our military might enables us to take the whole of Palestine, the new thinking more or less openly ran, why content ourselves with half? The system of zones A, B and C only gave the PA real control over 18 per cent of the West Bank. If you look at the actual path of the Wall, you'll see it corresponds exactly to what was decided at Oslo—unsurprisingly, given that the Israeli army drew up both the maps for the accords and those for the Wall. The Israeli government decided back in 1968 that a Palestinian entity would have to meet three conditions. First, such an entity would not be allowed to share a border with any foreign state; its frontiers would remain under Israeli control. Second, it could not claim sovereign authority, only a functional authority. Third, there could be no reversal of the 'facts on the ground'. Oslo fulfilled all that.

What was the reaction to the Oslo accords in Palestine?

It was a shock to see how the PLO had capitulated, abandoning not only the internal movement but also the diaspora, the refugees packed in camps in Jordan, Libya, Syria. The people still felt great respect and admiration for Arafat, for the sake of everything he stood for, but there was intense resentment toward the leadership as a whole, which was about to become the Palestinian Authority. In the spring of 1994, when the Authority bosses moved back to Palestine after the Oslo accords were signed, one had the impression that they were coming to reap the rewards of their efforts. The effect upon Palestinian society was catastrophic. People began to compete with one another for jobs and money, worrying about who would be the director, the sub-director, the vice-minister, and how much they would earn—because a lot of money was at stake, part outside funding, part tax revenues. What the Israelis had been unable to get from us directly, they now obtained through the mediation of the PA. The national movement found itself deeply confused and demoralized as a result. We had nothing against negotiations, we were on the side of peace. But we wanted a decisive agreement, providing for genuine independence and sovereignty—not this half-baked pseudo-agreement with its vague timetables, this sham solution.

From 93 onwards, we were conducting a struggle on two fronts. One was against the Occupation, which was now reinforced behind the deceptive façade of 'peace', with new outposts, new checkpoints all over the

country. Between the signing in 1993 and the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, they built 102 new settlements and redoubled the size of the existing ones. Contrary to what many believe, Israel introduced its checkpoint policy during the Oslo period—before the Madrid negotiations, one could travel freely in and out of Jerusalem or Gaza. Now there are 703 checkpoints.

At the same time, we had to struggle internally, against the Authority. Not only were our leaders completely inept at negotiating with Israel, but they were rapidly transforming themselves into a gigantic security apparatus—56,000 policemen out of a total 140,000 PA employees, consuming 34 per cent of the budget. Compare this to 8 per cent for health, and 2 per cent for agriculture. So it was necessary to foster a new movement, one which would continue the struggle for an independent Palestinian state, of course, but which would also have a social dimension, a clear programme of action on health, education, taxation.

The installation of the PA jeopardized many of the independent campaigns and networks that had been developing before the Oslo period. The Authority has functioned along the same lines as the totalitarian Arab governments that gave it refuge. It's tried to control every aspect of life—forbidding internal elections for the trade-union leaderships, for example. When teachers went on strike for the right to elect their own union leadership in 1998–99, the PA smashed the strike and had the militants put in prison. Lots of teachers lost their jobs. They've taken most of the NGOs under their wing, to keep charge of the money. Virtually all the political parties have been co-opted by the Authority, including the so-called opposition. They're all dependent on the PA to finance their full-timers. Our wing of the Palestine People's Party [the former PCP] fought for an alternative line, for building a popular democratic movement in opposition to the Authority. But the Party's old guard wanted to collaborate with the PA, and Arafat was keen to co-opt them. The Secretary-General actually became the PA Minister for Industry in 1996, though he fell ill soon after. The only parties that don't take money from the Authority are Hamas and ourselves, the Palestinian National Initiative. Hamas is very rich, they get money from abroad. We're very poor, but that's not a problem. It means no one comes to us out of opportunism.

What is your view of Fatah? From the outside it appears an amorphous nebula in which opposite tendencies coexist. The majority seems to stand behind

Arafat and the Authority, but other factions carry out suicide bombings, which the PA condemns. It tilted left when the left was strong, and now seems to be tilting right, towards Hamas's positions, especially on women.

