The Palestinians: Victims of Expediency

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Foreword

This book is not about the Holy Places, nor is it about the State of Israel. It is about the Palestinians and their plight in a Palestine under Israeli rule. You will find no mention here of the Habimah Theatre or the Church of the Dormition; nor will you find interviews with Israeli ministers to balance ones with Palestinian Arabs.

The Palestinian Arabs, Muslim and Christian, now number 600,000 souls, or some sixteen per cent of the population of Israel within its 1967 borders. While they are thus, in absolute terms, within sight of regaining their 1948 numbers their status since 1948 has changed completely. In 1948, the Arabs owned perhaps as much as seventy per cent of the land awarded to the Jewish State under the Partition Plan, as well as the extra portions, such as Western Galilee, which Israel had seized prior to the British evacuation. Of the remaining thirty per cent of the territory, about three-quarters was land belonging to the State, with the Jews legally owning less than seven per cent of the land they called Israel. Now ninety-two per cent of the land has been alienated from the Arabs by one stratagem or another, leaving the Arabs in legal – but often only temporary – possession of eight per cent, and that mostly in Galilee. It is forbidden for Arabs to buy back land taken from them, which is declared 'the

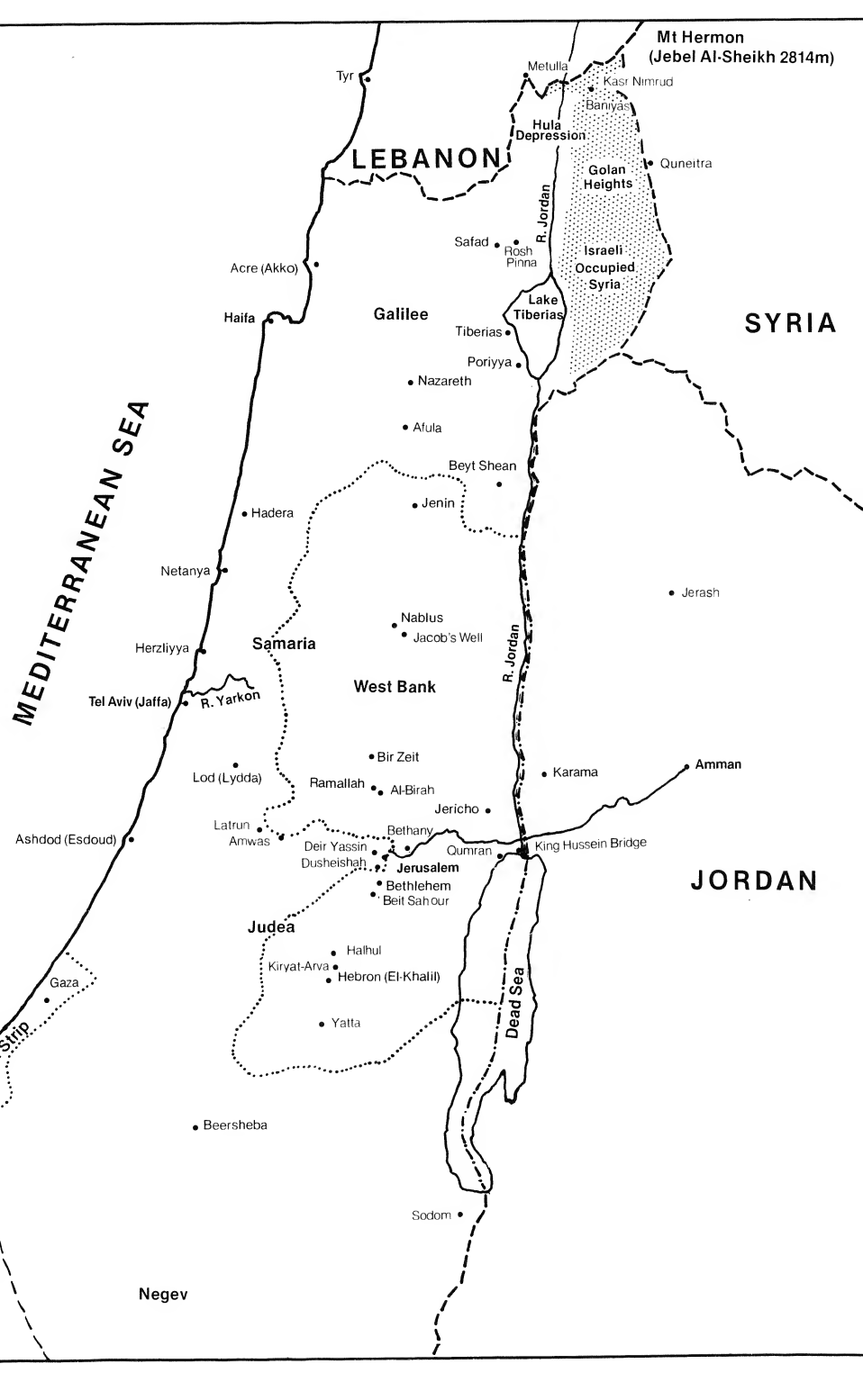
inalienable property of the Jewish people'. Needless to say, this property has been, and still is being, seized without compensation.

This being the background to the Palestinians' present circumstances, I did not intend my book to be fair – for who can be fair about blatant injustice? – though naturally I intended it to be true. But it has turned out fairer than I intended. It is the record of two visits. The first was in June 1980, when I based myself in Jerusalem and visited the Arabs in the centre and south of the country. The second was in January 1981, when I stayed for most of the time in Galilee, visiting the north. But Palestine is a small country, and the terrains of both visits conveniently overlapped, since I stayed for a while in Jerusalem and visited Nablus again on my second visit.

My thanks are due to all those Palestinians and Israelis whose kindness and fortitude encouraged me to write as I have written.

D.S.
Cairo
February 1981

Part One 1980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Nazareth
Afula
Beyt Shean
Jenin
Hadera
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Netanya
Jerash
Nablus
Jacob's Well
Herzliyya
Samaria
R. Jordan
West Bank
Tel Aviv (Jaffa)
R. Yarkon
Bir Zeit
Lod (Lydda)
Ramallah
Al-Birah
Karama
Amman
Jericho
Latrun
Amwas
Ashdod (Esdoud)
Bethany
Deir Yassin
Dusheishah
Qumran
King Hussein Bridge
Jerusalem
JORDAN
Bethlehem
Beit Sahour
Judea
Halhul
Kiryat-Arva
Hebron (El-Khalil)
Gaza
Strip
Yatta
Dead Sea
Beersheba
Sodom
Negev

1
Amman

Two cities dispute possession of the Jordanian capital: the one, ruled by the moon, is aromatic and delectable; the other, banal and trashy, is ruled by the sun. The June traveller experiences both and in doing so senses the duality which underlies the creeds asserting oneness. Other Middle Eastern duels are familiar, between desert and sown, settled and nomad, active and passive, gentile and Jew, male and female. But to show that the sun and moon are nearer an equilibrium than in the knowing West, the Arabic language treats the moon as male and the sun as female.

Except for the clamour of the airport, where I join one queue for a visa, only to be ordered into another for Jordanian currency, I am let in gently. A middle-aged Palestinian seizes my bag and drives me through moonlit streets. Like a potato sprouting, Amman has thrust highways from its central wadi, praised by the 1912 Baedeker for its Hellenistic ruins and deplored for its colony of wild Circassians. Ottoman Amman, successor to the Hellenistic Philadelphia, had been cast for sepia photography, for shots of men marching in fur tarboushes and khaki breeches, or for rebels dangling on scaffolds made of sleepers left over from the Damascus-to-Medina railway. Today's Amman, ruled by King Hussein, great-grandson of the Sherif who revolted against the Turks, lolls like a village wanton who has overeaten. Her

pillows are the seven – or is it nine? – inhabited hills. She has grown fat on two kinds of chocolate. The Palestinians, first expelled in 1948 then, in a new expulsion, after the Six Days War of 1967, are the bitter; while the Lebanese, in flight from internecine war, are the soft-centred kind with crystallized violets.

Each hill seems to have its palace, its institute, its outpost of multinational business, its air-conditioned hotel. I had chosen mine at random, in the London office of the national airline. But the airline's telex has not arrived. No matter, says the desk, the hotel is empty. After the warm night with glimpses of street bustle, my bedroom seems a freezer and the windows don't open. I leave my clothes packed, remove my tie and stroll into the night. In a hut at the portal, two Palestinians are arguing with a pro-Sadat Egyptian. They stop, sniffing in me the evening's first client. The more alert, the younger of the Palestinians, has the door of his Mercedes open.

'Where to, sir?'

'Anywhere open-air. Anywhere I can eat.'

His name is Amin. He rushes me to a hill on whose slopes strategic greenery, in holes filled with compost, creates the illusion of a savannah, if not a garden. Amin will return by the time I've had my dinner. I choose one of the thirty empty tables. Except for the thump of a machine drawing water to the hill, the place is silent. A Lebanese manager emerges from indoors and proposes, in French, a dinner the names of whose ingredients transport me to the sea-front of Beirut where, round Pigeon Rock, breakers glitter like sardines. It is the same mid-eastern moon but here it soars over desert. If you took the track to the south-east, you would reach the Empty Quarter; the road to the east, Rutbah Wells on the night transit to Baghdad.

A youth from Sidon in a white jacket brings what the Levant calls a *shampanyare*; in it lumps of ice joggle a flask of dry white wine from Ksara, also in Lebanon. Contentment smooths away the flight's abrasions, the remembered horrors of Heathrow. All is well served, well timed. As I sip my Turkish coffee, Amin returns.

'Tomorrow I take you Jerash.'

But the sunlit day brings irritation. On a glossy paper pendant I ticked √ 8 a.m., √ croissants with honey, √ French coffee, and

hung the order like a necktie on my door handle. A blear-eyed youth woke me at 6.15.

'You with the group?'

'No, not with the group.'

He dumps a tray holding toast and apricot jam, Nescafé powder but no boiling water. I notice this lack after he has gone and rush to the door to call him back. He returns in half an hour with luke-warm water. Then the sun, pitiless, climbs a sky that palpitates like worn blue nylon.

Nor am I my own master. I cannot up and leave, or even be certain what day I can leave. For Amman still regards the occupied West Bank as its own domain and to cross to the West Bank, Arabs and foreigners must still obtain a permit from the Ministry of the Interior. This could take several days, I had been warned in London, so that the army and intelligence can check your credentials. Journalists I respect have found on both sides of the Bridge a shared awareness of their identities.

Pondering my chances of a speedy permit, I gaze out on hills as dry as shards, grass as sharp as quills. It is Friday and the nearly half-built buildings are resting. Rectilinear blocks, destined soon to have window-frames but no intimacy or charm, they are the latest ripple of a Middle Eastern tide which as long ago as the 1950s turned the villages above Beirut into concrete cliffs.

My telephone rings. 'Amin.' I can hardly recognize in the two tired syllables the ebullient youth who offered to drive me to Jerash.

'You are not tired, sir?'

'Not at all.'

'And your permit can't even be started today; it is Friday.'

I find him by his car, yawning. But I'll go mad if I stay in the hotel. I notice but make too little allowance for his look of exhaustion. His car has been his bed, and his beard is perceptible. All night, he explains, he catnapped between new clients and new night-clubs. He turns on the radio. A reedy singer takes over my entertainment. He seems to swerve, then straighten, as we pass the King Hussein Youth Centre. But when, in answer to his question if only ruins concern me, I declare an interest in modern problems, he lowers the sound and the angry animation of an exile explodes his tiredness. Until last

winter he had stayed in Jerusalem, working as a tourist guide. This meant driving foreigners to holy or curious places and transmitting, to judge from what he tells me, a medley of history, folklore and grievance. The tourists he liked best and, in his tight jeans and muscled tee-shirt, expected to beguile, were blonde Nordic women. But according to him, the Israelis claimed even Arab Jerusalem as their preserve and served their purposes by alarming girls against the Arabs. The Swedes and Danes would cower from his curly hair and huge eyes as from a ticking suitcase.

One day an Israeli patrol stopped him with a small group of foreigners. They made him stand against his taxi and lower his trousers.

' "In front of tourists?" I asked them. "Have you no shame?" But they had none.'

We are on the main highway out of Amman, going north.

'Would you like to see where Palestinians live, sir?'

Mukhayyim is the Palestinian for a camp. It derives from the word for tent. In Egypt they call such places *muaskar*, which derives from 'soldier'. The experience of colonialism of the Egyptians was as auxiliaries to empire, not as those driven from stone houses into flapping canvas.

The tents have turned into dwellings fashioned from flattened biscuit-tins, corrugated iron and mud brick. We lurch through the orderly devastation which, with a hundred other such reservations for the dispossessed, prompted my Oxford tutor, Austin Farrer, to speak of the worst injustice of the twentieth century. But this monstrous place is lived in by decent people. Their crime: to have inhabited land wanted by other people. In a *souq* selling mounds of the cheapest plastic and small items of food, such as skewers of meat or frying *felafel* – round balls of bean-paste fried in fat – an old petrol-can holds a cluster of pink geraniums. The flowers are perhaps a talisman of beauty to men and women who once farmed terraced hillsides.

There is nothing to do but reverse from the *mukhayyim* and depart in a dust-cloud. Like the world, we have no intention or plan to prevent the young men who cannot reach the Gulf from turning into wastrels or killers. We sympathize, and long for the highway: in my case for Jerash, the certainties of an age whose

relics are reducible but, in substance, fixed.

But the last time I came, two decades ago, must have been spring. I remember trees and grass. Today, relentless sun makes the dead city shimmer in beige and khaki and, where stately rings of columns or processions of columns recall Decapolis, drab, aged white, the colour of tired lace. The *Thyestes* of Seneca may have been performed in one of the two theatres . . . but, more likely, a comedy. Lizards scuttle on bare stones and Amin's yawn finally touches my heart. He has got me here and now wants to get me back, to sleep off his night-club service to the rich. For the rich somehow abound in Amman. Villas nestle behind heat-tolerant trees; police doze over their small-arms in jeeps outside them.

We return to the most important theme.

'Why did you leave Jerusalem, apart from the insults?'

'No work, no income. Everything expensive. It is for them, too. But they have American assistance. Then, I admit it, fear. No dignity.' His anger grows suddenly fervent and I picture the Mercedes upside-down in a ravine with its wheels spinning. 'They kill us and who asks about us?' Then, with a coldness which is crueller than his anger, he speaks of the Arabs. 'In theory, they all support us. Even Sadat who has made peace with our oppressors claims to support us. If we stay over there' – he gestures beyond a cluster of cloches large as Nissen huts, the investment of those who have earned, or salvaged, something beyond the hills, towards the Mediterranean – 'if we swallow our pride, if we regard our survival as a gamble, we live among people who believe everything bad about us. And all of them, men, women, children, carry guns. If I pick up a stone, I go to prison. We have nothing to put against them, no weapon, no protection. There is no balance. They insult us, arrest us, charge us, defend us in court, judge us, torture us and when they take our land, they assess our claims and then reject them.'

Saturday, and my struggle for a permit is about to begin. My bedroom radio transmits the English-language programme from Israel. Freda Keat, whose voice I have heard from other cities, is interviewing an American who claims to be the biggest Jewish best-seller since Moses. His book: *The Jews, God and History*. I

don't catch his name. To the interviewer's suggestion that the title is presumptuous: 'Not so. As we Jews invented God, we deserve top billing.'

Amin has proposed his *wasta* – that 'influence' which is the modern substitute for the medieval 'Open Sesame!' – to help the permit take less than the normal four days. We penetrate the real Amman, a warren of villages stretching through wadis. Blocks of charmless stone; half-colonnades; gaunt shop-fronts; patches of green; an abundance of cinemas, pharmacies, money-changers, spare-part stores. And everywhere the crowds, masculine as Pall Mall clubs but teeming, not seated behind *The Times* or reddening over drinks. The crowds in Amman lack the humour of Cairo. Grimmer, slimmer, sparer.

Amin parks. He is to wake and fetch his older brother. The latter emerges, uncomplaining, and comes with us to the Ministry of the Interior. Its aroma takes me back to the Baghdad I knew when fresh from Oxford. I learnt then that my salary was not automatic; it was the reward for passing an obstacle course in dossiers, revenue stamps, signatures, in a language I still could not read. At the first encounter today the officials seem as fierce and pitiless as of old, though one's perception of bureaucrats, as of London policemen, gives evidence of one's ageing: I recall them in Baghdad as greybeard pashas, now they seem hardly out of the school football team. They demand, after I've filled in my form and surrendered my likeness, a thirty-*fils* stamp. This requires a wait (with the dread that the bureaucrat may meanwhile vanish, never to return) as, to get the stamp, Amin drives off for half an hour, taking with him half a dozen other petitioners. Just before he gets back, his brother, bored with waiting, goes into the street and buys stamps from a man sitting on a box in the pavement's glare. We hand in the stamps and are told to come back on Monday. I feel trapped in boredom, so start pleading. But the routine is concrete: soap eases no entry. Then some phrase from the brother works the magic of the East. We are allowed, after due sealings and filings, to take our list of applications – there are other beneficiaries on the sheet of paper – to the Intelligence Department, a half-submerged garage, of the Central Headquarters. Spick and span soldiers among trees. The papers will be ready at 1.30: just in time to get the permit.

