

Whither the 'Peace Process'?

Since the signing of the September 1993 Oslo I agreement, the Israel-Palestine 'peace process' has been punctuated by a series of dramatic developments. The purpose of this article is to assess their significance. I will first examine the September 1995 Oslo II agreement, the definitive document for the interim period until a final settlement is reached. I will then consider the likely outcome of the 'peace process.' I will finally suggest that, contrary to widespread belief, the recent victory of Benjamin Netanyahu will not substantively affect the process set in motion at Oslo. To clarify the issues at stake, I will refer to two illuminating critiques of Oslo I, Edward Said's *Peace and its Discontents* and Meron Benvenisti's *Intimate Enemies*.¹

The essence of the September 1993 Oslo agreement, according to Edward Said, was that it gave 'official Palestinian consent to continued occupation.' Indeed, the PLO agreed to serve as 'Israel's enforcer.'² 'The occupation continued' after Oslo I, Meron Benvenisti similarly observes, 'albeit by remote control, and with the consent of the Palestinian people, represented by their "sole representative", the PLO.'³ A close reading of the September 1995 Oslo II agreement only reinforces these judgements.⁴

Until Oslo, the international consensus supported a complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and the right of Palestinians to form an independent state within the evacuated areas. The PLO accepted these terms. Israel and the US rejected them. Oslo II states that 'Neither Party shall be deemed, by virtue of having entered into this Agreement, to have renounced or waived any of its existing rights, claims, or positions.'⁵ Seemingly balanced, this provision actually signals a most crucial concession by the Palestinians. In effect, the PLO grants a legitimacy to Israel's pretence of possessing 'existing rights' in the West Bank and Gaza, and to Israel's rejectionist 'claims, or positions,' including those denying Palestinians the right to sovereignty in the

¹ Edward Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, New York 1996; Meron Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies*, New York 1995. The author wishes to thank Noam Chomsky, Adele Oltman and Cyrus Vesser for their comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

² Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, pp. 147, 12.

³ Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 218.

⁴ *Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip*, Washington, DC, 28 September 1995. Issued by the State of Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem.

⁵ Oslo Agreement, Article XXXI.

West Bank and Gaza, which need not be 'renounced or waived.' The broadly affirmed title of the Palestinians to the occupied territories is now put on a par with the broadly denied title of Israel to them. 'The West Bank and Gaza,' writes Said, 'have now become "disputed territories." Thus with Palestinian assistance Israel has been awarded at least an equal claim to them.'⁶ Once beyond dispute, Israel's withdrawal will now be subject to the give-and-take of 'permanent status negotiations.' With Palestinians on one side, and Israel and the United States on the other, little imagination is needed to predict who will give and who will take.

The Oslo Agreement

On all crucial issues—Jerusalem, water, reparations, sovereignty, security, land—Palestinians, according to Said, 'have in effect gained nothing.'⁷ The actual picture is, if anything, even bleaker than Said suggests.

Jerusalem: Amid an analysis of Jerusalem as the nexus of Israel's conquest strategy ('an ever-expanding Jerusalem [is] the core of a web extending into the West Bank and Gaza'), Said presciently observes that 'in the history of colonial invasion... maps are instruments of conquest.'⁸ Turning to Oslo II, we find that, although the text leaves Jerusalem's fate for the permanent status negotiations,⁹ to judge by the map appended to the accord, Jerusalem is already a closed issue. The official map for Oslo II implicitly places Jerusalem *within* Israel. Said also laments that the PLO agreed to 'cooperate with a military occupation before that occupation had ended, and before even the government of Israel had admitted that it was in effect a government of military occupation.'¹⁰ Indeed, the so-called Green Line demarcating pre-June 1967 Israel from the occupied West Bank has been effaced on the official Oslo II map. The area between the Mediterranean and Jordan now constitutes a unitary entity. Seamlessly incorporating the West Bank, Israel has ceased to be, in the new cartographic reality, an occupying power. On the other hand, the textual claim that Oslo II preserves the 'integrity' of the West Bank and Gaza as a 'single territorial unit'¹¹ is mockingly belied by the map's yellow and brown blotches denoting relative degrees of Palestinian control awash in a sea of white denoting total Israeli sovereignty. In sum, the official map for Oslo II ratifies an extreme version of the Labour Party's Allon plan and gives the lie to the tentative language of the agreement itself.¹²

Water: Although Palestinians will be granted an increment to meet 'immediate needs...for domestic use,' the overarching principle on water allocation for the interim period is 'maintenance of existing quantities of utilization,' that is, 'average annual quantities...shall

⁶ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 111.

⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 27–8.

⁹ Article XXXI.

¹⁰ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. xxix.

¹¹ Article XI.