Fatah is not a homogeneous movement, it is composed of many elements ranging from the extreme right to—let's say, to the extreme centre! It used to have a powerful left wing but that was gradually eliminated, especially after the PA was installed in 1993. Since then, Fatah has merged into the Authority, it's become a government party. That's the reason for its double discourse, for you cannot be a national liberation movement and an Authority under occupation at the same time. It creates all kinds of insoluble dilemmas. I wouldn't say Fatah is leaning towards Hamas; it has adopted Hamas's methods because it felt threatened from that side. Fatah's popular support has dropped from 60 per cent in 1994 to 24 per cent today; however inaccurate the opinion polls, the trend is clear. With Fatah and the PA seen as collaborating with the Israelis, Hamas could present itself as the only force of resistance. Fatah then found itself under great internal pressure to carry out actions like those of Hamas—yet another wrong turning. On the other hand, both rely on the most traditionalist sectors of Palestinian society. They compete for the same voters. When Fatah denounces women's quotas and certain democratic reforms, it's so as not to lose ground among the most conservative layers. For all these reasons, it's difficult for Fatah to be consistent. Is it a movement of national liberation, or is it negotiating the transformation of Palestine into Israeli bantustans? Do you agree to collaborate with the Occupation, or do you refuse, and so lose your status as the Authority? Fatah has always tried to do both at once, with one very right-wing component bent on negotiating with Israel whatever the cost, and another lot who are seen to be heroes of the armed struggle. This double discourse is untenable.

During the present Intifada two mistakes, for which Fatah bears heavy responsibility, have seriously damaged our cause. The first is militarization, the second is this dual language—to condemn suicide attacks, but to carry them out; to condemn Israel's political moves, but to hold talks with Israel. We have fought to get a formal rejection of Sharon's plan for a so-called 'disengagement' from Gaza from them, since it's so clearly contrary to Palestine's interests—another attempt to split us up, to institutionalize a fragmentation, as they want to do with the diaspora Palestinians in Lebanon, Jordan, the Gulf. The PA doesn't dare reject it, they want to 'keep that option open'. This is not flexibility, it's indecision,

derived from the need to satisfy so many disparate tendencies, not least in the Arab countries. Behind the slogans, there's no clear line. This is why Fatah is losing out to Hamas—not because Palestinian society is becoming more fundamentalist.

What about Hamas?

During the 1980s, Israel encouraged the growth of fundamentalism, especially in Gaza but also in the West Bank, as a way of undermining secular resistance movements. Islamists were free to move around and their charities could operate openly, while we had no official existence. Some groups were even subsidized. By building up Muslim fundamentalism, the Israelis hoped to undermine the PLO. The same thing happened in Egypt and other Arab states—a gamble which soon backfired. Hamas, an acronym for 'Islamic Resistance Movement', was founded in the spring of 1988. It was an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, a relatively moderate, traditional movement, unlike many Shi'ite groups for instance; in Egypt and Jordan it formed a fairly mild opposition which did not challenge the nature of the government, as Islamic Jihad did.

Hamas became radicalized by the brutality of the Occupation, by the violence used to repress the first Intifada, by the deteriorating economic conditions and the disappearance of hope. But it should nevertheless be included in the democratic process, and invited to participate in elections. As doctors, we know how easily people mix up causes and symptoms. Violence, extremism, fundamentalism and suicide attacks are symptoms. As time goes by, people become ever more despairing and violent, but the causes of it are occupation, oppression and injustice. We shouldn't exaggerate Hamas's power. Its support has risen since 1994, but only from 8 to 24 per cent. Hamas chose to boycott the 1996 elections, as did the PFLP and Democratic Front, but the turnout was 73 per cent of registered voters. It called for no negotiations, yet 92 per cent of the population backed the Madrid talks. Hamas was opposed to the Oslo accords, as were we, but 63 per cent of Palestinians backed them, in the hope that Israel was finally going to give us something.