Bureaucracy assuaged and Amin promised for tomorrow morning, I manage to contact the scholar who was my first dean in Baghdad. A brilliant historian enmeshed for most of his life in an academe which combines the perils of the Mafia and a Tudor court, the former Iraqi nationalist, enemy of Nuri Said and imperial puppets, has ended up, staunch anti-Communist, teaching history in an Amman college. He was the first man I met after I had stumbled into what had looked from the air like an African kraal and whose Ottoman serai was a jumble of ministries. My first morning I blundered into the Prime Minister's office and sat for some while among the portly men in lounge suits and the shoeless bedou before I realized my mistake. All I can remember from the dean then was a sentence of advice: 'One thing about the Arabs you may not have got from your reading Burton. You will find, and I am speaking of your students, that if you try to push them, they'll be as stubborn as mules. But a kind word, and they'll follow you for ever.' Land of exaggeration – land too of gnomic truths; and in it there was more truth than exaggeration. The telephone works, and I am invited to dinner.

The afternoon is interminable and the hotel's magazines offer little of interest. In my whirring room, loud with its artifical air-stream, I read an article about the Palestinians in Sir James Goldsmith's *NOW!*:

> It was Golda Meir who argued that 'there was no such thing as a Palestinian people', a sentiment which was echoed when an Israeli official told me: 'They have never had nationhood and if they ever get it, it will be like putting on a new suit of clothes.' There is some justice in these arguments – [I check the writer, it is Christopher Dobson] – for Palestinians have never ruled themselves.
>
> All these cross-currents move within the Palestinian lake creating rip-tides, often ending in shooting and murder. The Israeli official was probably right when he said that nationhood would be like a 'new suit' for them. But he concedes that the Palestinians want that 'new suit', even though it fits badly and is almost certain to fall apart at the seams.

The flaws behind this type of objectivity are invisible to those

who have lived far from the subject. The ordinary reader hardly bothers to ask whether only Palestinians indulge in violence, or how many members of the United Nations Organization, including the Israelis, ruled themselves before they became members. The Palestinians were an important element in the Ottoman Empire before the First World War: under that empire they had as much regional autonomy as the Iraqis or, for that matter, the Turks.

That evening, over a generous dinner, my academic friend tells me stories of the Bridge: of coffins opened for inspection, of women insulted. As to Amman, we agree that it is at least an Arab city. But at night, in my featureless hotel, I think more of the Bridge, where it leads and why I am led to cross it.

Palestine under its various names and guises has beguiled outsiders since the imperial Egyptians built the settlement that was to become Jerusalem. For Jews, who arrived in Canaan somewhat later, it has, apart from a fancied link with divine donation, the appeal of the place where Hebrew, grown separate from other Canaanite dialects, became the vehicle for a series of coherent religious texts and where, for a short period, Hebrew-speaking kings enjoyed independent power. Since the dramatic events of the first century A.D., the Holy Land, as it was known in Europe, has had a stranglehold on the imagination of Christendom. For Arabs, from the dawn of Islam until today, it has had a link with the Prophet Muhammad in the 'furthest mosque', departure point for a night-journey to Paradise. As a result of geography as well as of religious attachments, this narrow strip of fertile land between Lebanon in the north and Egypt in the south has played a role disproportionate to its size. For it has yielded few significant minerals and, while its mountains are more impressive than its rivers, even these are nowhere grander than those of the English Lake District. Yet because of its strategic position and because of the conflict between those who have temporarily won it and those who have, at least temporarily, lost it – hardly more than seven million souls in all – it far outweighs in news-coverage terms continental Australia or congested Java.

Specific motives inspire my visit. The man who, more than any other, thrust Palestine into the twentieth-century arena was

Theodor Herzl, whose biography I wrote from Cyprus, Vienna and Budapest in the early 1970s. His portrait appears on the most-used Israeli banknote; it hung behind Ben Gurion when the latter proclaimed the independence of the Zionist State in 1948. Although he was by no means attracted to Palestine as a place, his corpse is enshrined on an Arab-owned (or -confiscated) hill-top overlooking Jerusalem.

A Jewish artist, Ephraim Lilien, used Herzl as his model for Moses in a stained-glass window and in his illustrations to the Bible. Demonologists of other faiths wove him into nightmare. To neurotics emerging from the disintegration of the First World War, he was a vampire-like figure whispering the Protocols of Zion to a cemetery gathering. To Arabs, his association with their dispossession has made him hateful.

One question-mark hangs over Herzl's otherwise liberal sensibility. Brought up in the rapidly industrializing heart of Europe, his earliest ambitions, like those of many of his contemporaries, were fired in the exploits of men like de Lesseps. Without any talent for engineering, he yearned to pierce an isthmus and so win fame. The religion of his ancestors meant less to him than it did to Disraeli, even though Herzl's elders, unlike Disraeli's, never accepted baptism for themselves or for their two children. Herzl sought assimilation, nevertheless, to aristocratic, gentile Europe. At Vienna University he had duelled for a right-wing fraternity. At the same time, like others of the Wagner generation, he swung between poses. He combined a first-rate education with a romantic cult of the knightly past. His professor, Anton Menger, the pupil of Lorenz von Stein, Hegel's brilliant disciple, taught that the nineteenth century's besetting problems could be solved, without the violence implicit in Marxism, by the state working through public law. The problem which came to obsess the assimilated Herzl – playwright and representative in Paris of Vienna's most famous newspaper – was that of the Jews. In a memorable phrase of his youth, Herzl called them the ring-finger of humanity. He implied that the Law to which they had clung through centuries of oppression had kept new blood and new ideas from flowing. His two successive solutions to the Jewish problem aimed at liberation as much from tradition as from persecution; at rescuing the Jews from the

status of an exceptional people, enabling them once again to be one of civilization's active constituents. His first solution was too naïve to be seriously proposed to the imagined parties: Herzl wanted the leaders of Viennese Jewry to strike a deal with the Pope. (Elsewhere, similar deals could be struck with Protestant authorities.) The younger Jews would be baptized *en masse*; in return, the Church would guarantee to terminate anti-Semitism.

His second solution, with which his name is indelibly linked, was political Zionism. This meant, in his conception, the conversion of Jews to the Western-style nationalism which was the characteristic European creed of his day. This required, as corollary, a mass exodus to a national territory. His pamphlet, *Der Judenstaat*, was often to be translated as 'The Jewish State'. But it did not mean that. It meant 'The State for the Jews'. The verbal difference seemed tiny but was important. A Jewish State would be a society modelled on the laws of Moses; a State for the Jews would be a society where the Jews would escape their oppressive past, which included in Herzl's secret thoughts the religious law. Inspired by such romantic poets as Lenau and Heine and moved by European landscape, whether cloud-swirling mountains or such havens of upper-class chic as Trouville, he was attached to no particular place as a site for his therapeutic Utopia. It could be Palestine; but its ancient associations could be as harmful as helpful, and in some moods he seems to have preferred the newness of Argentina. In his last year of life he was to consider a British offer of a Yorkshire-sized area in British West Africa. Other territories considered were Cyprus and Cyrenaica. His mental picture of his State was unshaped by prophetic or Talmudic tradition. His citizens would speak High German, the leaders would wear formal dress and the soldiers would be splendid in Ruritanian costumes. His enemies mocked his concept as a Jewish Switzerland, or predicted that in the long run it would prove a mousetrap.

The question mark over his humanism was how, in a world which even in the 1890s had no blank spaces, he would treat the indigenous inhabitants of his allotted territory. Herzl published a propagandist novel, *Altneuland*, which was set in Palestine. He pictures a few middle- or upper-class Palestinians as having remained, gratefully aware of the chamber-music concerts and

electric trains introduced by the Jews. But in a half-million-word Diary, passages of which he wanted kept secret except from his future disciples, Herzl spoke a strikingly candid language. While other Zionists claimed that there was room in Palestine for two peoples to live side by side or, alternatively, that there was no Palestinian nation, Herzl was too honest to subscribe to such slogans as 'A Land Without A People For A People Without A Land'. He had paid a nine-day visit to Ottoman Palestine and knew that less than ten per cent of its 650,000 inhabitants were Jews. Twenty pages of his Diary, starting on 12 June 1895, were devoted to the problem.

He first mentally divided the indigenous population into the poor majority and the land-owning bourgeoisie. Each group would be dealt with differently. The labourers or tenant-farmers would have to be expropriated without compensation. In words as chilling as those recounting the deeds of other white men in North America and Tasmania, he decided that 'the process of expropriation and the removal of the poor should be carried out discreetly and circumspectly'. No one can guess at this stage what methods he envisaged. He was writing in the context of European expansion in Africa and may have thought that legal dictates would suffice to move the Palestinians. He was personally too humane not to have blanched if he had foreseen the methods used in 1948. He was an intellectual writing in a hotel bedroom. 'It will be our endeavour to transfer the poverty-stricken population across the border, unnoticed, by securing work for it in the transit countries while denying it any employment in the land that will be ours.' For the landowners, he envisages an auctioneer's trick. Hundreds of agents would be stationed secretly in the country and, at a given signal by telegram, would conclude deals with the owners, thus preventing a sudden rise in values.

Which Herzl was the true one – the idealist whose *Altneuland* was an attractive daydream, or the Diarist who conceived his territorial solution in a mood not far short of mania – it is hard to be sure. Just as the dramatist conceives a villain with the same energy as a hero, so a political visionary may feel machiavellian and magnanimous within different aspects of his soul. If Herzl's liking for Argentina had been infectious and a flatter Judaea had

been re-created in Patagonia, it is conceivable that the problem would never have arisen, or would have been less anguished. In exchange for pesos, the native Argentinians might have cleared a few swamps and moved north to Uruguay.

But Herzl found few takers for his abstract dream. Only the doom-laden beautiful territory where prophets had inveighed and zealots fought against unwinnable odds could stir the thoughts of the inhabitants of Russian ghettos away from the Bronx and towards the Levant.

My knowledge of Herzl is biographical; it derives from manuscripts and books. My knowledge of his victims, the Palestinians expelled in 1948, has been acquired through friendships – as with the Bethlehem-born novelist and critic Jabra I. Jabra, who arrived in Baghdad the same day as I did, he from Cambridge, I from Oxford – woven into the thirty or more years that I have lived in the Middle East. The misery of the refugees who left has been rivalled by the misery of Arab populations who remained and were forced to endure dictatorial regimes ostensibly devoted to the restoration of Arab Palestine. But my knowledge of those Palestinians who have stayed behind, either as citizens of a sort in the Jewish State or under military occupation, is the dark side of the moon. It is as a this-planet astronaut that I have decided to cross the Bridge.

2

The worst bridge in the world

Amin, my benefactor, is snoring in his taxi as I leave the hotel early in the morning. A colleague who is drinking tea agrees to take me. To the voice of Fairouz – whose plaintive song '*A'idun*', 'The Returnees', was a hit of the 1950s – we bump through arid hills down, down into that cleft on the planet's surface which runs south through the Red Sea to the Great Rift Valley of East Africa. The bare hills flatten out to disclose a plain. If the sea got in, it would obliterate the ruins of Qumran and the caves where the Essenes hid their books, and much human misery. Kerameh, the site of the first successful Palestinian resistance after 1967 to Israeli incursions, might overlook a new, larger sea. But as things are, a temperature of 44° Centigrade (according to the car radio) lays a mist. The cliffs, the sombre waves of the Dead Sea, are as invisible as the prostrate girl behind a stage-magician's flash-powder. But behind me to the east, the beige Transjordanian hills are emerald here and there where someone has had the capital or the energy to install a pump. And to the west, topping the mist, are the grey and white ramparts of Canaan. Somewhere here, the twelfth-century Hebrews under Joshua must have crossed the river for, five miles north of the Dead Sea, is Jericho, the first city of Canaan to fall to their attack. Jericho was later to acquire a reputation for surrendering. Its gates admitted the

Syrian general Bacchides, then Aristobulus, then Pompey, Herod, Vespasian, in brisk succession. An edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, composed when London was a secular Vatican pronouncing on the qualities of the planet, attributed Jericho's lack of warlike spirit to 'the enervating effect of the great heat of the depression in which the city lies, which has the same effect on the handful of degraded humanity that still occupies the ancestral site'. This was the imperial mood. About the same time, T. E. Lawrence, then an Oxford undergraduate, was writing, after a few days in northern Palestine: 'The sooner the Jews farm it all, the better.'

The road from Amman ends at a Jordanian terminal reminiscent of a cattle market in the Scottish highlands: temporary structures process human beings, who are noisier than the slow-mooing, large-horned cattle of Argyll, before they are allowed to clamber into the senile buses that cover the few miles to the Israeli terminal on the other bank. But the hospitality which rescued the earliest Zionist settlers when, unused to the Levant or to agriculture, they grew sick and hungry – is shown to me. My processing takes but a moment, accelerated by an officer who is a copy of the Sandhurst model. My bag is hurled on to the top of one bus while I myself am pushed by impetuous hands into another. We sit for a moment, baked in torpor. Then the engines grind alive and the buses lurch across a flat no-man's-land towards the River Jordan, sump of this ochre-coloured plain. I had pictured the King Hussein Bridge as some Middle Eastern replica of Westminster Bridge, a swift arched thoroughfare which would, if sensate, be lamenting its now constipated flow. I find the sort of structure which might cross a canal in the industrial wastelands. The bus stops, giving ample time for contemplation of this fabled stream. Narrow, it has the look of barely liquid mud. Summer has deposited a skin of dust on the sedgy foliage by its banks. The spokes of a submerged bicycle-wheel project from the river's inert surface. Notices forbid us to photograph the strategic ditch.

Yet to cross this unremarkable waterway involves the Palestinians in physical and spiritual humiliation. It is hot, but there is nowhere to get a glass of water for their children, let alone to buy them ice-creams or change their garments. But

worse than the physical discomfort is the spiritual unease of having to return to their own country under alien control, to have to deal, as it were, with Martians who see Palestinians as intruding natives with no right to be born where they had been born. The buses undergo the equivalent of pass-checking in South Africa. We are, all of us on the bus, temporary – or honorary – Bantu.

There are two possible reactions to enormity: the commonplace, to wish to inflict it on one's enemies; the noble, the wish to expunge it from all existence. But the notion of the kind of welcome a master-race, or a winning race, gives its victims, must have seeped into the minds of the soldiers, in American-style uniforms, who guard the bridge. Commonplace conscripts. At school in England I found something like this: the boy who had been bullied in his first year was in his third year bullying others. Men repeat the same rituals that they have suffered; punishment creates its own vicious archetypes. A writer-friend of mine, asthenic and bolshie, was recently recruited into the Egyptian army at Assiout. He was soon kicked out – but not before discovering that a recruit of two days' seniority already knows precisely how to kick, to insult, to alarm the peasant who turns up from Kafr Gamoos in *gallabya*, never having worn, in his entire existence, footwear as solid as army boots. A year later, wearing two stripes, the now booted country-boy will himself perpetuate the character-building outrage.

Our passes and passports have been collected without a glint of recognition that we too are human: though one unsmiling sergeant looks at me twice. I must stand out, pale-faced and speaking Egyptian Arabic to a Palestinian back from Kuwait, who invites me to visit his family in East Jerusalem. Our papers processed, we are trundled west across the bridge. We disturb no waterfowl. Even the birds seem to fear this welcome.

Again the bus stops. There is further checking, counting, still without smiles, still without that spark-leap of humanity from eye to eye. The soldiers are selfconsciously macho, the Palestinians (except for their wailing children) wrapped in a silence enveloping as desert cloaks.

Finished with the Jordan, we swerve and lurch to a flat area backed by shade. We are told to stay put but I jump down. The

bus on which my bag was thrown seems to have vanished. A man toting a gun waves me back into the bus. I refuse, not through bravado but from a residue of imperial self-confidence. My uncle, baptized in Jordan water, practised medicine in Lagos and in the evenings played his pianola to Sir Hugh Clifford to the accompaniment of whisky and reminiscences of the East Indies and elsewhere. So I don't feel entirely a stranger in the ritual of this landscape, though certainly not at home. I search for my luggage but cannot find it. A tall bearded Israeli stands with his gun, watching. He does not look as though he altogether enjoys his occupation. He catches my eye.

'What are you?'

'English.'

'Your work?'

'I write.'

'Then why on earth did you come with those Arabs? For you, there is the tourist bus. It's air-conditioned and quicker. Why not try that heap?'