¹² Conceived soon after the June 1967 war, the Allon plan projected Israel's incorporation of roughly half the West Bank, the remaining areas of 'dense Arab settlement' consigned to some kind of self-rule.

constitute the basis and guidelines.¹³ Turning to Schedule 10 ('Data Concerning Aquifers'), we learn that these 'average annual quantities' give Israelis approximately 80 per cent and Palestinians 20 per cent of West Bank water.¹⁴ Prospects after the interim period seem even dimmer. Although Israel does 'recognize Palestinian water rights in the West Bank,' these rights do *not* include the 'ownership of water,' which will be subject to the permanent status negotiations.¹⁵ Indeed, Israel already claims legal title to most of the West Bank water on the basis of 'historic usage.'¹⁶ That is, having stolen Palestinian water for nearly three decades, Israelis now proclaim it is theirs. Proudhon, at any rate, would not have been surprised.

Reparations: Juxtaposing the cases of Germany and Iraq, Said repeatedly deplores the absence of any provision for Israel to pay reparations: 'the PLO leadership signed an agreement with Israel in effect saying that Israelis were absolutely without responsibility for all the crimes they committed.'¹⁷ Indeed, Oslo II explicitly imposes on the newly-elected Palestinian Council 'all liabilities and obligations arising with regard to acts or omissions' which occurred in the course of Israel's rule. 'Israel will cease to bear any financial responsibility regarding such acts or omissions and the Council will bear all financial responsibility.' In what may be called the *chutzpah* clause, the Palestinian administration must 'immediately reimburse Israel the full amount' of any award that 'is made against Israel by any court or tribunal' for its past crimes. To be sure, Israel will provide 'legal assistance' to the Council should a Palestinian sue the latter for losses incurred during the Israeli occupation.¹⁸ Washing its hands of all responsibility for nearly three decades of rapacious rule, Israel—Said rues—'crowded' while 'an ill-equipped, understaffed, woefully incompetent Palestine National Authority struggled unsuccessfully to keep hospitals open and supplied, pay teachers' salaries, pick up garbage, and so on,' and 'dumped' Gaza 'in Arafat's lap...even though it had made the place impossible to sustain.'¹⁹ As we shall see, South Africa's apartheid regime displayed rather more magnanimity after its comparable withdrawal from and institution of 'self-rule' in areas of black settlement. Indeed, even after conceding the Bantustans independence, South Africa continued to cover much more than half their budgets through grants.

Sovereignty: Oslo II refers only to an Israeli 'redeployment,' not a withdrawal, from the West Bank.²⁰ Excluded from the Palestinian Council's purview are 'Jerusalem, settlements, specified military locations, Palestinian refugees, borders, foreign relations and Israelis.'²¹ Israel retains full 'criminal jurisdiction...over offences committed' anywhere in the

¹³ Annex III, Appendix I, Article 40; Schedule 8, 'Joint Water Committee'.

¹⁴ Per capita water allotment for an Israeli is thus four times that of a Palestinian. See *Davar*, 25 October 1993.

¹⁵ Annex III, Appendix I, Article 40.

¹⁶ Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New*, New York 1994, p. 210.

¹⁷ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 103; see also pp. xxviii-xxix, 9, 18, 66, 154.

¹⁸ Article XX.

¹⁹ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, pp. xxxii, 103.

²⁰ Article 10.

²¹ Article XVII.

West Bank 'by Israelis' or 'against Israel or an Israeli.'²² Regarding internal Palestinian affairs, the Council effectively cannot 'amend or abrogate existing laws or military orders' without Israel's acquiescence.²³ There is even an explicit proscription on the wording of postage stamps which 'shall include only the terms "the Palestinian Council" or "the Palestinian Authority".'²⁴ On a related matter, the Palestinian National Council must 'formally approve the necessary changes in regard to the Palestinian Covenant.'²⁵ No comparable demand is put on Israel to renounce its long-standing claim to the West Bank—and much beyond.

Security: Israel retains 'responsibility for external security, as well as responsibility for overall security of Israelis.'²⁶ In the name of 'security,' Israel is thus free to pursue any Palestinian anywhere.²⁷ Although duty bound to protect Israeli settlers and settlements that are illegal under international law,²⁸ the Palestinian police cannot—'shall under no circumstances'—'apprehend or place in custody or prison' any Israeli.²⁹ Israel preserves the right 'to close the crossing points to Israel.'³⁰ Palestinians who, due to Israel's systematic destruction of their economy, are dependent on work in Israel are thus still left to the latter's mercies. Israel retains 'responsibility for security' at the border crossings to the West Bank and Gaza. Accordingly, it can detain or deny passage to any person entering through the 'Palestinian Wing,' and enjoys 'exclusive responsibility' for all persons entering through the 'Israeli Wing.' Said dismisses these arrangements as a 'one-sided farce.'³¹ Yet, Palestinians do get to post a policeman and hoist a flag at their entrance and provision is made for the expeditious processing of Palestinian VIPs.³² The 'Palestinian side' also gets to issue new ID numbers for residents of the West Bank and Gaza—which, however, 'will be transferred to the Israeli side.'³³