Are you in contact with them?

Of course. We talk to them, try to persuade them to do this, not that. Hamas is much more than a breeding ground for kamikazes. It maintains

a highly developed social network, and provides many services in health, housing and education, even if it does exploit them for political ends. But the most salient trend in Palestinian politics over the last decade has been the spectacular rise in those who don't identify with any existing movement—up from 9 per cent in 1994 to around 45 per cent today. These are people critical of the Authority's corruption and disorder, their capitulations to Israel, but who reject the fundamentalism of Hamas. This is the constituency that our movement, Al Mubadara, aims to address, with a programme resolute about Palestinian independence but also about democracy.

What are the origins of Al Mubadara, the Palestinian National Initiative, and what forces does it mobilize?

Its origins lie in the uprising of September 2000, the second Intifada. When it broke out, we were in the streets arguing that this was the Independence Intifada—whereas Hamas called it the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The PPP leadership didn't understand the importance of this distinction, this affirmation of secularity. Sadly, the Party seemed to have turned into a group of commentators on events, rather than participants. They would criticize this or that, but when you asked them what they would do on the ground, they didn't know what to say—whereas our line was getting more and more of a hearing. Along with that of Marwan Barghouti, it was our position that had the most impact at that time.

So I decided to go ahead, to found an alternative democratic opposition without the Party. I got in touch with Abd al-Shafi, Ibrahim Dakkak and Edward Said, who became a very close friend during his last years. It was obvious that we needed a renaissance of the Palestinian movement, on a footing that the outside world could understand. In October 2000 we published our manifesto: a secular programme for a non-violent, non-militarized Intifada, signed by 10,000 supporters. This was the start of Al Mubadara—the Initiative. It was officially founded in June 2002, at the time of the Israeli re-invasion. Five hundred major figures joined us immediately. At that point, Arafat offered me a ministerial post in his government. He put pressure on the PPP, which in turn pressured me to accept. So in April 2003, I resigned from the Party.

Al Mubadara is a democratic coalition, open to the whole range of secular left-wing individuals and groups—unions, the women's movement,

civil-society organizations—though so far we've mostly been approached by individuals. We hope to become an umbrella for various movements. We undertake joint actions with the PFLP, and would welcome them in a democratic alliance. People from Fatah come to see us too, and even religious individuals who are uncomfortable with fundamentalism because they are democrats. One of our main leaders in Qalqilya used to belong to a religious group. But when recruiting we enforce one uncompromising rule: we will only accept groups that are completely independent, both from Hamas and other fundamentalist movements, and from the Authority. People come along saying they'd like to work with us, but remain within the Authority. That's not possible. You can't be part of a democratic opposition and in the government. You have to choose.

How would you define Al Mubadara's strategy?

Our aim is to reactivate the popular resistance movement that was extinguished by Oslo. We also need to reconstitute the links between the Occupied Territories and the diaspora. During the Oslo period, many Palestinians outside the country felt betrayed, thinking the Authority had forgotten them. Finally, it's imperative to establish points of contact with Israelis. We've worked with a variety of Israeli groups—Women in Black, Gush Shalom, Yesh Gvul, Ta'ayush—demonstrating against the invasion of Iraq or against the apartheid Wall.

Our strategy is to try to link popular struggle against the Occupation with action on the ground designed to help people stay where they are—for if they stay, Israel has failed; whereas if they go, it's we who are defeated. That is why mobilizing in the community is so important to us, working in health, agriculture and education to assist the local inhabitants. Secondly, we need to rebuild international support and solidarity. This is vital on two counts: for the direct assistance it provides, and also for its support in our struggle against the fundamentalists. They say: 'We are alone, everyone is against us, all the Jews are against us, Europe is against us.' This sense of isolation nourishes fundamentalism. I've often argued over this with them at meetings, and it puts them in a quandary: how can they be against those foreigners who come to help us break the curfew, who act as human shields to protect us, risking their own lives? In fact, many Hamas members join in demonstrations with us and our international supporters.