He points with his gun towards a pile of dishevelled luggage. He suggests from experience. My bag had become invisible; through being rolled so thoroughly in dust, it had changed its colour and lost its labels.

This is not the first time I have seen divided communities: moments in Northern Ireland; six years in the Cyprus which exploded like a grenade in 1974. But I have yet to see as complete an alienation of the dominant from the dominated. I am now refused the luxury, or pose, of staying with the latter. While the Arabs slowly advance to the next stage of their ordeal, carrying their bags towards tables where soldiers stand with knives at the ready to cut into their bundles, I am directed towards a hall hung with posters: Welcome to Israel! Architectural bric-à-brac, touristy details, the delights abound. We are not, it is idle to object, in Israel anyway. Even the United States produces senators who refuse to be conducted over Occupied Territory – though others are less squeamish. The 1947 Partition Plan, however, gerrymandered by US pressure, conceded what is now the West Bank (with much else) to an Arab State intended to exist in equal status alongside the Jewish one. The King Hussein Bridge and the Jericho region came under Israeli rule as the result of the

1967 *Blitzkrieg*; Israel's duty to withdraw has been defined by the world community.

But enough Europeans have expressed sympathy for the Palestinians for no alien to be unsuspect and the Israelis have the power to do as they wish. I am parted from my luggage. The hand-bag in which I carry my money, passport, personal documents, diary, is taken from me. When I have been frisked in a cubicle, I find my other things laid out on a table in front of an official. They include a camera and a radio.

'Take one exposure.'

I do so. There's no explosion.

'Now turn on your radio.'

A group of Australians, who have come in an air-conditioned bus but are being similarly held, watch as I turn the switch. Music flows inconsequentially into the hall.

'Mozart,' says a voice from down under.

'No, Tchaikovsky.'

The Palestinian on the bus had warned me that my heels would be unprised and my toothpaste confiscated. This does not happen. But everything in my possession which incorporates writing is taken away. The things taken include my diary, my chequebook, my address book and my 1912 Baedeker.

'What on earth do you want with these things?'

The official, distantly polite, commands me to be patient. In just under an hour they are all returned and I am asked to check that nothing is missing. Nothing is. I am later told by practised journalists that documents are photostated and, if suspicious or if they contain suggestive addresses, are transmitted to Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency, and perhaps to other friendly outposts. But I leave this place of interrogation intact.

The man who checks my passport for the last time is even friendly. 'Don't take an Arab taxi. They cheat. There are fixed prices in the Israeli taxis and there are also buses.'

By this time the Palestinians are undergoing the body searches, entirely naked, of which they told me on the bus.

My frontier experience has introduced a *frisson* of police-station chill into the broiling day. I feel an urgent need for someone, however roguish, to talk to; after the music, made unrecognizable by the circumstances, I need a few bars of merely

human conversation. I also wish to visit Jericho, before starting on the road to Jerusalem where the traveller fell among thieves. But I have the luck to fall into the taxi of an honest man. We agree on a price for a visit to Jericho and then the ascent to the Holy City. The driver drives well and is to make no suggestion that the sum I finally pay him should be augmented.

3

Jericho

A citizen of Palestinian Jericho who showed military *élan* would be asking for trouble. For the first time, I glimpse barriers between occupiers and occupied which are to repeat themselves like geological upthrusts throughout the Occupied Territories. The jeeps, armoured cars and dull steel weapons belong to one faction. It claims ultimate mastery over all the land. The other faction is defenceless. The hand, even of a six-year-old child, chucking a stone can project dire consequences on its owner and his or her family.

The situation, the occupiers sometimes plead, has affinities to that of Ulster. The Israelis would like to be reassured that their soldiers are no rougher than the camouflaged youths from Yorkshire who patrol the Londonderry streets. Yet, apart from occurring in a landscape of rock and sun unfavourable to abstract ideas or the misty nuance, the division here separates communities with hardly any shared assumptions. Some foreigners see resemblances between Jews and Palestinians; but despite similar complexions, an Arab can distinguish an occupier as swiftly as a Bantu or Cape Coloured can tell a white man. In Ulster, despite decades of close focused hatred, a Protestant recognizes a Catholic by ascertaining his occupation, his residence or his favourite pub. The Provisionals and the security forces share an

infrastructure which includes a common alphabet, a similar diet and shared TV aerials and, whatever the differences in cult and detail, one baptism, one creed.

And whereas in Ulster the contestants have been *in situ* for centuries, here the occupiers have taken over, within living memory, the houses and lands of the Palestinians; even the land still owned by Arabs is owned provisionally, liable to confiscation on grounds of security or the needs of the newcomers.

Jericho's best known citizen is Mousa Alami. An upper-class Palestinian, Alami long ago established a scheme for training Arab youths, mostly orphans or refugees, in modern agriculture. In the dark foliage round his old-fashioned house lurks a retainer who rises to greet me with Arab courtesy. Inside, I recall the houses of anglophile Iraqis in the 1950s: comfortable, rather shabby chairs, the large, faded photographic portraits of male relations, little tables to support the offerings of orange juice or coffee. Alami grew up in a world that had not discovered Swedish Modern but retained a visceral sense that Queen Victoria's servants, if correctly informed, would do the right things. A young relation tells me that Mousa Bey is far from well and is confined to bed. But learning that a visitor is here, from England, which for Palestine did so many wrong things, yet where *Palestine, My Country*, Alami's book, caused a stir, he sends word that he will be down.

As I drink my orange juice, he walks in, apologizing for his eighty-three years and regretting his arthritis. But alert, restful, tolerant, he provides an entry to this ancient country which befits its true character: not, of course, the Holy Land as painted in faithful detail by my nineteenth-century compatriot, David Roberts, but still less the Sparta of the Levant. Somehow, he has retained the smile of a child; but his unfibrosed hope for a fair solution to a baffling problem would repel extremes. A hot-headed Arab youth, or *shaba*, must find his perspectives slow and, because non-violent, ineffective. He would disturb those old men whose grouses obliterate public concern.

He repeats a theme I remember from his book. When he was young, before the Balfour Declaration inflated the ambitions of Zionists in Europe and New York, Arabs and Jews in Palestine had been genuine friends.

'We Muslims often had Jewish foster-brothers, and vice versa. We were that close. My own foster-brother and I stayed on these terms as, side by side, we climbed the ladder of what was essentially a small-scale provincial society, little noticed by the world. But the political demands of the Zionist leadership eventually prevented us from doing more than exchange sad smiles, or perhaps a wink, as we passed at the law courts.

'But I have long since ceased to puzzle over the Zionist system. To me it lacks all normal logic. You know I have my farm here in Jericho? It suffered, like everything else, in the war of 1967 and we have many problems. We are forced to solve these through the military authorities. But it is baffling work. We put in, say, ten requests, of which nine are rejected.'

'What kind of requests?'

'I'll give one example. Jericho has virtually no rainfall. Our trees are fed from subsoil water, and wells here, as elsewhere, cave in periodically and need to be cleaned. We have the requisite machinery but are forbidden to use it. Even though this is our land, we are forbidden to use its water resources as and how we wish. This paralyses our development.'

The approach of even moderate Israelis is typified for him by one unforgettable incident. His face shows bemusement, irony, not bitterness, as he retails it. A trio of agronomists turned up one morning and politely requested to see over his scheme. It had, over the decades, transformed sallow wasteland into groves of citrus and palm. No less important, it transformed orphans, the kind of children known in America as 'street-wise', into constructive farmers. On this occasion Mousa Alami instructed his foreman to show their Jewish guests everything that might interest them, whether good or bad. Their tour took them about two hours. They then returned to his house and, in the Middle Eastern ritual which no antagonism makes the Arabs abandon, were offered coffee. His visitors congratulated him with evident sincerity on what they had seen of his project's achievements.

' "Mr Alami," they told me, "we have seen things, progressive things, we frankly did not expect to find here. But," one asked, "will you allow a very frank question?" '

I could picture the courtly bow with which such a request would have been conceded.

' "Ask whatever you like and I shall endeavour to answer."

' "Why, Mr Alami, do you do these things – these excellent things – here, and not in your own country?" '

The immigrant from Poland pointed beyond the dark evergreens swathing Alami's house, the palm clusters of the dusty town, away to the east, to the hills beyond the Jordan.

4

Rings round Jerusalem

When in the autumn of 1898 Herzl paid his one visit to Jerusalem, he was a sick though not yet dying man. He arrived by train after the onset of Sabbath and, out of deference to his followers, felt obliged to walk from the Ottoman station with the help of a cane. Jerusalem offered him little to please his particular sensibility, though much to irritate. His urban standards had been shaped first by Pesth, whose new streets were in the gridiron pattern pioneered by the Hellenistic Greeks and developed in Manhattan; and then by Vienna, whose spectacular nineteenth-century Ring of mock-Gothic and neo-classical structures encircled the Innedstadt of the Habsburg Kaisers. His day-dreams were later to involve the improvements he would make to Jerusalem if the Jews came to rule it: hygiene, concert-halls, cafés-dansants.

The city to which the taxi lifts me in steady, coiling ascent from Jericho and the vast abandoned camp on its outskirts – its inhabitants forced to flee a second time after the Six Days War – would have delighted and depressed Herzl in equal measure. And these extremes have their roots in him and his vision. Teddy Kollek, the mayor is a Viennese. Since the no-man's-land of barbed wire and dead cats between Arab and Jewish Jerusalem was expunged in 1967, he has shown an overall ambition for his city combined

with sensitivity to detail. The middens which Herzl deplored have been filled in. An aesthetic humanism respects, tidies up, even homogenizes the old. And since Old Jerusalem's streets are narrow for motor cars, its Innedstadt has begun to be what it was long in potential, a place of visual beauty and imaginative nostalgia.

On the last part of the climb, from Bethany, the Arabic name for which – Al-Azariyeh – preserves the memory of Lazarus, whose apparent death made Jesus weep, the eye is drawn to a skyline frieze of honey-coloured ramparts culminating in a golden dome atop blue walls. The dome stands over the vast rock which was the traditional underpinning of Solomon's altar of sacrifice, having been originally a Canaanite threshing-floor. The chain of medieval walls squares off this jewelled precinct from the secular world. The renovation and embellishment of the walls have been a particular care of mayor Kollek, so that the result is an evocation of medieval Aleppo by a Viennese impresario. Kollek has patched where it was desirable to patch and removed squalor which spoilt the mural line.

If the world were sane, if people could exist undisturbed where they were born or where they wished to live, and were prepared to do the latter through the normal processes of buying or renting, then Kollek, blind to ethnic divisions but shrewd-eyed for the first signs of ugliness or neglect, would be an ideal mayor. He would be acclaimed by all Jerusalem an unbiased benefactor; he would not be seen as the representative of one faction that oppresses another.

But the aspect of Herzl's vision inspired by the Habsburg passion for grandiose architecture, light opera and complex cakes is balanced by a sterner aspect formed in an imperial age. His formula for commandeering land outside Europe (inspired in part by Cecil Rhodes) installs an alien, intrusive community which confronts the hostility of an Eastern culture for which he felt occasional respect but, more often, disdain. When Sultan Abdul Hamid refused point-blank to cede him Palestine, he saw the rejection as something to get round. He thereupon proposed to a series of possible gentile patrons including Kaiser Wilhelm II, Czar Nicholas II, Joseph Chamberlain and King Victor Emmanuel of Italy, that a Jewish State in the Levant

would serve their interests. His State would form a bridgehead for Europe in an East which he described as 'barbarous'.

The spore of this colonial policy is visible on the ascent from the Jericho rift. At strategic turns on the gaunt hills, water pipes glitter, banal prefabricated huts are skinned with dust. These small outposts could never be agriculturally profitable even if, at great expense, the settlers force tomatoes and lettuces from the sterile rocks. But the ugly settlements have not been conceived as nursery gardens: they are constituents of an expandable stockade. They could be dismantled as fast as a travelling circus; or extended from scree to scree. Sinister though they are, they in no way prepare me for the second, unbeautiful ring that encircles Jerusalem. On land confiscated, compulsorily purchased, or classified as Jordanian state land and therefore, by some Israeli logic, made available for Zionist expropriation, Teddy Kollek's masters have, in less than fourteen years, reared multiple fortress-blocks exclusively for Jews. Small oblong slits in bare stone are like the embrasures used by medieval archers, not normal windows through which you gaze or breathe. It is political, defensible architecture raised by settlers with no apparent sense of style. The heavy stone blocks lack the grace of Mussolini's architecture in Asmara or Tripoli while duplicating the Italian dictator's aims: to dominate a hostile indigenous people or, inside the ring of fortified tenements which now encircle the Old City, to concentrate and then redistribute them. My perception of the city changes in an eye-flick. Advancing claws grasp a plant as fragile as April.

The American Colony Hotel has a name which could deceive the wary. Its American roots go back to New England puritanism and the America which set the world an example of austere, energetic living and buried its dead in plain pine coffins. The hotel's Swiss manager and all-Arab staff welcome a varied clientele, gentile and Jewish, to what was originally a pasha's mansion built, in what was then an innovation, outside the Ottoman city's protective walls. The road north to Nablus starts nearby. As the result of persistent and interested anti-Turkish propaganda, the West is inclined to ignore the considerable advances made in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire by such reformers as Midhat Pasha and Sultans Mahmud II and Abdul Hamid. The

development of the Arab citrus industry along the coastal plain, the new vogue for mass tourism associated with Mr Thomas Cook, fostered railways and shipping lines. More and more ordinary Westerners added the Levant to the tamer regions of lake and mountain they had explored in Europe. The American Colony was created by a transatlantic couple turned to God by a personal tragedy. They opened the mansion as a clean though not luxurious hospice, the forerunner of many such. It is now the Jerusalem hotel for those uncaptivated by the tastes of the Hilton or Sheraton empires.

I approached the long reception desk past an inner patio bright with flowering shrubs.

'Mr Friedmann will be very, very angry.' The Arab telephonist evoked over his wire a fragment of a drama to which I would never find the key. With regretful smiles he turned to me: alas, the hotel was full and I had made no reservation. The fault, I pleaded, was not mine: except at the highest level, communications between Amman and Jerusalem were as blocked as those between Tirana and Moscow.

'But I can promise you something tomorrow. Meanwhile, why not try the YMCA? It's almost next door.'

The YMCA wears its name even more loosely than the American Colony: confined to neither the young, the Christian, nor the male. As if aware of the misnomer, it lets visitors glimpse an earlier name on stationery and bills. For, as The Aelia Capitolina, it commemorated the pagan city which Hadrian built on the levelled ruins after his legions had suppressed the second and last Jewish Revolt of A.D. 135. Aelius was Hadrian's family name; the new city he dedicated to Capitoline Jupiter was so thoroughly Hellenized that it renders fruitless most attempts to locate the streets, alleys and public buildings of the city where Jesus was tried and put to death.

Like the American Colony, the YMCA insists on being paid in American dollars. Each room has a private bath. This is a necessity in a metropolis with Arabia's sand-seas expanding beyond the dusty hills to the east and south.

Next morning my radio brings me the Israeli news in English. I note these items: Mr Menachem Begin has taken over Ezer Weizmann's post at the Ministry of Defence. The American

magazine *Newsweek* reports that, to strengthen security on the West Bank, three brigades have been transferred from Sinai. The military governor has banned the circulation of two of Jerusalem's three Arab dailies – *Al-Fajr* and *Al-Shaab* – in 'the administered territories'.

But in a city new to me – and in the case of a hill-city where limestone appeases the eye and a scent of resin delights the lungs this June morning – I am disposed to push politics aside in a search for impressions. Someone I met last night, a graduate of Bir Zeit, one of the three West Bank universities, has promised to show me the Dome of the Rock. He is outside by his small car.

But with Palestinians, to ignore their saga would be as insensitive as to discuss marsh-butterflies on the fringe of Auschwitz.

'What explains these measures,' I ask him, 'against these papers? Surely they're already censored?'

'You can say that again. Sometimes a whole new issue has to be created at midnight, if the censor condemns the first. And we are not allowed to fill the banned space with blanks.

'A major purpose of such measures, which are almost routine, is to remind us of our status. Since occupation is of its nature absurd, it needs absurdities to give it force. I am not breaking the law if I buy the banned papers here in Jerusalem. The claim that all Jerusalem constitutes Israel's capital makes it hard to impose an index on Arabs only. But if I were absent-minded and left copies of the papers in my car when I drive out to Bir Zeit, I could face a fine which would put my wife and me into debt; or I could go to prison. The ban could also bankrupt the papers. Many of their readers live outside Jerusalem, in the West Bank. The drop in circulation will make it hard for the editors to pay their journalists, or even survive. But this may, of course, be more than a routine measure. There is a possibility that they are planning moves they don't want the people of Nablus and Hebron to debate.'