Land: The first phase of Israel's redeployment leaves Palestinians with territorial jurisdiction over only 30 per cent of the West Bank. Further redeployment are promised in the future but their extent is not specified.³⁴ And within the areas coming under Palestinian territorial jurisdiction, Israel continues to claim undefined 'legal rights.'³⁵ Moreover, the Palestinian areas are non-contiguous. A caricature of South Africa's Bantustans, the Palestinian territorial jurisdiction comprises scores of tiny, isolated fragments.

²² Annex IV, Article I, paras. 2, 7a.

²³ Article XVIII, paras. 4–6.

²⁴ Annex III, Article 29.

²⁵ Article XXXI.

²⁶ Articles x, XII.

²⁷ Annex I, Article v; see also Annex I, Article XI, para. 3b for application of this provision even to 'territory under the security responsibility of the Council'.

²⁸ Article XV, Annex I, Article II.

²⁹ Annex I, Article XI, para. 4d; see also Annex I, Article v, para. 3b2.

³⁰ Annex I, Article IX; see also Annex v, Article VII.

³¹ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 53.

³² Annex I, Article VIII, Annex I, Appendix v, Section F.

³³ Annex III, Appendix I, Article 28.

³⁴ Article XI.

³⁵ Annex III, Appendix I, Articles 16, 22.

Palestinian Incompetence or Israeli Obduracy?

Said is plainly right that Israel 'achieved all of its tactical and strategic objectives at the expense of' the Palestinians.³⁶ More problematic, however, is his explanation of how this defeat came to pass. Perhaps because *Peace and its Discontents* was written with an 'Arab audience in mind,'³⁷ Said puts the onus on PLO bungling. With unfortunate echoes of Abba Eban's famous quip, 'the Palestinians have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity for peace,' Said ruefully recalls Arafat's 'catastrophic misjudgements and failures,' running from the 'folly of Palestinian involvement in Lebanese affairs [that] was to lead to the disasters of 1982,' through peace overtures of the Carter Administration that 'Arafat categorically turned down', to 'the misguided policies of the PLO leadership during the Gulf crisis.'³⁸ Not only are these judgements open to question³⁹ but cumulatively they tend to obscure US-Israeli responsibility for the undermining of Palestinian national aspirations. For all its corruption, criminality and idiocy, the PLO did endorse, from the mid-1970s, a full peace with Israel in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. Notwithstanding the international consensus favouring such a two-state settlement, the US and Israel blocked implementation. Oslo signalled the complete triumph of US-Israeli force. Consider as an illuminating comparison the Camp David accord of 1977, an earlier milestone in the 'peace process.'

In February 1971, Egypt offered Israel a full peace treaty in exchange for a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Sinai. Claiming security imperatives, Israel obdurately refused. Note the exact symmetry of Arab offer and Israeli response on the Egyptian and Palestinian fronts. What then accounts for Israel's acquiescence in full withdrawal at Camp David in 1977 but not at Oslo in 1993? Said opines that 'for the Arabs, war has had disastrous effects.'⁴⁰ This is not altogether true. What brought Israel around at Camp David was not an Egyptian diplomatic offensive but the offensive of Egyptian troops in the October 1973 war.⁴¹ Israel, like all conquering powers, only understands the language of force. Said no doubt knows all this. Indeed, he himself insists that the 'struggle over Palestine is principally' a 'real or material one,' not a 'psychological misunderstanding.' To prevail, Palestinians must match Israel tit-for-tat in the hardball politics of power.⁴² A quantitative juxtaposition of the Camp David and the Oslo II accords also points up the reality of Israeli intentions in the West Bank. Specifying in simple, lapidary phrases a full Israeli withdrawal and reciprocal Egyptian pledge of peace, the historic Camp David accord runs to barely seven pages.

³⁶ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. xxv.

³⁷ Ibid., p. xxiii.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 7–8, 73, 82–3, 120, 180–1.

³⁹ No one knows better than Said that the impetus behind Israel's 1982 Lebanon invasion was not PLO 'folly' but rather its 'peace offensive' (Israeli strategic analyst, Avner Yaniv); for sources, see Norman G. Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, New York 1995, ch. 6, note 52; and Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Rise and Fall of Palestine*, Minnesota, forthcoming, November 1996, ch. 3. For the more complex issue of the Palestinians' stance during the Gulf crisis, see my *Rise and Fall*, ch. 4 and epilogue.

⁴⁰ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 127.

⁴¹ For details, see my *Image and Reality*, ch. 6.