We don't call for a boycott, but for sanctions against the state of Israel for having violated the Geneva Conventions and international law. Specifically: suspension of the EU–Israel accords, which Israel has broken by its failure to respect human rights; stopping all military co-operation with Israel, now one of the world's biggest arms exporters; a halt to investment in Israel; cutting off cultural relations at government level.

You stood as the Al Mubadara presidential candidate in the January 2005 elections. But can free elections take place under the current Occupation, with the Israeli army omnipresent, and polling stations banned in East Jerusalem?

That's exactly why the elections are so important: they are an instrument in the non-violent liberation struggle. The Israeli government has always sought to decide who should lead us, what accords we had to accept. The only way to have valid negotiators on the Palestinian side is for them to be regularly elected and accountable to the people, ejectable if they trample on the people's rights. It's especially vital now, when Israel is trying to install a new layer of sub-contractors to govern Palestine, a security apparatus staffed by collaborators, ready to defend Israeli interests against their own people.

Our campaign encountered huge obstacles: the prejudice of the world's media in favour of Mahmud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the illegal channelling of the PA's financial resources and its whole bureaucratic network in support of him, plus the massive endorsement from the Israelis and the Americans who, having made him their candidate, moved heaven and earth to impede our progress. Hamas's decision to boycott the elections also worked indirectly in favour of Abbas, for the movement's leaders instructed their militants not to vote for me.

As presidential candidate, I was harassed by Israeli soldiers on seven occasions during the campaign, and was twice arrested in Jerusalem to prevent me from speaking. But my greatest shock was to see the attitude of the allegedly 'professional' Arab TV stations: they too, under heavy political pressure no doubt, backed the Fatah candidate. All the same, we managed to bring together a solid democratic coalition in support of the Al Mubadara campaign: the PFLP, independent unions, workers' committees, eminent figures of the democratic left such as Abd al-Shafi, moderate Islamists including Abd al-Sattar Qassem and many groupings from Palestinian civil society. Thousands of volunteers came to

help, and numerous private donors contributed funds. In the end, we obtained close to 25 per cent of the overall vote, reaching 30 per cent in major cities like Hebron, Nablus and Beit Jala. According to the exit polls, our principal support came from women, young people, graduates, non-PA employees and those most deeply involved in the struggle for Palestinian rights. In a less oppressive atmosphere, we could no doubt have obtained even better results.

What sort of solutions to the Palestine–Israel conflict would you envisage?

There are two choices. The first is obviously an independent Palestinian state. At a minimum, this would be within the 1967 frontiers—only 23 per cent of historic Palestine—and would have East Jerusalem as its capital. All settlements, without exception, would have to be dismantled. Their occupants could stay if they wished, since we want no more expulsions, but it must be under Palestinian sovereignty. Personally I would see no objection to this state being demilitarized, on condition that there was an international force to protect us. But the borders must comply with international decisions.

If Israel sticks to its current policy, if it persists in the attempt to impose a series of bantustans, beginning with Gaza and continuing through the West Bank, if it leaves the apartheid Wall standing, then there is no physical possibility of a genuine state. At that stage, the only other solution would be a single democratic state, in which all citizens are equal. Of course, such a state could no longer be exclusively Jewish, it would have to be both Jewish and Palestinian. It is hard for many in Israel to contemplate that outcome. The Israeli government has sought to trap the Palestinians into a corner of the chessboard where there's no longer any choice. If we agree on a two-state solution, we are offered bantustans. And if we say that in those conditions, we'd prefer a single, bi-national state, then we are accused of wanting to destroy Israel. But the present US–Israeli policy of forcibly imposing an unjust, Oslo-style solution can only lead to the rise of fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories. If Palestine becomes a bantustanized police state, the outcome will be a disaster—for both peoples.

This is an edited extract from Mustafa Barghouti, *Rester sur la montagne: Entretiens sur la Palestine avec Eric Hazan*, to be published by Éditions La Fabrique, Paris.