We park as close as we can to the south walls of the inner city. Nearby, the old Jewish quarter has been rebuilt. Its identical arches, mesmerically repeated, are reminiscent of Chirico's lunar townscapes. There is something curiously unintimate about the result. Turning our backs on this expression of the Hebrew renaissance, we approach what Muslims call the Noble

Sanctuary. Since 1967, a gigantic piazza has flattened an area of Arab houses, many dating from Mameluke times. This bare space gives windswept access to the Wailing Wall. What was once one side of a lane, congested by Jews in ringlets and kaftans, interceding, lamenting, using with tears the interstices between these cyclopean blocks as receptacles for petitions to the Spirit that rules the place, is now the retaining wall of a Coney Island funfair. In the piazza, tourists in funny hats aim polaroids at each other. It only needs a camel and we could be in the tumult by Giza's insulted pyramids. A group of girls whirl in a dance of triumph to the applause of their boyfriends, who clap in rhythm with the girls' gyrating stomachs.

My companion, whom, like a number of Jews and Arabs, I leave unnamed, consults his watch with its date indicator.

'Today is June the second. What holiday is this? Their next celebration is our day of mourning. The fifth of June: when they overran Jerusalem in the Six Days War.'

A staircase passes a notice from the rabbinate, warning that the Temple Mount is out of bounds to orthodox Jews. A spacious plateau open to the sky dominates what was once a panorama of fields and farms. But even the tenements of Ramat Eshkol cannot diminish buildings whose contrasted magnificence marks the culmination of the Hellenic tradition and the beginning of the Islamic. The Furthest Mosque – in Arabic, Al-Aqsa – was originally a Byzantine basilica. It is named in the Koran, where a verse narrates how God took Muhammad up into heaven on what modernists regard as a mystical exaltation but which Islamic tradition has loved to portray as a literal journey, the Prophet being transported on a magical horse with a peacock's tail and a woman's breasts. To the north is the mosaic-walled structure which culminates in a golden dome. Caliph Abdul Malik built this above the rock which underlay the Jewish altar. In popular legend, the rock was suspended between earth and heaven, although it is possible to descend into a cave and see that this is not so. The Caliph's structure provides space, not only for the prostrations of Muslim prayer, but for that circumambulation long practised by Arabians around their desert shrines and still forming a major feature of a pilgrimage to the Kaaba in Mecca.

Most of the Noble Sanctuary is open to the sky. It occupies the area of the Temple where, in his most spectacular act of defiance, Jesus ejected the men who changed coins bearing the imprint of the emperor into a temple currency with which worshippers bought doves and lambs for combustion on the altar. The Islamic transformation has given the Mount a peace that melts the tensions we felt below. Its components of earth, sky and trees give it a dignity far removed from the clatter of so many religious places. As I sit in the shade of a tree, between the mosque and the blue and gold Dome of the Rock, I hear Northern Europeans oohing and aahing at the proportions and atmosphere. But my companion, sitting beside me, has things to say. He was in Jerusalem when, shortly after the Israeli occupation, an attempt was made to gut the mosque.

'The flames suddenly appeared and we called the fire service. But no engines came. Instead, the shrine was saved by a miracle of human co-operation. Turbaned imams and bearded priests, young men in jeans and merchants from their stalls, all Arab Jerusalem, in fact, formed a living chain for buckets to put out the blaze. This first attempt was defeated.'

'The first?'

'It will not be the last. How can they bear it, that the country they claim as theirs says so much about everything except their presence in the past? They dig. No one is keener on digging than the Israelis. They find Greek things, Egyptian things, Islamic things, but only scattered Hebrew fragments. And they have to represent the city they claim as their eternal capital by tourist posters of our walls, our minarets, our domes. No, they will surely try again. Their archaeologists have been chipping away under Al-Aqsa until they have weakened its foundations. Daily we hear how they plan to complete the outrage. Explosives could wreak havoc that water could not defeat. They want to get rid of this shrine, and of course, the Arabs: to turn facts into unfacts!'

'But their tourism must largely depend on people visiting their various holy places as well as art-lovers visiting such shrines as this?'

He sighs.

'I'm sure Mr Kollek would join the human chain. I speak of the fanatics.'

5

Explosion at Nablus

Judging by the disfigured monuments in European cathedrals, beauty has always attracted fury. The Parthenon was not built in a serene and equal society. But the juxtaposition of bigotry and peace exhausts me. I am now in a quiet, viewless room at the American Colony: lunch will be completed by a sleep. But Israeli news in English makes rest impossible.

This morning, as I ate breakfast and glanced at my guidebook, attempts were being made to kill three Palestinian mayors as they started their day. The mayor of Al-Birah, a small Muslim town just short of Ramallah, heard in time of two explosions and asked the authorities to check his car. An army sapper – a luckless Druze – was blinded as he set off a bomb planted outside the mayor's garage. But Karim Khalaf, mayor of largely Christian Ramallah, and Bassam al-Shaka, mayor of Nablus, the West Bank's largest city, were seriously hurt in the first two explosions. There have been other acts of violence. In Hebron a bomb wounded shoppers in the *souq*. Two Ramallah students have been shot in the back.

The main shopping street of Arab Jerusalem, Sharia Salahaddin, runs from close to the YMCA and the American Colony to join the boulevard which encircles the walls of Saladin. (The Kurdish hero is remembered for his defeat of the Crusader

State.) Halfway along this shopping artery, above a fruit shop, is what amounts to a Palestinian press office – 'what amounts to', since the occupying authorities have so far refused it a licence and are searching for pretexts to close it. The office is staffed by young Palestinians who help foreign visitors see the Arab side of things for themselves. It was founded by Raymonda Tawil (who has spent time in gaol); she is now absent in Europe to promote her book, *My Country, My Prison*. But an enthusiast, Hind, has just come from Karim Khalaf's bedside. As she now wants to visit the mayor of Nablus, she offers to take me there with her. If we can get past the police-blocks, we may penetrate the hospital where Bassam al-Shaka is fighting for his life.

As the highway exits from the fortress blocks ringing Arab Jerusalem, and we enter the West Bank proper, every few miles drivers are being stopped and searched. But Hind's 1967 VW beetle is waved through the checkpoints. Perhaps, I suggest, the Israelis respect a woman? Or is it my pink, foreign face? I had prepared an out-of-date Egyptian press-card but have not had to show it.

Hind laughs. 'Forget chivalry or tolerance for foreign visitors. I bought this Volkswagen second-hand in Haifa. It came with an Israeli licence-number and they take me for one of themselves. I speak Hebrew; I took a course at an *ulpan*, one of their schools for immigrants.'

Left to myself, I should have hesitated before rushing to the mayor's bedside. Deep in my memory are the hush and discipline of my father's hospital. But Hind has the Arab ability to make politics central and her determination enables me to see, for the first time, the uplands of biblical Samaria. Jesus, unlike most first-century Jews, travelled this route between Galilee and Jerusalem.

No wonder the Palestinians – descendants of Canaanites, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, but children of this landscape – are resolved to cling, at whatever price, to these bright fields, yellow and green, edged by stone walls; the trees whispering under the weight of fruit. This small-scale mountain range is like no other Mediterranean scenery known to me. It is less arid than the Greek islands and less tropical than Sparta. It lacks the concrete and the billiard-green golf courses of coastal Spain. The sense of

space, of unfouled air, is found in southern Turkey, but here there is also the intimate cultivation of central Lebanon. But it is less dramatically backed by mountains than Lebanon and on a smaller scale than Turkey. Its rolling fields, the proximity everywhere of rock, bring back memories of Bibles illustrated when Arthur Rackham was designing his tree shapes for *The Wind in the Willows*. The Bibles got it right.

Yet here, too, an air of menace blows from settlements imposed on strategic hilltops since the occupation, and at an accelerated rush since the Camp David agreement. And a sense of intrusion. For the villages you see from the Nablus road grow from the earth as naturally as hair from a beautiful head. The settlements, by contrast, are the false eyelashes, the nylon wigs of a transvestite spy.

Since its name, like that of Naples, is a corruption of the Greek *nea polis*, Nablus must once have been new. But it has become old as the chief town of the upland region and, since the British occupation in 1918, a major centre of Palestinian resistance. Associations with Jesus offering the Samarian woman water fade, though the well was here, as passing on our left the law court and prison with their blue-and-white Israeli flag, we drive into silent streets. Protective shutters guard the interiors of shops. Their owners await the axes and acetylene flares which, Hind tells me, are the response to any sign of protest, however passive. But not a stall offers juice, transistor batteries or combs.

'The Rafidiyeh Hospital – where is it?'

Hearing Hind's screech, balcony faces nod towards the northern end of town. Hind has temporarily blonde hair and her Israeli number-plate. Hence the cold politeness.

We find the hospital and park. Sweat-stained soldiers cuddling machine guns observe us closely. One looks to me a little shamefaced. Hind, teetering on high heels, dismisses any such notion as imagination. Followed by the soldiers' stares – she wears skin-tight white trousers and a revealing blouse – we reach the hospital entrance. Outside, another drab-green posse, more dull oiled steel. Inside, all is clamorously Arab. The packed staircase could lead to a stadium terrace on cup-tie night. But the faces contradict this impression. They focus anxiety, resolution, anger, on a door. Behind it, periodically closed by nurses and

doctors against the palms of those who are desperate to see, if possible to touch, lies Bassam al-Shaka.

'Come along!' Hind, the liberated Arab woman, grabs my hand, but the voices of my education are powerful enough to overrule her.

'You go in. But don't stay. He'll need air.'

Instead, I talk to Said Kenaan, the mayor's cousin, who was with Bassam when he surfaced from anaesthesia. The mayor understood at once what he had lost in the explosion: both his legs from above the knees. In fact, he only brought one leg to the hospital; the other was found in his car.

'The Israelis wanted to get rid of me but they only got rid of my legs. And that is their error. For us to walk out of Palestine, which they want, we need legs. I am tied to Palestine more tightly than before.'

His utterance belongs to the world before TV: to the death of Gordon, to the execution of Kléber's assassin, whose arm was burnt off to the wrist, before his anus was impaled, his voice still resisting. The young killer was from Palestine, though he did what he did for an occupied Egypt. That Bassam spoke as he did is confirmed by other witnesses.

His cousin describes what happened before the incident: 'Last night we were late at Bassam's house. No Israeli would move in Nablus at midnight unless he was on official business and protected. The family heard suspicious noises. The pigeons must have heard them too, as they stirred in their house. We went outside but found nothing strange. Then around four we heard a car. Again, very unusual in Nablus at that hour. Bassam had an early morning appointment with an Israeli. Perhaps you have met her? Felicia Langer. She is a lawyer, and defends many Arabs in the courts. Bassam and she are working on the case of families whose houses have been blown up as a punishment. Around eight a.m., a sudden power cut. A few minutes later Bassam went out as usual to start his car. As he turned the key, the car exploded.'

Like others I meet in Nablus, Said Kenaan is convinced that no amateurs or people acting without the connivance of the authorities could have contrived the operation. A similar device, a bomb triggered by the ignition key, had killed Bassam's cousin,

the novelist Ghassan Kanafani, in Beirut. Mossad has never denied its responsibility. There are also too many coincidences. 2 June was Begin's first day as acting Minister of Defence. It was the beginning of school holidays, so large demonstrations were unlikely. The two newspapers had been banned immediately prior to the attempts on the three mayors. In many countries power cuts are commonplace: in Israel they have frequently preceded new moves against the Palestinians. There was the reported reinforcement of the occupation army.

Hind comes from the sickroom. Her face is lit up. She could have won a lottery.

'Yallah! Back to Jerusalem so I can tell them how it is.'

6

The tent as restaurant

The Begin government publicly admits no connection with the attempted murders. On the contrary, the Prime Minister expresses, as a Nobel Peace Prize winner must, his sympathy for the mayors and their families. There is to be an energetic hunt for the would-be assassins, and their trial is promised. And the sincerity of his regime will be tested by the speed with which it captures the culprits. For Mossad, the Israeli Intelligence Service, cannot plead Middle Eastern incompetence: its astuteness is a commonplace of newspaper articles and best-selling thrillers.

But the disclaimer and the sympathy repeat a pattern first cut during the period in which political Zionism grew from seedling to tree. In 1948, for instance, David Ben-Gurion sent his condolences to King Abdullah of Transjordan when the Stern Gang massacred the Arabs of Deir Yassin. (Similar condolences had been sent to the British Government after the explosion of the King David Hotel.) The peculiar feature of Deir Yassin, a village in the hilly western outskirts of Jerusalem, was its good relations with neighbouring Jews. But later Israeli governments have made no amends. Deir Yassin has forfeited even its name. As 'Kafr Sha'ul', it has been redesigned as a suburb for Russian immigrants.

But despite governmental ambiguities, the attempted murders have stunned Israeli liberals. Journalists from Tel Aviv were among the throng outside mayor Shaka's hospital door. I heard one long-haired youth express, and with evident conviction, his despair at what was being allowed to happen. Later, students and teachers from Israeli institutions drove up to offer their blood for the mayor of Ramallah. Karim Khalaf's loss of one foot and the laceration of his other leg are to prove a more protracted handicap than the amputation of Bassam's legs, since in the latter's case both cuts are clean. And back at the Palestine press office, where Hind pours out her story, an Israeli journalist regrets that the Prime Minister has fostered the mood in which this kind of terrorism can flourish. For Begin has openly supported Gush Emunim, an extremist group that states as its aim the rapid colonization of the West Bank. Other splinter movements on the right go further: they openly advocate the wholesale expulsion of all Palestinians across the Jordan. A settlement of such bigots has established itself near Nablus; it is a possible base for whatever group plotted the attacks, all of which involved Arab towns north of Jerusalem; others trace the operation back to Kiryat Arva, the settlement overlooking Hebron and established with the active approval of the Labour Party.

'And we know,' says the young Israeli, 'that Jewish liberals will be the next targets of our local fascists. Anyone who criticizes the policy of expansion will be seen as a traitor. Ultimately, they hate us more than the Arabs.'

But for the Palestinians the threat is concrete, not speculative; now, not in the future. The Begin who kissed his 'brother Sadat' reverts in old age to the Begin who planned the 1946 destruction of the King David Hotel and, two years later, the massacre of Deir Yassin. The attitude of Israeli extremists to the peace with Egypt is one of suspicion; it can be justified if it facilitates their purposes. By isolating Egypt from the rest of the Arabs, Begin has bought Israel a precious, but limited, period in which to clear Erez Israel of its remaining Arabs. Begin will replay the terrorist role in his adaptation of the Ben-Gurion manner. He poses as a cultivated, even courtly, man of principle who promises justice. This worked for Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir. While expelling Palestinians by the hundred thousand, Israel manages to seem

the injured party. It would have pleased and surprised Theodor Herzl that the terrorism of the 1940s never alienated Western sympathy from the Zionist principle except, briefly, in Britain. But with his admiration for all things German, Herzl could never have foreseen the fever-pitch that Hitler's mania attained against non-Germanic peoples, or his ability to command a state giving that mania physical shape.

The Stern Gang fought, not only in the aftermath of Hitler, but in the context of military occupation by a large British army. The army which had suppressed Palestinian resistance to Zionist immigration in the 1930s could have done the same against the Jewish terrorists of the post-war period. But only in theory. World sympathy for the Jews and its ignorance of the Palestinians made it impossible for a Britain exhausted by war and dependent on American aid to pursue a policy hateful to New York. But now that a Zionist army has replaced the British, the terrorists from Kiryat Arva and elsewhere perform against a disarmed population, with governmental sympathy and almost certainly technical assistance.

Is it possible to dismiss such talk as paranoia? In 1948 the Arabs constituted a majority even in that part of Palestine awarded to the Jewish State; Jews had secured by purchase less than seven per cent of mandated Palestine. My thoughts return, despite myself, to the girls dancing, the men clapping, by the sunlit wall. Celebrating what? The answer is pushed out of mind as too preposterous, evidence that delusions of persecution are infectious. It throbs back when, later in the week, Rabbi Meir Kahane informs the press:

'This week has been a holiday for me and all Israel. It seems that good and talented Jews took revenge for the blood of Jews that was spilled in Hebron.'

The rabbi was referring to a guerrilla attack on Jews who had established themselves in that all-Arab city. Western broadcasts at the time coloured the victims as 'theological students', evoking notions of bearded martyrs killed at their orisons. The settlers were, in fact, armed intruders in an Islamic city. One of them, Eli Hazeev, turned out, as the London *New Statesman* revealed in its issue of 6 June, to have been an American psychopath – a gentile – who had acquired an addiction to killing in Vietnam. He

emigrated to Israel, made a hasty conversion to Judaism under the name 'Hazeev', the wolf. The convert proved too much for the Israeli authorities. They were forced to put him under temporary arrest when he initiated a rampage against Arab houses. After he was killed in Hebron by unidentified gunmen, his friends remembered him saying, as though it were some profound truth: 'The only good Arab is a dead Arab.'