⁴² Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, pp. 35–7.

The 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty comes to less than ten pages. Yet, the Oslo II accord fills more than three-hundred folio-size pages. With its multiple, chapter-length annexes and appendices and multitude of pettifoggings, obscure, ambiguous and mutually contradictory details, Oslo II presages, not the emancipation, but the emasculation of Palestine.⁴³

Consequences of the Agreement

One may want to argue that, the letter of Oslo notwithstanding, implementation of the accord's provisions for a Palestinian council, police force and so forth, will still put Palestinians in a better position to achieve true self-determination. The tacit, Pollyannaish assumption is that *any* new reality *must* improve on the present state of affairs. Yet, the new reality will more than likely allow for the tightening of Israel's grip on the Palestinians. This is the 'Bantustanization' scenario projected not only by Said but seasoned Israeli analysts as well. 'It goes without saying,' Benvenisti, for example, writes 'that "cooperation" based on the current power relationship is no more than permanent Israeli domination in disguise, and that Palestinian self-rule is merely a euphemism for Bantustanization.'⁴⁴

Before considering this prospect, it is important to first take note of another significant Palestinian loss at Oslo. Said recalls the opinion of Walter Sisulu that 'one reason for the African National Congress's victory was its *international* campaign against apartheid.'⁴⁵ Every effort South Africa made to normalize its global standing through cosmetic concessions such as Bantustan 'self-rule' and subsequent independence proved unavailing. Its isolation only deepened. Yet, Oslo has allowed for the full rehabilitation of Israel. No longer condemned as an occupying power, Israel rather stands beyond reproach as a full-fledged peacemaker. Indeed, all the United Nations resolutions which, as Said observes, 'although... paper resolutions... represented the only international guarantee that [Palestinian] claims would not be ignored,'⁴⁶ have been effectively nullified by Oslo. This contrast suggests that, in the short term at least, Bantustanization will prove more stable in the West Bank and Gaza than it did in the South African setting. I will return to this point presently.

After World War II, South Africa embarked on the path of separate development or apartheid to ease the conflict between an ethnically exclusivist state and an ethnically heterogeneous population. Hendrik

⁴³ See Amos Oz's breathtaking disingenuousness in the wake of the February-March 1996 Hamas suicide bombings: 'There are hundreds of clauses and subclauses to the Oslo Accords, but the essence is clear and simple: we stop ruling over you and suppressing you, and you recognize Israel and stop killing us. But up until now we have delivered and you haven't.' 'Letter to a Palestinian Friend', *New York Review of Books*, 4 April 1996.

⁴⁴ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, pp. 70, 147. Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 232. Indeed, the Bantustan precedent is plainly uppermost in the minds of all the signatories to as well as dissenters from the Oslo agreement; see Graham Usher, *Palestine in Crisis*, London 1995, pp. 8, 10, 85, n. 6.

⁴⁵ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 95; emphasis in the original.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Verwoerd, post-war Prime Minister and architect of apartheid, conceived the new initiative primarily as a political expedient to abate foreign criticism.⁴⁷ Using the vocabulary of decolonization, the South African government contrived a political separation in which whites took the lion's share of material resources and blacks were effectively consigned to a state of total thralldom. Technically free of South African domination through the creation of Bantustans, blacks—Verwoerd imagined—would have only themselves to blame for their abject state. Slow to see the merits of this scheme, sceptical whites—including Cabinet ministers—feared that the homelands or Bantustans would enhance black political power and undermine security, giving free rein to 'Mau Mau'-type terrorism. On the other side, sincere opponents of South African rule at first looked favourably on the Bantustans as a step toward justice.

Comprising multiple fragments of barren land encircled by white settlements, each Bantustan was originally cast not as an independent state—a prospect the Republic officially ruled out—but rather as an area of ethnic 'self-rule.' The South African government forcibly removed from the designated homelands white residents, who angrily charged that they had been 'sold down the river.'⁴⁸ The first homeland granted 'self-rule' was Transkei in 1963. Maintaining that 'more was to be achieved by supporting separate development than by opposing it', the leader of the new entity, Chief Matanzima, could point to the trappings of self-determination such as a Transkeian flag and national anthem.⁴⁹ Its power narrowly circumscribed by the South African-imposed constitution, the Transkei government was vested only with such civil responsibilities as tax collection, education, local public works, agriculture, courts and welfare. South Africa reserved for itself jurisdiction over external and internal security—Transkeian units performing basic police functions—foreign affairs, communications, transportation, financial institutions, and population movement. It also retained a veto on all Transkei legislation and jurisdiction over whites within Transkei's borders. Note that Oslo II is a veritable carbon copy of the Transkei constitution. As even an observer sympathetic to the Bantustan experiment conceded, 'The central Government holds the whip hand.'⁵⁰