At the American Colony I take a shower and, in a moment's panic, cannot open the bathroom door. This problem resolves itself after some claustrophobic moments. But it symbolizes the anxiety which drives me from the hotel into the town. And my ears rebel at the brittle talk of tourists at the bar. Surveying Jerusalem from a charabanc's tinted glass, buying keepsakes, they seem not to notice the oppression of the Arabs.

I ask a taxi-driver where to eat and, as an Arab, he suggests The Tent, a restaurant at the summit of the Mount of Olives. This proves an ideal choice. A leafy courtyard leads to tables glassed in against breezes which even in summer can be fresh. Olives no longer abound but umbrella pines saturate the night with resin. The restaurant has the fresh cleanliness claimed for Palestine by its admirers. Cats prowl as they used to do in Egypt's Nile-side casinos before eucalyptus yielded to concrete, and dim, mosquito-buzzed globes were replaced by neon strips. Through the glass I see the double city: across the wadi that Jesus traversed on the night of his betrayal, the ramparts of East Jerusalem; behind them, the contemporary towers and cubes of the Israeli metropolis. Even these are softened by amber lighting.

An Israeli couple stand out among the Palestinian clientele. She has Gretchen plaits, his English is as Teutonic as Kissinger's, but they use it as a *lingua franca*. Suddenly, she leans over to kiss him – which is touching.

A little later I hear: 'With these people, if you show yourselves weak, they despise you. You must be strong.'

They stand up to pay and when they've gone the Arabs relax. They come to my table, inquisitive to know where I come from. They insist I try a local brandy. I do. It burns. As the dusk gathers, the Dome of the Rock is washed in light. An articulate Arab begins to assail the Arab League:

'Let me tell you about Egyptian nationalism. It is a corpse

because it was never alive. The Copts boast they are patriots. False, all of it. They repudiated Egypt when they adopted Christianity. They identified with the very Hebrews whom their ancestors drove out. After Islam, Egypt was ruled by foreigners. The only role the natives played, apart from working, was in religion. Egyptian nationalism was invented by Turks influenced by Europeans. Muhammad Ali's dynasty was like that of the Ptolemies two thousand years earlier: Macedonians who identified with Egypt because it was theirs. The pashas were imitators, and part of what they copied from London and Paris was nationalism. You have been to Cairo? Then you know the statue of the young pasha, Mustafa Kamil? "If I had not been born an Egyptian, I should have wanted to be." His sentiment echoes that other Mustafa: Ataturk. "What is better than to be a Turk?" Nasser gave Egyptian nationalism its chance. He increased its scope. He included the other Arabs. But he over-extended; he underestimated the enemy. His defeat has left Egypt where it was and what it was.'

With the salute of a seigneur, this survivor totters into the resinous night. One of the local youths pulls his chair close to mine.

'We don't trust him. We suspect he works for them. I heard what he was saying; more importantly, I heard what was behind it. All Egyptians are *not* traitors. A party came to visit Jerusalem, after Camp David. An organized tour. One of them, I don't know who he was, lagged behind the rest. Not unusual, as some Egyptians are very fat. "We are are Arabs, too," he said to me, "and we hate this charade. We are with you." Maybe he was telling the truth?' Then, lowering his voice, 'Can you keep a secret? An Israeli policeman comes here to relax. We are friends. Today he told me they have found big quantities of arms and explosives in the cellars of the Jewish quarter. To blow up the mosque!'

One figure who fascinates me is a very old man dressed like a European of the inter-war period or, for that matter, of the Edwardian period. Unlike my articulate theorist, he speaks to no one. He is sipping brandy when I arrive and sipping it still when I leave. He wears spats. His suit is pressed and his white collar high and stiff. He is like a character in a story by one of that generation

who made expeditions from over-furnished Cairo villas to bring back crates of books from Europe: Ouida's novels, works on racial theory, what now seems dislocated bric-à-brac but which made up, for those successors of the Wildean epoch, a view of life. Towfik al-Hakim, now on the Arab blacklist, wrote a novel about one such cultural importer: *Sparrow from the East*. Now the hawks are too numerous for gentle souls to parade in public.

By the morning, the young man's secret is on the local news. An unnamed French newspaper has reported that Rabbi Meir Kahane is under arrest for conspiring with two soldiers to blow up the Aqsa mosque. The explosion was planned for some three weeks back. It would have coincided with the government's announcement of the unification of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the Jewish State.

But Kahane enjoys the solicitude of the American president who has made concern for human rights his trademark. Like most visitors to new cities, I read whatever of the foreign press is available, *Newsweek*, too. The latest issue: 'Kahane, a US expatriate now living near Hebron, was jailed recently under an Israeli anti-terrorist law usually applied only to Arabs. The State Department, though opposed to Kahane's violent brand of politics, is studying the possibility that the arrest violated his human rights. If so, Washington may invoke a US–Israel treaty and demand that he be tried promptly or released.' With such emotions controlling Israel's financial spigot, terrorists, amateur or governmental, can cheerfully follow the violent path this rabbi has shown them.

7

The tent as home

My own country, I must concede, has had its critics, in the European Supreme Court and elsewhere, for its methods in Ulster. But it seems unthinkable that any twentieth-century British parliament would support a regime that sanctioned the destruction of thousands of Catholic houses or the bombing of southern Irish villages in reprisal for terrorist attacks. Yet the fear that one's house may be blown up is a daily anxiety of occupied Palestine. One acquaintance of mine has lost two houses. The charge justifying both demolitions was that his family had given food to guerrillas. As is well known, Arab tradition expected a nomad to entertain even his kinsman's assassin for three days and nights – let alone a tribal ally fighting for a tribal aim.

The problem of dynamited houses had been on Bassam al-Shaka's mind as he turned the car key. He had an appointment in the Nablus area with Felicia Langer that very morning to discuss such demolitions. He returned to the subject yesterday, when Felicia Langer visited the hospital.

It is morning and Hind's car is outside the hotel. What would I like to see?

The Western media have so often implied that the Israeli occupation is benign, I want to see for myself how house-

destruction affects its victims – or beneficiaries. To meet someone whose loss of a house affects him now; not some years ago, when the passage of time turns the wound to a remembered scar.

'Can I meet the owner of a bulldozed house?'

'On the West Bank, nothing easier. A woman and her children are this minute living in a tent outside the ruins of their house. Half an hour from here. On the Bethlehem road. In the heat.'

But before we go, Hind leaves me briefly, to inquire as to the state of Karim Khalaf. I wait in the shade of a tree in the hotel garden. As her car reverses from its parking space, a charabanc with tinted glass squeezes into it. My brief stay has already shown me that sun-reddened faces staring at ruins and nightmares through tinted glass are as frequent as soldiers. The group of pilgrims troops into the hotel. Their voices are undrownable but their faces can be screened. I open wide my copy of *The Jerusalem Post*. But I am, alas, an addict of words. I cannot use the paper simply as a veil. An item hits me.

Yesterday evening, as the sedated mayor spent his first leg-less night, the Egyptian ambassador had received hundreds of guests at his first official reception. *The Post* describes the occasion at the Tel Aviv embassy as one of the most lavish in recent years.

From the administrative point of view I can see Mr Mortada's dilemma . . . so many bottles of wine, so many trays of canapés. But his decision not to cancel the reception epitomizes Egypt's decision to stand aloof from what Arabs and Muslims see as a central struggle. The decision, the most recent in a sequence, requires a brand of courage. Sadat's flight to Israel had no obvious precedent, but his initiative has established him in America as a figure as popular as the Pope, and Washington shows its gratitude by undertaking to equip his army for possible future use against Arab or African enemies. But in Palestine, among the Palestinians, the sense of betrayal is palpable. Forced, year after year, to endure passivity, having their houses dynamited or bulldozed, their young men gaoled or killed, their land confiscated on one pretext or another, they now observe the diplomatic representative of the Arab State they most admired welcoming their tormentors over champagne, or Jaffa juice.

On the road to Bethlehem, soldiers stop all cars with Arab number-plates. Their drivers stand with their hands above their

heads. Israeli civilians wait undisturbed for buses to take them to their settlements. They all carry guns; most wear *yarmulkas*. We leave them briefly for bare, open country till at Dusheishah a scree on the left side of the road is covered with housing. It represents the drab climax of thirty years' evolution. On this unploughable site without trees, Palestinians from the villages between Latrun and the sea have, since 1948, turned tents first into shacks and then, with the help of saplings and the smiles of children, into homes. It takes a certain probing of the eye to see that this is a refugee camp, like the one outside Amman, and not an oddly sited, impoverished town.

A boy with clear bright eyes plays hopscotch by the road. He may be eight.

'The house they destroyed,' Hind cries in Arabic, 'where is it?'

The boy replies as if to the most normal question in the world.

'You've come too far, so reverse. You'll see a lane blocked with stones. You can climb over them but they are big.'

Sure enough, one of the lanes that ascends from the main road has been closed to cars and pedestrians by gigantic rocks which we clamber over, after parking the car on a strip of waste land. We pass a small shop and then, a short way up the slope, reach an empty area large and flat enough for a landing helicopter. It is unmistakable in the close-textured village. Behind it, next to a tree, is a small dusty tent. Stone, dry earth. Close to the tent, taking advantage of a neighbour's tree, a family are getting through the day. The woman who greets us with traditional formulae of welcome is probably twenty years younger than she looks. The bright colours of the Palestinian dress cascade in straight lines to her feet. She wears Hong Kong flipflops but no make-up. No school has taught her to disguise her feelings. She offers coffee; smiles; waves us to the solitary bench. She is the mother of six children. Her oldest, a girl, is fourteen; her oldest son is just twelve. Telling their ages releases a fervour of narration: fierce, angry, as emphatic as the declamation of an outraged victim in a Greek tragedy. Her story rises to the same brazen sky that Sophocles knew, to the same seemingly silent powers.

She points to what I had seen as a helipad or a tennis court. It was in fact the floor of three houses lived in by three families: her

own and those of two neighbours, Suliman Abdul Muhsin Zakaria and Abdul Azeem al-Haik. No less than twenty-four children had learnt to crawl on this earth in the shade of that now vanished ceiling. Her husband joins us. He is more broken even than his wife. He typifies the poor for whom Herzl envisaged 'drastic expropriation without compensation'. After he lost his home in the coastal plain, UNRWA employed him. With what he saved he built and furnished his house. He finally added a tiny shop on the corner, half underground, for the simple things neighbours would buy. Mulberries and apples grew round the house and, sitting in warm weather under trellised grape, he could almost imagine he was back within the sound of the sea.

Then on 4 May this year (1980), soldiers firing wildly into the air encompassed the area. Everyone was terrified. They watched while, defenceless, house after house was searched, doors forced open by boots.

The reason? A local child was reported to have hurled a stone at a passing jeep. After the search, everyone huddled indoors. Although it was day, no one dared to go out. Then night fell with Middle Eastern abruptness. In the darkness the soldiers could still be heard firing outside. By eleven, the children were exhausted. They slept in the darkness . . . only to be woken by the sudden rattling of the iron door. The lock snapped as troops pushed into the house.

'You have ten minutes, no more, to be out of the house.'

The mother re-lives the event, which is only a month past.

' "*Allahu Akbar*! God is Greatest," I cried. "You would do better to bring the house down over our heads and the heads of my children. We have been refugees since 1948. Where else have we to go?" '

Minutes of disbelief were wasted in protest. Neighbours less immediately threatened kept their heads and rushed to help salvage a blanket, a cooking pot, a child's coat. The military kept to a timetable whose execution required no submission to a judge or presentation of evidence and which allowed neither defence nor stay. When the ten minutes were up the soldiers resumed firing, this time at a lower angle. In a panic the family retreated under the tree just beyond their garden. The darkness was broken by powerful headlamps. Up the lane rumbled a bull-

dozer. In five minutes the slow acquisitions of thirty years were dispersed. Even medieval warfare had spared trees. But the bulldozers cut and uprooted every tree. The father claims that things in the house were stolen: sixty packages of cigarettes from the little shop; one thousand Israeli pounds (perhaps £6) and the stores which Palestinians customarily lay in for a year ahead. For the following ten days the troops enforced a curfew so inexorable that the UN were prevented from bringing water to the families stranded under the tree. The tent was then brought. Meanwhile, an older boy from one of the other two families was taken off, with two cousins, to the section of Bethlehem Prison known as the Slaughterhouse. He returned after a week's treatment.

No proof has been offered at any time that one of the twenty-four children now rendered homeless threw the offending stone.

All the mother wants is a house, not the Red Cross tent.

'Will they allow you to rebuild?'

'If they find no evidence against us.'

The cost of rebuilding and refurbishing the houses, she puts, after cogitation at some 20,000 dinars, the Jordanian currency.

How many houses have been destroyed like these three on the Bethlehem road? Certainty in such matters is hard to obtain. The Israeli authorities refuse to supply statistics. The figure supplied by the Palestinians, twenty-four thousand houses up to June 1980, may be inflated. What is not in dispute is that the practice violates the Geneva Convention relating to the rights and duties of an occupying power – a convention which Israel has signed.

Since, in Palestine as elsewhere, the poor outnumber the well-to-do, they, more than the affluent, have been savaged by the occupation. Their lack of education, their few contacts with influential people, render them vulnerable to lawyers' language and bureaucratic chicanery. But, to the occupiers, those Palestinians whose education makes them natural leaders seem the most dangerous, those who can do most to obstruct the colonization of what is left of Palestine. Particular efforts are taken to persuade or force the educated to migrate and not to return.

In the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, in Beit Sahour, the town which commemorates the shepherds who heard the Christmas angels, lives Yacoub Basil Shomali, once an officer in the

Jordanian army. Now a secondary schoolteacher, he lives in a spacious stone house. His wife is active in the local Arab women's organization while his two daughters are university graduates; one already teaches. His son Tarik, a boy of seventeen, is studying to be an engineer.

The family's middle-class routine was disrupted on the afternoon of 13 May when Shomali was summoned to Bethlehem.

'The Military Governor spoke to me coldly and without giving me the chance to reply. He did not ask me to sit down. "Your son has thrown a stone at a military vehicle. Accordingly, three sentences have been pronounced against you and go into effect as from this moment. There is no appeal. Your daughter, Ibtissam, teaches at a government school. She has worked her last day. Her dismissal is permanent. You personally are to be gaoled for a period of eighteen days, which may be extended. Your son is also to be gaoled." '

Shomali was made to stand, from the end of his interview with the Military Governor until eight that night. In a nearby room he could hear Tarik being given the slaughterhouse treatment. The soldiers told the boy that when they were done with him he would be incapable of fatherhood. And, in the event, the five hours they worked on him left him in such a state that the police officer in charge of the prison protested: 'I don't want him dying in my gaol. Take him to hospital and let him die there.' It must not be thought that the soldiers were behaving in an exceptional manner or in defiance of orders. The journalist Uri Avneri on 19 May sent a letter to fellow-members of the Knesset in which he quoted instructions to conscripts by a high-ranking officer in the Military Government: 'Anyone you catch outside, you first beat with clubs all over his body, except the head. Have no mercy, break all his bones! Give no explanations. First of all beat, and when you have finished you can explain why you have done so. If you catch a small child, order his whole family out, make them stand in a row, and beat the father in front of his children. Don't treat this beating as a privilege. It is a duty. They understand no other way.'

Two evenings later, Mrs Shomali was alone in her house when some two hundred and fifty soldiers enforced a curfew on the part of Beit Sahour where she lived, and then cut the telephones.

A group of them broke into the house and carried its contents outside to a waiting lorry. The house was sealed behind her, and the family, minus Tarik, were pushed into the same vehicle and driven off into the night. Around one thirty a.m., they were dumped in the darkness. Though they did not recognize where they were, the shadowy, broken walls belonged to the vast Jericho refugee camp, which had been bombed and emptied in 1967 and its occupants driven east across the Jordan. The Shomalis had no idea what was to happen to them. They had no candles, no torch. There was no water or electricity or the most rudimentary lavatory facilities. Animals made strange noises in the night. The stars glittered overhead, the roofs having long since fallen in. After a night of apprehension, the Military Governor called on them next day. They were now domiciled, he informed them, in Jericho. They would not set foot in their house again.

This case has aroused concern in Israel and the world outside. General Peled of the Israeli 'Peace Now' movement, as well as numerous Jewish teachers and students, visited the family. So did Arabs from all over the Occupied Territories. The family made their own protest by abstaining from all solid food.

The resulting furore caused the authorities to reverse their order, and I find the Shomalis back in their home. But all is not well: Tarik must undergo an operation on his urinary tract.

The question remains: what did the Israelis have in mind?

'Had you thrown a stone?' I asked Tarik. Few would be censorious if he had.

'A stone was thrown, but not by me. They simply rounded up everyone in the vicinity. When the checked my identity card, they recognized my father's name and picked on me as the culprit.'

This suggests the motivation of the Begin regime: a deliberate policy to deprive the Palestinians of leaders. The leaderless poor can then be dominated more effectively, or stampeded into exile. Other recent events such as the physical expulsion of the mayor of Halhul and the mayor and Mufti of Hebron and yesterday's murder attempt fit in with this plan.

Will it work? The Palestinians of 1980 have the highest ratio of university graduates to population of any Middle Eastern state,

including Israel. They have learnt the lessons of 1948. 'They will have to kill us here,' Hind is only one among many to say the same thing, 'for we will not leave.'

Yet the means of resistance are meagre. Political organizations are forbidden. Printed matter is censored. Passive protest is possible in theory. Mayors Elias Freij of Bethlehem and Rashid Shawa of Gaza, the former a commercially-minded moderate, the latter a conservative, make the gesture of resigning. Anything more radical brings swift reprisals. If Palestinians begin to demonstrate in public, the Israelis are soon on the spot. The methods already quoted are used to subdue the young. Their elders can, briefly, shut their shops. They have done this now in Jerusalem and the other West Bank cities. The BBC – whose Jerusalem representative is the Brooklyn-born Michael Elkins – announces somewhat prematurely that the strike has failed. In fact, as I see for myself, it succeeds all the first day: the shops in Sharia Salahaddin are shuttered. Yet occupiers can usually abort a strike, if they are ruthless. For they know where the strikers are vulnerable. In places little visited by tourists or observed by pressmen, they use blow-torches and sledgehammers. Jerusalem is in the public eye and here, for the first time, they try out a technique which proves effective. Hundreds of shopkeepers are called from their beds in the small hours and are driven to a prison in West Jerusalem. There they are handed papers declaring their readiness to re-open their shops. They are ordered to sign; they obey, but are still not sent home. They are held at the prison until normal business hours when police guards drive them to their shops to witness their compliance. Should they refuse to obey, their shops will be permanently closed.

Ibrahim, a Palestinian journalist, agrees that such limited protests are almost self-defeating.

'The harsh fact is, we are disarmed and they are armed. They pass the laws. We can only defy. They order us to open up: we briefly let down our shutters. This manifests, to those who care, the oppression and daily harassment under which we live. It amplifies our protest. Yet, on one level, all such gestures are futile. Our demonstrations are smashed. Our resignations are refused. Our strikes are defeated by a mixture of threats and economic pressure. But we do show our refusal of a *fait accompli*

and our determination to achieve our goals.' He pauses. 'The Arabs? If our Arab brothers would listen, we could point out effective measures within their scope; these are not even violent. Such measures could include, after every outrage against Palestinians under occupation, a total shut-down of oil production for a period to be announced in advance. Funds should be withdrawn from those states which show their hostility by vetoing UN resolutions that uphold our cause. The Arabs would in any case be wiser not to keep their money in such countries. Iran's recent experience shows how vulnerable such national funds are when deposited in countries which can freeze or expropriate them on political pretexts. In helping us, the Arabs would be helping themselves. Again, they should give greater encouragement to resistance inside the territories. But at this point I have to affirm a shameful truth – our morale here on the West Bank is much higher than in most Arab states.'

'How do you explain that?'

That Ibrahim's assertion is a fact I take seriously. The morale in the Arab country I know best, Egypt, is as buoyant as a punctured tyre.

'We live in a state of permanent challenge. We cannot relax even if we wanted to, and this means that challenge comes to us daily. Like your newspapers, most Arab capitals simply watch what happens here as the world once watched Vietnam. You have a radio at the hotel? Then you'll have heard that Cairo has protested at the attempt on the three mayors. The words of the protest would not have disgraced some remote Buddhist state! Perhaps Siam?'

8

A city vanishes

Oppressed by injustice I cannot relieve, wearied by arguments that I accept but whose intricate detail I must hear for the umpteenth time, I welcome nightfall. It gives me the excuse to return, alone, to the Mount of Olives.

This outcrop of rocks is, in name at least, woven into Western familiarity. Its Islamic equivalent might be Arafat, the cone-shaped umbilicus of the treeless plain outside Mecca where, every year, the pilgrims mass. Islam is a congregational religion, traditionally making no separation between mosque and state. The Mount of Olives, a place of retreat, of concealing trees, echoes the difference between the mysterious Jesus and the public Muhammad. Tonight the Mount commands a new mystery.

I saunter through the courtyard of The Tent with its shrubs and cats, expecting to see the composite city spread out below and across from the glassed-in terrace. But there has been a startling change. The view is composite no longer. A giant sponge has deleted Israeli Jerusalem, part Bratislava, part Brooklyn. The buildings that incarnate Herzlian modernity have disappeared like the palaces in Prospero's magic. I can see, more brilliantly than last night, the great platform dominated by the Aqsa mosque and the Dome of the Rock. I can see the Old City's

floodlit ramparts. But only after staring for long minutes can I dimly discern the faded side of the Jerusalem Hilton. The King David Hotel where President Sadat's party slept among the ghosts of the Stern Gang's victims is a lightless shadow. A problem has been dissolved by an absence of illumination. It is a perilous parable, this sense of brief relief. It is how all of us who verbalize escape a reality which pains or oppresses.

The two brothers who serve the tables gaze west, enthralled.

'Did you listen to the Monte Carlo news?'

'At seven-thirty? No.'

'A power cut in their section. Usually when that happens the Israelis blame it on too much air-conditioning. But today's not hot. Only thirty degrees. We wonder.'

It is just after eight p.m. and the Old City twinkles against a velvet darkness. Yet tension is as omnipresent as the scent of resin. In this country people listen to news bulletins on the hour; Jews and Arabs. Speculation drifts through this Arab eating-place.

Have guerrillas hit a power-line?

Are 'they' planning something against 'us'?

Power cuts have masked military preparations in the past.

Then hopes and fears evaporate with the Jewish city's reappearance: large, banal and, if not exactly ablaze with lights (for Israel is short of energy), certainly as visible as the backdrop in a musical.

Davan, a trade-union paper, reports – in its issue of 2 June – that the Military Government has confiscated 4,000 *dunums*, or around a thousand acres, from the Arab village of Yatta in the Hebron district. For security reasons.

Rabbi Kahane's plans for the Aqsa mosque, the yet wilder zealots who dream of rebuilding a Temple for the sacrifice of lambs at matins and vespers, these are the froth on serious intentions. The attempts on the lives of the three mayors from the West Bank were the second stage in a process which began, earlier this year, with the expulsion of two mayors from the southern sector of the West Bank: Muhammad Milhem from Halhul and Fahd Qawasma from Hebron.

How are their families – and their towns – faring in their

absence? Hind drives me to see for myself. The landscape south of Bethlehem is sterner, drier, barer, than the gentle hills that roll to Nablus. But, even here, stone walls pack in vineyards whose green seems untarnished. Here, too, the Palestinian villages spring out of the earth, repeating the contrast with the settlements that seem so foreign and imposed.

The Milhem house at Halhul is solid, stone, middle-class by western standards. Clamorous children call their mother, Um Ala. Her calm serenity has not been shaken by her experiences. She speaks factually, without rhetoric, as she tells me how things happened. At one in the morning, soldiers arrived to arrest her husband. They told her that Muhammad was wanted for a short chat with the Military Governor. They would then bring him back.

Instead, he and Qawasma and the Mufti of Hebron were bound, their heads covered with hoods, and flown by helicopter to Metulla, the most northerly town in Israel, where they were pushed across the Lebanese border. Their luck was in. Nigerian soldiers of the UN enabled them to reach Beirut and the start of a world trip which has done much to publicize the Palestinian cause.

As for their families, they were left without water, electricity or the use of their telephone. In their agonizing uncertainty, they were helped by the pertinacious tenacity of Felicia Langer, the Israeli Communist lawyer, who, at Nablus, was helping the mayor concerning bulldozed houses. She at once drove over from Tel Aviv to help. And, as with the Shomali family, Palestinians came like pilgrims from all over the country. The solidarity shown by this small oppressed people, almost sealed off from outside support, seems only to be strengthened by its recurrent miseries.

The policy to which these miseries are paving-stones is symbolized by a huddle of high stone towers on a bare hilltop overlooking Hebron. As illegal settlements go, Kiryat Arva is a veteran, having been authorized by Israel's Labour Government after the 1967 war. Its buildings stand as menacing as missiles. Like other such settlements, it is built on expropriated or – in simple English – stolen land. The settlers neither pay for the land nor, by any standard of international law, own it. Its sinister

detachment from the scenery is emphasized by its private access road, guarded and blocked by inspection points. I have met journalists and a photographer who were turned away. But Hind swerves off the main road and follows the private way to the guarded entrance. Her Hebrew – and perhaps her hair, which has been changed to auburn – gets us past. Once inside, we drive round and round the fortress colony. Starkly arrogant when viewed from afar, the towers seem drearily vacuous when one is among them. It is hard to imagine human beings living here and performing everyday functions. We do see one pregnant settler flopping across the road to a grocer while a second pushes a pram. But, for the most part, we see bearded men in skullcaps with guns moving as if on manoeuvres. The settlement is without soul and, even though the high buildings are of the local stone, they are shoddily finished: bleak iron shutters, iron fittings to the defensible doors. The windows, like those in the tenements that ring Jerusalem, are slits for guns, not for pots of flowers. Kiryat Arva cannot conceivably fertilize the desert, the theme of so much Israeli government propaganda. It forms instead a mustering point for soldiers. It would act as headquarters if it were thought propitious to do to Hebron what was done in 1948 to Jaffa and Lydda. Gush Emunim activists, an American informant tells me, argue: 'Why create new towns or clear new fields, when we can take over Arab towns, do them up, and use their fields?' The government has refused to answer a liberal Knesset member who challenged Begin to confirm or deny that contingency plans exist for the eviction of 800,000 Palestinians in a future war. And the members of Rabbi Kahane's group, Kach, affirm the desirability of such measures. In his more tolerant youth, Kahane advocated the enforced exile of all Palestinians and the compulsory purchase of their land. He has now simplified his programme to one of expulsion and plunder. The change of mood may have been fostered by Egypt's isolation and an Israeli conviction that the other Arab states will go on squabbling to the edge of doom.

These thoughts jolt me as we descend a half-made track into Arab Hebron. Whether the policies of Kach work will not depend on foreigners but on the Arabs; Kiryat Arva's challenge is addressed to them. The settlements serve, less aesthetically,

the same purpose as the massive castles with which, for more than a century, the Crusaders held down the Levant. But they derive from an ethnocentric bigotry which makes the cruellest Crusader seem a genial universalist.

Hebron is a tangled city; its streets and lanes are as hard to decipher as when Joseph and Mary slept here on their flight into Egypt. Because Hind and I arrive from the direction of the Zionist settlement, and because the car's number-plate is Israeli, children jeer at us in Hebrew as we probe our way through the dusty maze. Hind leans from the window, wearing her mother-of-pearl brooch inscribed with *Falistin* in Arabic letters, and shouts back:

'We are Palestinians! Which way to the Ibrahimi mosque?' She did not conceal her brooch even when we were inside Kiryat Arva; a red and white keffiyeh was slung over her seat.

The Ibrahimi mosque – or Haram – is one of Islam's sacred places. A huge structure, built partly by the Crusaders and partly by the Arabs, it entombs, if you believe such traditions, Abraham, Joseph and other patriarchs and their wives. Islam includes these figures in the chain of monotheistic witnesses which culminates in the last of the prophets, Muhammad. But a placard in the street just below the strong stark mosque advertises the Israeli Settlers' Centre. Others signal the first *yeshiva*, or Jewish religious school, to be re-established in Hebron.

We climb the slope to the mosque and I prepare to remove my shoes. It is five p.m.

An Israeli police officer stands by the portal. 'This is a synagogue and there is no need to take off your shoes. But we close at five. In fact, now.'

Hind expostulates: she has come from Jerusalem, I from as far as London, to see the tomb.

The officer relents. 'Five minutes only, mind!'

He hands me a *yarmulka* of cheap black plastic. I carry it in my hand like a dead fish. Inside, a Muslim guide shows us round, knowing better than to comment. As I stand at the tomb of Abraham, I hear again the words Jesus addressed to the Jews of his day: 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do as Abraham did . . .' But at once I think of Felicia Langer and the

donors of blood at Ramallah. I remember what Muhammad Milhem's wife said two hours ago: 'We want to drive no one into the sea – only to live in peace and for them to live in peace.'

The mayor of Hebron, Milhem's companion in the helicopter. lived on the outskirts of the town. There is time to call before we get back to Jerusalem. A *souq* spreads below the mosque and in it stands an ugly group: olive-drab and armed. In their centre stands a female with a khaki cap plonked on bedraggled blonde tresses, khaki trousers hardly meeting over her stomach and a face I should not like to find scrutinizing me if I wore a keffiyeh and was late for curfew. She points her squat automatic at bare-legged children.

The mayor's wife is to tell me a story that confirms this distrust. During the curfew which followed the guerrilla action against the settlers, a greybeard was called to the governorate and there searched.

'I am seventy,' he protested.

To his relief he was laconically told, 'Then go off home.'

'But how? There is a curfew. Please give me a paper.'

'O.K. I'll give you a paper.'

On a scrap of paper the officer scribbled words which the old man could not understand. 'Whoever apprehends this old fool, give him a good beating.' An Israeli found him being almost savaged to death and escorted him home. To the credit of Israeli journalists, many such stories come to public notice through press reports.

During the same period of tension after the mayor's expulsion, thousands of boys were detained by the security forces. (Hebron's population is approximately 60,000 with a high percentage under twenty.) The boys were frog-marched under rifle-butt up to Kiryat Arva and there made to clean up the settlers' garbage. Meanwhile, in Hebron, soldiers dragged the people's annual stores into the streets. Rice, sugar and flour were piled into heaps and covered with paraffin. Their owners were told: 'Go ahead. Eat!'

The Qawasmas' one son narrowly escaped treatment at 'the slaughterhouse'. His crime was to open the front door during the curfew. The door gave on to the garden, not the street. Fed up with four days of incarceration, he was still some twenty yards

from the main road. Soldiers rushed the house, smashing the glass panels in the front door (as I saw for myself), and would have got the boy, had not the women of the household blocked the stairway.

As we left the town of the patriarchs, Hind pointed out a factory. At its entrance a large patch of ground was covered with broken glass. 'The Qawasma boy was luckier than the young workers at this glass factory. They were taken off their bus and rolled in broken glass after being beaten senseless.

'To be a Palestinian,' she added, 'you have to suffer.'

9

The road to Gaza

Two slabs of Palestine, linked by no extra-territorial highway, separated from each other by an expropriated plain, still have the overwhelmingly Arab population which the Crusaders encountered in the eleventh century, which David Roberts depicted in the nineteenth, and which, as late as 1929, made Vincent Sheean, an American writer, exclaim that Jerusalem was 'as Arab as Cairo, or Baghdad, and the Zionist Jews [that is, the modern Jews] were as foreign to it as I myself'.

The bulge of the West Bank and the oblong Gaza Strip owe their dimensions to accidents beyond Palestinian control. When the 1949 Armistice was signed, the central uplands, the agricultural hinterland of Jenin in the north, of Nablus and Jerusalem in the centre and of Hebron in the south, were still held by King Abdullah of Transjordan's Arab Legion under its British commander, Glubb Pasha. Instead, however, of allowing this area to form the nucleus of the Arab State recommended by the 1947 Partition Plan, Abdullah incorporated it into his own kingdom, which he renamed Jordan to symbolize its enlargement.

At the same time the Egyptian army was under the nominal command of Farouk, the slothful grandson of the Khedive who had opened the Suez Canal in 1869. This Egyptian force, employed by the British to guard bridges and Italian prisoners,

managed, despite somnolent leadership and unreliable arms, to hold roughly half the coastal area which the Partition Plan had included in the Arab State. The Strip, engorged with refugees, was to be directly administered by Egypt (with a short Israeli interregnum at the time of the Suez War of 1956) until 1967. The army which had secured it was to return to a gullible Cairo decked with triumphal palms. One major, Gamal Abdul Nasser, had distinguished himself in the defence of a desert outpost, Faloujah, and was to use his reputation and his sense of disillusion to wrest power from Farouk and his cronies in 1952.