Although Matanzima, with a nod from South Africa, kept an iron grip on power in Transkei, political dissent was marginally tolerated. Indeed, 'deeply concerned that self-government should not be seen as a puppet show,' South Africa even encouraged 'a certain amount of opposition... It shows that the figures are alive.'⁵¹ Creating 'growth points' with tax

⁴⁷ Verwoerd hoped that political separation would, in his words, provide a 'basis for the Western members... to prevent action against South Africa in the UN.' Gerhard Mare and Georgina Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, Bloomington 1987, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Roger Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*, New York 1983, p. 149. Forming a lobby and aligning with the opposition political party, the white settlers resisted government plans. Ultimately, however, most returned to South Africa.

⁴⁹ Jeffrey Butler, Robert I. Rotberg and John Adams, *The Black Homelands of South Africa*, Berkeley 1971, p. 31.

⁵⁰ Christopher R. Hill, *Bantustans*, Oxford 1964, p. 59.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

concessions and especially cheap labour as incentives, South Africa sought to lure foreign investment on the periphery of and later inside Transkei. In fact, only a 'tiny percentage of the population' benefited from these policies, while the Transkei economy, tightly monitored by South Africa, became ever more closely linked and subordinate to it.⁵² The identical strategy with identical results is, as Said shows, now unfolding in the West Bank and Gaza, with 'growth points' rechristened industrial parks.⁵³

Sovereignty Without Justice

As international pressures mounted, South Africa moved to grant Transkei independence in 1976. Arguing that it would legitimate a division of wealth grossly unfavourable to the interests of blacks, opposition leaders rejected the South African initiative. Through adept political manoeuvring, Matanzima was able, however, to muster a popular electoral mandate for independence, although only a small minority truly supported it.⁵⁴ An emergent entrepreneurial class, together with the traditional, conservative elites and a privileged—and corrupt—official class administering the bloated bureaucracy, undergirded the new order. Matanzima maintained that the Transkeian 'nation' had successfully rid itself of colonial domination. Indeed, it did enjoy the same legal status as any other state. Yet no foreign power recognized Transkei's independence, the United Nations General Assembly declaring it 'invalid' by a vote of 134 to zero, with only the US abstaining.

After independence, the Transkei government did, to its credit, abolish the most egregious apartheid regulations,⁵⁵ but it also muzzled all political opposition. One observes a similar dynamic in the West Bank and Gaza, with the arbitrary humiliations, curfews and so forth typical of Israeli rule curtailed, yet with Arafat putting in place—in Said's words—a 'system of dictatorial rule...in which citizens' rights, especially in the realm of civil freedoms, will be absent.'⁵⁶ South Africa's

⁵² Newell M. Stultz, *Transkei's Half-Loaf*, New Haven 1979, pp. 93, 96.

⁵³ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 153. See also Usher, *Palestine in Crisis*, pp. 38–40 and Chomsky, *World Orders*, p. 254. Such an economic strategy serves the dual purpose of allowing for the exploitation of cheap indigenous labour while maintaining an exclusivist ethnic state, and enhancing the credibility of the Bantustan alternative by making it financially solvent.

⁵⁴ As in Transkei, the real purpose of the January 1996 election in the West Bank and Gaza was for the subject population to 'democratically' ratify the annulment of its basic rights and to 'democratically' install a Quisling leadership. In neither case was the derisory settlement subject to a public referendum. Rather, the electoral victory of, respectively, Matanzima and Arafat was 'interpreted' as acclamation of it. Thus, a vote for Arafat purportedly signalled support for Oslo. The actual facts suggest otherwise. For an analysis of the Transkei election, the modalities of which exactly prefigured the recent Palestinian election, see Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*, pp. 120f. For the Palestinian election, see Norman G. Finkelstein, 'Arafat Victory Doesn't Equal Real Reconciliation,' *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 January 1996.

⁵⁵ Trumpeting the abolition of apartheid within Transkei, the Matanzima regime claimed to have done more for black freedom in South Africa than any of the more militant liberation movements: 'The Transkei has...liberated 18,000 square miles...from the grips of apartheid—the pass laws, job-reservation, apartheid at our post offices and segregation at the numerous beaches along our...coast.' (Southall, *South Africa's Transkei*, p. 254.) No doubt Arafat will soon be making a similar pitch against his principled critics.

⁵⁶ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 172; see also p. 157.

refusal to cede additional land to Transkei evoked angry denunciations and threats to sever ties from Matanzima. Shackled by its total economic thralldom to the white republic, the Transkei regime was in no position, however, to make good on its threats.⁵⁷ Willingly or not, it remained what it had always been: a servant of South African power.