The Gaza Strip and the West Bank form the territorial base which those exponents of autonomy envisage as a possible focus for Palestinian nationhood. If the area is meagre, the concepts of autonomy currently canvassed are meaner. Autonomy in its everyday sense could be reconciled with the notion of the Arab State of Palestine which the 1947 Partition Plan – a plan weighted in Israel's favour – saw as enjoying equality of status with a Jewish State. But the model proposed at Camp David – and thus endorsed by Sadat's Egypt and the Israel which occupies the lands in dispute – offers its inhabitants (if the offer is even intended seriously) less than the South African Bantustan of Transkei offers *its* citizens. In fact, if the Camp David version of autonomy is ever applied, the result will be closer to a Red Indian reservation than a Bantustan. The total area involved – less than twenty per cent of Palestine – is considerably less than half what the Partition Plan awarded the Arabs; and this award was considered so unfair that Great Britain abstained in the vote, while India, the one considerable Afro-Asian power then in the United Nations (and herself a recent victim of partition) proposed a totally different solution. The Plan, nonetheless, was gerrymandered through the General Assembly by American pressure. But Israel secured even more. Apart from a general whittling-down of the Gaza area and the West Bank, Palestinians lost western Galilee to Israeli 'freedom-fighters', even before the British evacuated Haifa in May 1948. This meant that Acre and Nazareth would be progressively throttled by surrounding Zionist settlement.

To reach Gaza and what remains of the Arab coastline, we take

the road which twists round the monastery of Latrun before crossing the plain. Until 1967, the Jordanians controlled this road as far as Latrun. The Israeli highways to the north have the ruthless contours of Los Angeles. By contrast, this road retains a rural character. But it has been systematically overlaid with Jewish details. Arabic is officially Israel's second language. But the road signs in Israel proper are in Hebrew and English. The exceptions are cautionary notices, such as SLOW DOWN! which are in Arabic. In Israel improper – that is, in the territories seized in 1967 and, despite Resolution 242, still unrelinquished – signs are in the three languages. But even there, in the area supposedly reserved for Palestinian nationhood, Hebrew comes first.

For the drive to Gaza, Hind has produced an ideal guide. Muhammad Batrani is known in Palestinian circles as a poet; he is employed as an accountant in the Arab Electricity Company, which supplies electricity to East Jerusalem and the West Bank and is the last major enterprise still under Palestinian control. (Zionist attempts to take it over have not yet succeeded, thanks, in part, to a limited objectivity by Israel's Supreme Court.) Muhammad was born in Esdoud. My Baedeker describes Esdoud as an Arab village of 5,000 souls. Its mosques and houses incorporated shafts of columns, inscribed stones, from its distant past. It had been one of the five Philistine cities which dominated the southern coastline, just as the Phoenician cities had dominated the northern. Esdoud no longer appears in guide-books. It has become the new port of Ashdod; its minarets have been replaced, as I can see, by the chimneys of a cement works.

I have read none of Muhammad's poetry but he shows the poet's ability to retain visual details. As we descend from Jerusalem to the plain, he points out site after sad site. We do not enter Kafr Shaul, the renamed, reconstructed Deir Yassin. 'That might be dangerous. Anyway, for Palestinians,' he reflects. 'What a lesson in cynicism for its inhabitants! They were scolded by hot-heads from other villages for being too friendly to the Jews who lived nearby. But Zionism has its own wild logic. If the villagers of Deir Yassin, who got on well with Jews, could be panicked into leaving, what other villagers would stay where they were?'

Talk of Deir Yassin still haunts conversation with Arabs and, I

am to discover, Jews as well. In the same way, Czechs cannot forget Lidice (where half as many, all male, died in revenge for the killing of Heydrich) and Israelis revert to Auschwitz. The facts are bleak. On 10 April 1948, the Red Cross representative in Jerusalem, Jacques de Reynier, was alerted to a major outrage. Driving out to Deir Yassin, he discovered the corpses of two hundred and fifty-four villagers, largely women and children. They had been thrown down the village wells and, when these were filled, scattered nearby. As Muhammad argues, it was no random atrocity. Deir Yassin played a role in Zionist strategy. How else could the Arabs speedily be cleared from the territory awarded to the Jews by the Partition Plan? For even there, the Arabs constituted a majority.

The strategy worked. By mid-May, in desperate disobedience of Arab Higher Command orders to remain where they were, 400,000 Arabs had fled. Begin was to publish a self-congratulatory account of the massacre in *The Story of the Irgun* in 1951. He had probaby expected to be remembered by history as an inspirer of this *realpolitik*; he can hardly have imagined that the gentile world would crown his career with a Nobel Peace Prize.

Muhammad teaches me how to conjure, from vegetation designed to lay them, the ghosts of villages that haunt the road to the sea.

'You can sniff their ghosts several ways. Usually the Israelis have planted quick-growing gum-trees over their ruins. Eucalyptus grows fast and needs little water. But since insects cannot thrive in a eucalyptus grove, no birds sing. But if you peer among the leafy silence, you can pick out the fragments of a house or a mosque. The line of the road is another indication. When there is a sudden inexplicable bend, here a street once bustled with the activities of a village *souq*, or there a coffee-shop hummed with local gossip.'

Or a line of long-standing cypresses, grown when the future seemed as protracted as the past, makes the same revelation.

'You see that single palm? It shaded the front garden of my best friend's house. The house has vanished but the palm awaits our return.'

People have been evicted in other countries. One nineteenth-

century Irish landowner was proud of a machine for knocking down the cabins of peasants. Two ox-carts had stretched between them a giant chain which cleared the estate. Scottish landlords used economic pressure to clear the moors for grouse. In all such cases, the result is a lifeless landscape. Despite all I have heard of land-reclamation, of settlement, I find the same thing here.

Between the ridge of Latrun and the Gaza dunes, we cross a swathe of Israel and see nobody at work. We do see Israelis, but they are soldiers, male and female, waiting for lifts; others guard their tanks in the shade of trees. Israel's clearances are more extreme, more brutal, than those in Ireland or Scotland. An alien faith, an alien script, an alien way of life has tried to delete fourteen centuries of Arab culture. In its haste, or in its lack of inner certainty, it has introduced what is undeniably shoddy and probably evanescent. A typical Israeli village: there is no such thing. Instead, the plain is interspersed with clusters of buildings. Differing only in size and the quick materials they employ, they resemble the caravan parks which cluster round the US forces' bases in East Anglia.

To anyone affected by Zionist propaganda – which means anyone who has failed to avoid the cinema or television – the journey abounds in surprises. There are no palpable signs of a people returned to a cherished homeland. Flapping polythene; broiler-chicken farms; encampments: not roofed farmsteads or any equivalent of the Mediterranean village, of that sunlit unity which Albert Camus believed he had discovered in the Algeria of his youth. A persistent myth is that Palestine was a desert turned by Israeli know-how into fertile fields. This was never true of the area of Palestine which produces Israel's agricultural exports. The first, 'Rothschild', settlers, who came to Palestine were in grave danger of perishing from hunger, so little did they know of agriculture. The orange groves of Jaffa were planted by Arabs. When Herzl visited Palestine in 1898, he left, afraid that the Ottomans might arrest him, on the *Dundee*. This small British freighter was engaged in shipping Arab oranges to Egypt. Palestine's Lebanese neighbour offers a more spectacular instance of the transformation of barren soil. Photographs preserved at 'Ain 'Anoub – a Druze village above Beirut where

some English eccentrics established a school – show the surrounding countryside in the late Ottoman period: bare, denuded. By the 1960s, the same hills had become a fertile jungle of olives, apricots and grapes. No such miracle was needed on the land between Latrun and Gaza. Muhammad continually exclaims on a reverse transformation: the fields which in his youth were alive with people, as densely worked as the Nile delta, now lack the vitality of Arab rural life and are badly kept. A large field of potentially rich red soil, guarded by cypresses, grows one badly weeded row of aubergines.

In colonial times, the British littered this area with the barbed wire and blancoed stones of military camps. In what Churchill was wont to call 'blood and treasure', Palestine was to represent a loss to Britain. But its potential military role attracted the collective mind of the Imperial Cabinet when, in 1917, it allowed Balfour to issue the declaration which goes by his name. (Its terms were, in fact, worked out by Zionists in London and New York.) The chain of camps and airfields which the Mandate entitled Britain to construct formed a possible substitute for the Canal Zone in Egypt. Muhammad worked as a boy in several of these places. He tells me the name and function of each British camp: there is an engineering depot, there an underground Eldorado of explosives, somewhere else a laundry. The Israelis have maintained and expanded these military sites. The visitor gets the impression that war is the country's unifying factor.

We can suddenly smell the sea. Then, behind wire, we see groves of citrus masking dunes with green. Muhammad expounds. They are still worked by the very Arabs who once owned them. Despite a sense of shame expressed in recent Palestinian writing, the men have no other choice: to loll at home with the children, or work for the Jews. Gaza can employ only a handful out of its civilian population. So labourers from the congested Strip are taken in buses to work on the masters' land, and so deep is their attachment to the land that they choose to work in the very groves they formerly owned and loved.

The expulsion of the Egyptians in 1967 left the Strip a reservoir of cheap labour for Israel. But this gain was secured at a price – the idealistic side of Zionism. Many Jewish pioneers had believed, under the influence of nineteenth-century socialism or

the humanism of Tolstoy, that urban Jews, forced into activities that the world knew as usurious, could achieve redemption through working the land. They agreed with the thesis of the young Herzl that the Jews were the ring-finger of humanity, although they were interested less in the inner pressure of the Jewish past than in the external pressure of gentile society. This had distorted the Jewish character by closing all but commercial outlets to Jewish talent; in particular, Jews were long forbidden to own land or to work in agriculture. Aaron Gordon, one such Zionist, taught that Jews should labour as brothers and equals alongside the Arabs, only competing in who could serve best. One such high-minded group had formed a kibbutz just north of Gaza. Its recollection is a bright picture from Muhammad's childhood. Arabs and Jews exchanged visits at their respective feasts; doctors from the kibbutz treated ailing Arabs.

The kibbutz has gone and, with it, its idealistic spirit. Even at the best of times, idealists were probably as outnumbered in the settler community as Albert Camus and his friends were outnumbered in French Algeria. For the Jewish Agency's strict ban on the use of Arab labour on Jewish-owned land symbolized an intended apartheid. When the British had begun forming their administration in the 1920s, they were surprised that it was the Jews, not the allegedly bigoted Arabs, who demanded that the two communities should be educated separately.

The emergence of independent Israel as a military power has ironically sapped both versions of the Zionist ideal, the universalistic and the exclusive. Because young Jews are needed to police the Occupied Territories (in a strategy which apparently can command uncritical American support), Palestinians are employed in large numbers as labourers on the land or in the construction industry. This entirely contravenes the teaching and practice of Zionist pioneers. And as the two communities are unequal, the supplanters and the supplanted, it poses moral problems for the Palestinians. They can withhold their labour, stay at home and starve, or they can receive a wage for building the Zionist economy. This moral conundrum has inspired a major novel by a young woman writer from Nablus.*

**Chronique du figuier barbare*, Sahar Khalifa: Gallimard, 1978.

Whatever the dilemmas posed for the Palestinians, the collapse of the Jewish vision of redemption through toil is evident. The myth of the kibbutz is sustained to attract gentiles from America and Western Europe: their voluntary labour represents an important subsidy. But less than four per cent of the population inhabits such collective settlements. Factors that have helped to puncture the ideal include the tendency for men in power to exploit others when they can; the subsidies from America; the reparations from Germany: all these have encouraged Israelis to expect a standard of living which the pioneers would hardly have envisaged or approved – a standard which Palestine itself could hardly support. An ironic factor is the decay of the currency. Ever since the Basel Conference in 1897, Herzl and his disciples assumed that their people would possess financial omnipotence. He used this certainty as a clinching argument in his search for gentile support. Some potentates were warned that Jewish money would break them if they opposed his will; others were lured by suggestions of what Jewish gold could do if applied to their interests. The victories of the 1940s and 1950s were not effected by money alone. Those escaping the nightmare of Hitler's Europe found reserves of energy in their search for a home, while their sufferings (admittedly more publicized than those of other victims) won them a sympathy in which excesses were overlooked. Yet the financial resources of those whom Ben-Gurion scorned in private as 'dollar Zionists' – American Jews who had prospered in the war, who refused to 'ascend' to Israel themselves but let their consciences add zeros to their cheques – were in cruel contrast to the poverty of the Arabs. No opportunist looked to Libyans or Kuwaitis in 1948.

Since then, in one of the whirligigs of history, the situation has totally changed. Israel's failure to conclude a reasonable peace from the strength of her 1967 triumph forced the Egyptians under Nasser to devise a plan which Sadat was to execute, to recover control of the Canal. The fighting of 1973 – when for the first time the Arabs scored successes against the settler state – induced the other Arabs to use an economic weapon recently freed from foreign control. Even in 1973–4, they used their weapon with hesitation and, under pressure from Sadat (acting according to his beliefs or commitments to his masters, only

history will reveal), stopped their boycott before it had secured even the application of United Nations' Resolution 242. Indeed, it is arguable that so far their reserves of oil and capital have benefited the American economy more than their own. Yet the fear of the weapon's more effective use, of its ability to change Western attitudes, explains why American Zionists advocate policies designed to wrest the oil wells from Arab control and, with the wells, the source of their money. In 1948 the Israeli (or Palestinian) pound stood eye to eye with the Jordanian dinar and the Egyptian guinea. It is now worth less than a 1981 piastre and around three Jordanian milliemes. A single pound can buy literally nothing. It has in fact recently been replaced by the shekel, worth ten old pounds. But the new shekel is crumbling too. My rooms at the YMCA and at the American Colony are quoted in dollars. In Jerusalem, a non-Israeli employee of Barclay's Bank told me:

'The bitter truth is, this country is bankrupt. Its currency has none of the normal backing, whether in gold, currencies or shares. If the US turned off the tap – which, ironically, flows with Arab money invested and duly 'laundered' in the States to avoid identification – the country would collapse the same day.'

Israeli hyper-inflation results from the excessive ambitions of the Zionist experiment. Palestine, it is easy to observe, is a country richer in beauty than in natural resources. It has no oil, coal or water power to generate energy. Phosphates from the Dead Sea, which it shares with Jordan, are its one important mineral resource. Carefully developed, Palestine could enjoy the agricultural prosperity which Denmark has patiently constructed in Northern Europe. It could never, of itself, support the superstructure of a major military power. Yet the Israeli air force has been said to rival the air power of Britain and France combined. It is true that the armaments of this country of less than three millions are largely paid for, as well as provided, by the United States. As are the millions of dollars which the Israelis are currently spending on settlement of the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Gaza. But whatever the money's source, the inflationary effect is the same. And it gets steadily worse. America is donating billions of dollars for the construction and equipment of bases in the Negev to replace those Israel is to

return to Egypt by the spring of 1982. This, too, will accelerate the deterioration of the local currency.

Two characteristics of modern Israel – its inflation, its slide into a plantation economy – have always been disastrous to agriculture. Livy, writing as early as the reign of Augustus, attributed an already palpable decadence to the replacement of peasant-farms by *latifundia*, great collectives worked by slaves. By the Byzantine period, the sturdy coinage of the early Caesars had been replaced by paper-thin coins, and the lands of Gaul and Italy were ready to change hands. A prosperous agriculture depends on comparatively small profit-margins; such margins are only tolerable in societies where the currency is stable. Great Britain was an example. Its gold sovereign held its value for over a century, and even as late as the years immediately after the Second World War, the government could launch a loan yielding under three per cent. In situations of hyper-inflation, the shrewd and the greedy congregate where the black market, in its widest sense, can produce the necessary gains to keep pace with inflation and produce a profit: in the Israeli context, in Tel Aviv and Haifa.

Another, more permanent factor limiting the large-scale expansion of agriculture is lack of water. Palestine has no rivers to rival Egypt's Nile or the Tigris and Euphrates that water Syria and Iraq. The sole stream which rises and flows inside Israel's borders is the Yarkon, long since absorbed by agriculture and industry. The country has a higher rainfall than coastal Egypt but far less than the French *Midi* or Spain's plateau. Subsoil water pumped from beneath the plain has been used for an intensive cash-crop system. But the effects are sinister. The salt sea has infiltrated what geologists call the aquifers, and the water is more brackish than in 1948. When Israeli leaders talk of obtaining access to new water supplies, they have serious measures in mind. The late Levi Eshkol (the prime minister responsible for the seizure of the West Bank) demanded that Lebanon's Litani River should be shared with its neighbours – this despite Lebanese schemes to use the water for its own arid south. A comparatively short canal could divert all or part of the Litani into the headwaters of the River Jordan system. But to do this would require an extension of the Israeli empire. This in turn

would divert more Jewish manpower into the army. Israel's interest in – or prompting of – President Sadat's offer to divert water from the Nile to the Negev is therefore keen. If the obliging Egyptian would also send peasants to work Israeli's *latifundia*, this would make Palestinian labour less important. The expulsion of the Palestinians would no longer spell economic disaster and it is doubtful if men like Rabbi Kahane would be troubled by the moral disadvantages of so final a solution. Snags nevertheless remain.