The case of the KwaZulu Bantustan is equally revealing. Through the mid-1970s, Chief Buthelezi of KwaZulu won guarded praise from the African National Congress and even the militant South African Students' Organization, and the enmity of South African whites alienated by his defiant posturing. Situating participation in the Bantustan scheme within a wider strategy of creating a 'liberated area from which I can engage in the liberation struggle on South African soil,' and offering 'some hope for the Zulu,' Buthelezi claimed that cooperation with South Africa did not signify support of apartheid but rather acquiescence in the only available option: 'What will be more gratifying to us... than to think that we did our best in the circumstances and to the very limit of what was possible?'⁵⁸ Like Transkei, KwaZulu abolished the most obnoxious elements of apartheid. Indeed, demanding a more equitable distribution of South African resources, Buthelezi—unlike Matanzima—balked at independence on the Republic's terms. Eventually, however, KwaZulu reeked of massive political and financial corruption, with Buthelezi in the thrall of a messianic complex and an obsessive concern with status.⁵⁹

As mass resistance to apartheid mounted, Bantustan leaders made common cause with the South African government. Homeland defence forces, trained and equipped by, and pledged to the security of, South Africa, repeatedly clashed with African National Congress guerrillas. Indeed, South Africa's repressive rule was partially concealed behind the veil of 'black-on-black' violence. Bantustans did not serve as a transit point to true emancipation; rather, they proved a major obstacle to it. Calling for the dismantling of apartheid and political reunification with South Africa, even the leaders of the Bantustans ultimately denounced them as a sham.

The Question of Statehood

Edward Said writes that 'there is a gigantic and inherent difference

⁵⁷ Although perhaps sincere, such fulminations also served Matanzima as 'proof' that he was not a South African stooge. For that same reason, South Africa quietly abided them.

⁵⁸ Mare and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, pp. 3, 35–9, see also p. 82: 'We have created a springboard from which we can go forth to conquer in ever widening circles. We have created for our Black South Africa a liberated zone from whence we can mount our strategies and attacks on apartheid which are vital to the country as a whole.' Compare also Butler et al., *The Black Homelands of South Africa*, p. 35, quoting Buthelezi on 'self-rule': 'It may be a contribution to the unravelling of the problem, insofar as, if we attain full independence, our hand will be strengthened.' Echoing Buthelezi's rationale, Arafat told a crowd in Gaza upon his return: 'I know many of you think Oslo is a bad agreement. It is a bad agreement. But it's the best agreement we can get in the worst situation.' And his deputy maintained that Oslo 'will not automatically lead to national independence, but the political space it opens up enables us to set off an irreversible dynamic towards independence through the new national mechanisms we set in place.' Usher, *Palestine in Crisis*, pp. 1, 9–10; see also Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Even Bophuthatswana, the one Bantustan initially protective of individual rights, ended up as a police state.

between “limited self-rule” and “independence” and that the Oslo accords ‘do not include any reference, not one sentence, about the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.’⁶⁰ The clear implication is that the crucial issue is Palestinian statehood. This emphasis, I think, is misplaced. If the South African precedent is any guide, Israel *will* eventually grant Palestinians full independence within the patchwork areas of ‘self-rule’ adumbrated in Oslo II.⁶¹ If cast in terms of statehood, the Palestinian question will then be technically resolved. At any rate, there will be no further basis for complaint.

Yet, even the conservative critique of apartheid was anchored in the more substantive, albeit more abstract, principle of equity: the white regime had engineered an unfair division of South Africa’s resources. Consider the argument of a basically sympathetic critic of apartheid. ‘The principal deficiency,’ Kenneth Stultz wrote,

is that...no African could see that the whites of South Africa had given up anything of substance in order that Transkei independence should occur. On the contrary, it appeared that the whites had *gained* greater respectability for their exclusion of blacks from equal treatment in the cities. Nor could it be believed that the Transkei representatives enjoyed effective leverage in the negotiations themselves. Certainly Pretoria wished Transkei to seek independence in order to validate its policy of separate development, but there is no evidence that the Vorster government was made to pay a high price to ensure its happening. In short, Transkei independence lacks the legitimizing element of real and material sacrifices on the part of the white population... Although political power has exchanged hands in consequence of Transkei independence, if only the power Transkeians now have... to police themselves and administer their own poverty, there has been no shifting in the ownership of great amounts of wealth.⁶²

Note the issue was *not* that Transkei was a ‘neo-colony.’ Even if true, it was irrelevant: many an African state, alas, exercised little real independence. Indeed, Stultz was at pains to show that the Transkei state fared no worse economically than neighbouring countries. If Transkei was, by virtue of its material dependence, illegitimate, so were they. Rather, the critical principle for Stultz was equity. True, Transkei’s blacks achieved independence. So weak was their bargaining position, however, that South Africa kept for itself everything worth keeping. All Transkeians won was the right to ‘police themselves and administer their own poverty.’ Bantustanization was, for white South Africans, basically cost-free and therefore unjust.

⁶⁰ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, pp. 173–4.

⁶¹ This is especially so since pressures will undoubtedly build to ‘normalize’ the status of Palestinians and a relatively stable Palestinian elite beholden to Israel will undoubtedly crystallize. See the reported view of influential Labour Party ‘dove’ Yossi Beilin: ‘Beilin is not afraid to say that when finally we have the five parameters that Rabin presented in the Knesset—the Jordan river as the security border, no dismantling of any settlement, no return to the 1967 border, Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and no right of Palestinian return—it will be possible to discuss a Palestinian state.’ All indications are that Arafat would accept such terms. (*Haaretz*, 29 November 1995; *Yediot Ahronot*, 29 February 1996; *News From Within*, March 1996, pp. 17–18.) After this article was completed, the Labour Party officially dropped its opposition to a Palestinian state.

⁶² Stultz, *Transkei’s Half-Loaf*, pp. 133–4; emphasis in the original.

Compare now Meron Benvenisti's authoritative assessment of Oslo:

while Israel is free to act independently in its own sovereign area, it insists on 'coordinating' the usage of natural resources by the Palestinians, so that Israeli interests will not be harmed. This asymmetry perpetuates the existing inequality in the distribution of common natural resources and re-emphasizes the impression of a victor's peace. For the Israelis, it is peace without pain or sacrifice, a bargain proposition...⁶³

Thus, by the standard of even a conservative critique of apartheid, the Oslo accord, even if it culminates in independence for the marginal areas currently reserved for Palestinian 'self-rule,' lacks legitimacy.

Significantly, in the matter of apartheid, the international community acknowledged that the fundamental issue was not statehood but equity. As noted above, no country recognized Transkei's independence. Accordingly, international pressures on the apartheid regime did not relax. Yet, the enthusiastic reception accorded Oslo suggests that equity is no longer a concern of the world community. Recall that the two-state settlement hitherto supported by the global consensus was predicated on a *full* Israeli withdrawal. Such a division was arguably equitable. Israel is now called on to withdraw only from *parts* of the West Bank and Gaza, in effect, the parts it doesn't want.⁶⁴ The PLO's capitulation crucially legitimized this reversal. If Israel eventually grants independence to the hodgepodge areas that now exercise 'self-rule,' the Palestine question will probably be dropped altogether from the international agenda. Palestinians will no longer be able to benefit from the kind of international solidarity that contributed so mightily to the collapse of the apartheid regime.

The Chimera of Separation

The critique of apartheid ultimately rested, however, not on a moral but rather a political, indeed, pragmatic foundation: separation was a pipe dream. 'The theory of apartheid in its pure form,' wrote Christopher Hill,

was that there should be *total* separation of White and Black, the Africans being returned to their Reserves, which though small would become highly industrialized states. Their economies would complement that of White South Africa, which would entirely dispense with African labour and rely for manpower upon greatly increased White immigration.

Yet, the basic premise that the 'existing economic integration between the races can be unscrambled' proved to be—in Hill's word—a

⁶³ Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 222.

⁶⁴ One can argue that the two-state settlement which gave the indigenous Arab population 20 per cent of Mandatory Palestine and the Jewish settlers who displaced them 80 per cent was also far from equitable. My own view was that this proposal was a pragmatic application of justice, that is, an application of Max Weber's formula, 'Given the existing conflict, how can one solve it with the least internal and external damage for all concerned?' (H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, New York 1975, p. 9.) Granting Palestinians independence in the derisory areas of 'self-rule' sketched in Oslo II cannot, I think, be plausibly justified by any standard of justice.

'fiction.'⁶⁵ South Africa could not free itself of dependence on black labour and the Bantustans could not free themselves of dependence on South African employment and subventions. Every appreciable enterprise in South Africa continued to employ, and relied on the Bantustans as a reservoir for, cheap African labour. On the other side, migrants labouring in South Africa accounted for fully 70 per cent of the gross national income in the Bantustans. Over half of the economically active Transkei male labour force, for instance, was annually recruited for work in the Republic. Without the remittances dispatched home by the migrant workers, the Bantustan economies—such as they were—would have collapsed. Indeed, the Bantustans depended, even after independence, on South African grants for fully 60–80 per cent of even current expenditures.⁶⁶

Israel has been less reliant than South Africa on indigenous labour. Due to Israel's systematic ruination of the West Bank/Gaza economy, Palestinians in these areas are still reliant on work in Israel, a fact highlighted by the devastation wrought on their economy by the current closure. Meron Benvenisti forcefully argues that the Oslo-contrived 'unscrambling' of Israel and Palestine is equally chimeric. The accord, he observes,

provided for the establishment of a permanent committee to supervise cooperation in a long list of areas, such as water, electricity and energy, finance and international investment and banking, the port of Gaza, communication and transport, industry, labour relations, human resources, and protection of the environment. The long list of areas in which cooperation and coordination is essential points to one basic fact that the advocates of 'separation' have yet to grasp: the country, from the Jordan to the sea, can perhaps be divided politically, but not physically.⁶⁷

Indeed, it is uncertain whether the two-state settlement itself was ever feasible. Benvenisti thinks it was not. Noam Chomsky acknowledges that it was 'always a slim possibility,' one which he very reluctantly supported. Although Said clings, throughout most of the book, to the two-state settlement,⁶⁸ there is a notable change of emphasis in the concluding chapter:

Palestine/Israel... is the place where two peoples, whether they like it or not, live inextricably linked lives, tied together by history, war, daily contact, and suffering.

⁶⁵ Hill, *Bantustans*, pp. 5, 41. It is an open question whether the *apartheid* regime ever actually envisaged a total separation. 'The dominant Republican Afrikaner attitude to race relations', T.R.H. Davenport observes, 'held in tension the conflicting notions of territorial separation (as an insurance against numerical swamping) and domination (*baasskap*) to ensure control over labour.' (*South Africa, A Modern History*, Toronto 1991, p. 518.) At any rate, one cannot but be struck by the identity of socioeconomic visions between the masterminds of apartheid and the Oslo accord. Verwoerd projected 'one national economy [with] the opportunity of separate government, the opportunity of living separately,' while Shimon Peres calls for a 'political divorce and an economic marriage.' Mare and Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power*, p. 30; Usher, *Palestine in Crisis*, p. 35.

⁶⁶ Nearly 10 per cent of the South African budget was earmarked for the Bantustans. 'Rather surprisingly,' reported the authors of one standard study, 'the rapid growth of spending on the homelands... has not been challenged by white public opinion or politicians.' Butler et al., *The Black Homelands of South Africa*, p. 143.

⁶⁷ Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies*, p. 221.

⁶⁸ Said, *Peace and its Discontents*, pp. 3, 20, 119, 125. To be sure, Said reports (p. 174) that he too endorsed the two-state settlement with great reservations, although apparently not because of doubts about its viability.

To speak in grandiose geopolitical terms, or to speak mindlessly about 'separating' them is nothing less than to provide prescriptions for more violence and degradation. There is simply no substitute for seeing these two communities as equal to each other in rights and expectations, and then proceeding from there to do justice to their living actualities.⁶⁹

As Said's parting words suggest, the inevitable if very distant future is one in which Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, enjoying reciprocal communal and individual rights, coexist within a unitary entity. Consigned to a footnote, Oslo will no doubt be dismissed one day as a sordid detour on the path to that just and lasting peace.

The Policy of Encirclement

Finally, Benjamin Netanyahu's victory in the recent Israeli election will not substantively affect the process set in motion at Oslo. Historically, conquest regimes have pursued one or a combination of four options: extermination, enslavement, expulsion, and encirclement. Given the constraints of international politics and morality, the first three options are not, at any rate for the foreseeable future, available to Israel. Accordingly, Labour Party leaders Yitzak Rabin and Shimon Peres sought to implement the maximum version of the encirclement strategy. A year after Oslo I was signed, Israel's control of West Bank land reached 75 per cent, up from 65 per cent when the accords were signed, and government funding for settlements increased by 70 per cent. The number of settlers in the West Bank and Gaza—not including Jerusalem—increased by 30 per cent in the first three years of Labour rule, though July 1995. Were any of the other options available, there is little reason to doubt that the Labour Party would have pursued them. Certainly there is nothing in the recent, let alone historical, record of Labour to suggest it is averse to deploying violence on a massive scale. Witness Rabin's fully justified boast in the 1988 Israeli election campaign that, 'I, as Defence Minister, expelled more people and blew up more houses than any Likud Defence Minister.' Witness Rabin's murderous rampage in Lebanon in 1993 and Peres's recent replay. The Labour Party did not change in September 1993; the world did. Neither a 'Tasmanian solution' nor a 1948-style mass expulsion—implemented by, among others, Rabin—is a tenable alternative. The optimal variant of the encirclement strategy ratified at Oslo is the most Israel can hope for. Indeed as shown above, Israel gets to keep nearly everything, albeit with the Arabs still in situ. Campaign rhetoric notwithstanding, Netanyahu no doubt knows this. His settlements policy may prove tactically more provocative. The media will perhaps give the new Prime Minister a harder time, wistfully blaming him for the failure of the 'peace that could have been' were the Labour Party still in power. No one privy to the facts will be fooled by these fairy tales.

⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 163–4.