Herzl too tried to obtain a promise of Nile water nearly eighty years ago. In so doing, he ruined any hopes of obtaining consent for a Jewish municipality in Sinai. The Ottomans (as nominal sovereigns) saw the dangers of allowing the establishment of an alien entity in a key position; the British (as *de factor* rulers) saw the political capital that could be made by those opposing their rule; while the Egyptian peasantry, rich and poor, Muslim and Copt, attached to the waters of the Nile a significance almost religious in its intensity. Today, most of those who know Egypt predict that this particular promise will never be made good. And those Egyptians who want to emigrate would pursue the riyal or dinar, not the dying shekel.

10

Gaza

I do not note down the gist of our conversation – the small red car rushing in June heat towards the earth's most congested area – for any claim to inherent truth or light it may throw on the future. But it does reflect an aspect of Palestinian existence which is probably a general result of putting a people under pressure. The Palestinians, before the Zionist invasion, were certainly more open to the world than the tribesmen of the Arabian interior. Even so, they were remoter from Europe than Athenians or Smyrniotes, while wearing the same turbans and, often, baggy trousers. David Roberts portrays them as stately figures by wells or giant rocks. Their recreation was the hubble-bubble, their solace a chain of beads which they would run through their fingers. A century of bitter challenge has made them more articulate and more alert than any other nation in the Middle East except, perhaps, their supplanters. But some Israelis admit that the zeal that gave them their pioneering impetus has passed to the Palestinians.

This energetic reaction to adversity has been remarked by the world at large as regards Palestinians in exile. In somewhat similar conditions of adversity around the turn of the century, Egypt too produced its own vivid thinkers and reforming theologians; some brilliant cartoonists and rhetorical poets;

Turko-Circassian bluestockings conducted salons and attended lectures; members of the ruling dynasty toyed with reform or even revolution. Yet the simple Egyptians, the *fellahin*, remained engrossed with cotton and village intrigue. The fiction of Egyptian authors such as Haikal or Sharkawy, the sociological studies of observers such as Henry Ayrout, S.J., confirm these horizons. In Palestine the pressure is so universal that it involves the rich (who sometimes escaped its full effects under the Mandate) with the middle classes and the poor.

When Sadat decided to make peace with Israel, his obedient press orchestrated an attack on the Palestinians destined to be sacrificed. (You can only happily betray if you first belittle or degrade your victim.) One theme was that they had sold their land. (Less than one per cent of land purchased by the Jewish Agency came from Palestinian sellers; of the approximately six per cent of Palestine obtained through purchase, the greater part by far was from Lebanese absentees, like the rich Sursock family.) Another charge was that they were 'like the Jews'. Egyptians suddenly showing a racial interest in being Pharaonic attributed this likeness to a shared Levantine ancestry. The racial argument misses the point – a point which Proust saw when he compared the Jewry to which he was connected through his mother, and the Sodom to which he was recruited by his psychological construction. Jews and homosexuals each formed something akin to a secret society, spanning classes and frontiers. Both were shaped, and sharpened, through a vulnerability of situation. To attribute to Jews, or Palestinians, or – to declare my own interest – to Scots, better brains is a false explanation for the sharpness of a group that is put under pressure. Such a group collapses, emigrates or survives. 'What does not kill us makes us strong.' The proliferation of Jewish names in the arts and sciences dates from the time when the Jews emerged from the ghetto undecided about how much they should concede to gentile society, and unsure how much that gentile society would concede to them. Jewish pre-eminence, where it exists, is due neither to a conspiracy of self-help nor to genetic superiority. Jews lived on their nerves, at the front line of the social drama. The biography of Albert Camus shows that, in occupied France, Frenchmen spent as much psychic energy in getting food –

Camus for example in obtaining a particular pâté – as on politics. Few Jews could so divert their impetus. Unlike the Sartres or the Mitterrands, they could be arrested for what they were, not for what they did.

Now it is the painful privilege of the Palestinians to be in the front line. Like the Jews, they can be boring with their obsessions; judaeo-centricity is fully matched by the Palestinian conviction that contemporary history centres on their struggle. As an uncomfortable reward, neither Jews nor Palestinians can be as bucolic as the undisturbed. It is impossible for someone whose house may be blown up tomorrow, whose brother may this moment be dying in a fray against an army equipped by America, to have the easy smile of the Egyptian whom centuries of oppression have taught defensive tactics based on deception of those who ask direct questions, and the joke as an armoury against a cruel truth.

Gaza crams three hundred and fifty thousand Palestinians into an area of dunes which in Europe might conceivably support, with the necessary facilities, some twenty thousand tourists. When the Palestinians came here in 1948, they lacked even tents. The present camps here evolved through a process similar to that in Amman or round Bethlehem. But because of the lack of stone, solidification has been achieved through oil barrels, driftwood, corrugated iron, plaster or palm fronds. The congestion has devoured the picturesque township of my 1912 Baedeker, chief city of an Ottoman *khaimakamlik* with a population of forty thousand. This concentration of dispossessed, uprooted people – embittered by an experience which cut them off from the land they had tilled beyond the barbed wire – posed a major security problem to the Israelis when they re-occupied the zone in 1967. (They had occupied it temporarily during the Suez War of 1956.) They have tackled the problem in two ways, one visible to the naked eye, another which needs description, such as I was given by a leading citizen.

The interwoven huts which replaced the first makeshift shelters provided an equivalent of the Algerian casbahs which had baffled the French. They afforded a classic instance of that ocean of popular support in which the guerrilla can return to his concealing shoal. The Israelis made it an early part of their

business to carve swathes of empty land through the close-textured camps, so that the Israeli soldiers and armour could patrol. By dividing the sea of humanity into manageable lakes, they made it harder for the guerrillas to operate. They incidentally deprived many thousands of Palestinians of the shacks they knew as home.

The second approach echoed tactics also applied on the West Bank: a deliberate campaign aimed at destroying, expelling or discrediting the Palestinian leadership. But the compact Gaza slums formed a more cohesive as well as a more congested society; it inspired the Israelis to go to more elaborate lengths.

Dr Haidar Abdul Shafei was the Director of Health under the Egyptian administration which ruled the Strip until the summer of 1967. (Nasser's satrap, Marshal Amer, used Gaza for week-end frolics, while lesser officials did their black-market shopping.) Dr Abdul Shafei was also prominent in the local assembly sponsored by Nasser. He is now a member of the Board of Trustees of Bir Zeit University at Ramallah and, as a distinguished physician, is also the director of the Red Crescent Society, the Islamic equivalent of the Red Cross. In most parts of the world, the Red Cross (or its equivalent) cares for the sick or the wounded. It is not usually a cultural institution. But under an oppressive military rule which forbids every kind of normal political organization and which makes oil paintings of flowers in the Palestinian colours a proof of crime, the Red Crescent is a popular forum for maintaining intellectual and cultural standards. Its library of seven thousand books is the only public depository of books in the Strip. It is relevant to Dr Abdul Shafei's story that a third of these are religious works. At the organization's cultural meetings, as many as five hundred people may attend lectures on literary or cultural themes. Muhammad Batrani, for example, has lectured here on the evolution of Palestinian literature; as a separate branch of Arabic letters, it traces its origins to the Aqsa mosque.

Such an organization could articulate the attitudes of the Strip to such proposed solutions as Sadat's notion of a Gaza granted autonomy under Egyptian control, before the West Bank could make its own more diffused voice heard. 'We are grateful for what Egypt has done for us in the past,' says Dr Abdul Shafei.

'I personally am optimistic enough to be confident that Egypt will eventually return to the Arabs. But our attitude here in Gaza to what was arranged on our behalf at Camp David was overwhelmingly negative.'

Informed, rational, non-violent opposition by Gaza's foremost personalities perturbed the Israelis and they sought ways to render it ineffective. As in other parts of the Arab world, a strong religious current is one result of a situation felt to be baffling and intolerable. The Israelis fostered rumours that the Red Crescent was a mask for Communist activities. The evening of 7 January 1980 was to provide onlookers with an extraordinary spectacle. In a zone where the security is so tight that, normally, personnel-carriers stuffed with club-swinging soldiers have surrounded a primary school even before the children inside have realized that they were about to demonstrate, Israeli jeeps were seen escorting fifteen hundred Gazans bent on sacking the Red Crescent building. Some believed they were going to attack a Communist base, others the solid nucleus of some new Jewish settlement. When, with a jeep-load of Israeli soldiers in front and another behind, they reached the mysterious and suddenly sinister building, they set it on fire. A third of the books which were burnt were Korans or other religious texts. One lad was heard to shout to another: 'This is the best demonstration I've ever been to.' It was certainly the first manifestation in Gaza which, from start to finish, enjoyed Israeli approval and protection. Next morning, when they saw how they had been duped into destroying something precious of their own, the demonstrators knew the bitterness of political hangover.

Gaza as cage – which is its function now – discredits the parties who formed it or tolerated its perpetuation. Its 350,000 inmates mock the repeated British claims to care equally for the interests of both groups named in the Balfour Declaration. The United Nations Organization, despite heroic efforts by some of its functionaries, has done nothing to compensate, has merely sustained, the victims of its collective weakness and chicanery. The Arab world has managed to do little to improve living conditions which would be regarded as unacceptable for poultry. Despite Dr Abdul Shafei's tributes, I could find little evidence that the Egyptians had used their nineteen years of occupation to do

much for the welfare, let alone the defence, of the Strip. Many Palestinians spent time in Egyptian prisons before spending more in Israeli ones. The Israelis have battered down resistance with one hand and, with the other, fashioned a reservoir of cheap labour. From the gates, buses convey day-labourers to perform menial tasks in Tel Aviv or to tend citrus groves their own fathers planted and owned.

But history shows that sometimes the bleakest problem can produce the most startling advances. The substitute for Gaza as cage is Gaza as maritime outlet for a Palestinian State. Its concentration of people, today's burden, could be tomorrow's asset. For smallness in size is both relative and irrelevant. Manhattan Island, New York's creative core, is less than a quarter the size of the Strip.

Serving as port for the West Bank and Jordan, attracting Arab investment, Gaza could thrive as a centre of manufacturing and business activity. A demilitarized highway (perhaps initially policed by the UN) could link it to Latrun in a matter of minutes. The city needs to rediscover a function. This done, it could surge to prosperity as rapidly as post-war Germany, whose surplus refugee population became a dynamo for their industrial miracle.

As we left Gaza for the drive back to Arab Jerusalem, my sense of outrage at what the world still tolerates clashed with an unexpected optimism concerning the Palestinian future. In part, this was because I had appreciated one of Gaza's existing assets: the beauty of its white-flecked green waves and its beaches. Hind, Batrani and I lunch off fish as good as at Abukir in Alexandria, in a tranquillity hard to find in other resorts.

Part Two 1981

11

Tel Aviv

In 1980 I had entered the Occupied Territories by the bridge of humiliation, the route open to non-Egyptian Arabs. After comparatively short bureaucratic delays in Amman, I had obtained papers allowing me to join the Palestinians returning home to visit the families they had left behind. In the fierce sun of the Jordan valley, thirsty babies and tired grown-ups waited to be body-searched, women as well as men, lest they were smuggling in a knife, to threaten the machine guns carried by Israelis as casually as umbrellas, or a truth-telling magazine from the outside world.

The reception for tourists arriving at Ben-Gurion Airport is totally different. This time, I am travelling with my mother. We leave the artificial atmosphere of the plane for a whiff of the same pines which embellish Beirut. There has been rain. We walk to the reception lounge by the light of a vagrant moon. And my mother, who lets on that she is an artist, is soon piled with pamphlets advertising in gaudy colours the glories of Safad and other Israeli resorts.

Our taxi-driver then takes us through streets which are shabby and dirty even by the weakened electricity of a country short of energy.

We reach the Tel Aviv Hilton, but for us this is only a glittering

transit camp, a preliminary stage in our project to visit the Palestinians of Galilee.

How Herzl with his secularist views would have approved of the Tel Aviv Hilton: the coffee lounge with its deep chairs, the international modernism, even perhaps the Independence Park of dusty cacti and the red-hot pokers that surround it, by the Mediterranean Sea! But he would have lamented the lost etiquette and elegances of Vienna: no dinner-jacketed or tailed musicians; the pieces of jagged iron from the El Al art collection would have mystified him. But plainly this is not the place for us: there is not a Palestinian to be seen among the air-conditioned diamonds, magazines, clothes, chocolates of its dollar-economy. As I negotiate for a car under these opulent ceilings, I wonder uneasily how that family is faring under the stars at Dusheishah, and the hundreds of thousands of refugee-families in the shanties of Gaza. Meanwhile here we are, insulated from the poor and perplexed in an international bubble of comfort.

Daylight peels off the onion skin of glamour and welcome. In my hired car I survey the city. The things that first impress me are the names that the streets honour: Balfour, of course – he of the equivocal Declaration; and Allenby who won Palestine from the Turks. Then, near the Hilton, there is Sederot Nordau, named after the racist who taught that crime was the result of physical degeneracy and that lesser breeds deserved to be exterminated by the stronger; he had also entertained a fundamental doubt as to whether the Jews were still 'anthropologically fit for nationhood'. What a sinister patron! I cannot resist calling at the Egyptian Embassy. Heavily shuttered and guarded, it stands in Basel Street, which commemorates the First Zionist Congress, held in Switzerland in 1897. There it was that Herzl launched his programme to colonize Palestine, and Nordau invented the phrase 'national home' as a disguise for the real intention, a Jewish State. Jabotinsky Street is one block away; this commemorates Begin's political mentor, who taught that Jordan and most of the surrounding states must eventually belong to Israel.

Or again, there is Yarkon Street, the product of an ugly century, and a shock to the system compared with streets of similar status in Naples or Vienna. Highish, sedate, rich houses with no touch of grace. Greenery, yes, but indoor plants. Boxed-

in balconies, like the shoddiest sectors of Alexandria, but unredeemed by the vitality of the in-thrusting lanes, the crowds, the *gallabyas*. Pavements, iron trash-baskets, crossings for pedestrians, brutal motorists, in a word the characteristics of many a modern city but, with these, a kind of sparseness of soul, of imagination and, in fact, of population. Tel Aviv, one never forgets, represents a bourgeois ideal. Where else, so many banks, so many shops offering, not kapok-stuffed camels, but diamonds?

And amid all this, the absent Banquo: the isolated minaret, the Arabic script. And if you want to feast, ghosts or no ghosts, the Eastern-style restaurant is called 'Shaul's Inn'.

These considerations apart, you cannot visit Tel Aviv in 1981 without soon being conscious that there is something wrong. Once you close the airport brochures with their pretty pictures, you sense an atmosphere as shabby as in Eastern Europe, and without the smiles. This is not the arrogant, over-confident land you used to read about in the 1960s. An air of gloom, which has nothing to do with winter, infects the city.

The major reason for this is the collapse of money, chief weapon of Zionism since the Basel Conference. Herzl used Jewish financial power – whether myth or reality – to bribe those who might support him or threaten those who stood in his way. The Zionist victories of the 1940s and 1950s would have been impossible if international Jewry had not possessed capital infinitely greater than that of the Arabs. Now the situation has radically changed. Although the Arabs have only begun to use their strength, the dread that they may be able to use it more effectively in the future is Israel's nightmare and contributes in the main to Tel Aviv's low spirits.

Inflation, the lack of jobs for those with high talents or educational qualifications, the sense since 1973 that Israel is no longer militarily invulnerable, and a horror, among liberal-minded Israelis, of the increasingly expansionist policies of the Begin government and, in a politer form, of the Labour Party: all these have produced a second demoralizing factor: the acceleration of *yerida*, or emigration. Reported as a bleak phenomenon abroad, it has a devastating impact on the spot: like men in a beleaguered castle who suddenly find that a battalion has dug an escape

tunnel and sneaked away. It induces something close to panic. Not that the emigration is all that secret now. 'Our young men,' an Israeli told me, 'used to pretend that they were going on vacation and would soon return. Now, on completion of their military service, they give farewell parties, distribute their books among friends and openly leave for ever.'

12
Tiberias

Emigration is only the most dramatic sign of a collapse of the idealism which aroused admiration among even those observers who felt disturbed by the fact that the Zionist pioneers were working on already inhabited land. The road north from Tel Aviv to Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee takes two or three hours of easy driving. The coastal plain has been wrecked by shoddy building, much as the Greeks have spoiled Cyprus, visually, or the Lebanese the Lebanon; but worse, by the proliferation of activity conducted amid ugliness. Not a detail, man-made, that is elegant or imaginative.

At Hadera you turn inland to cross the rich plain which supported some five thousand Arab families in the last century and which the Sursock family of Beirut sold to the Zionists in the 1920s. The Zionists, whose principle then was that no Arab could work on Jewish land, evicted the villagers, forcing the British to pass legislation prohibiting the further sale of land worked by Arabs. (The sellers, be it understood, were practically all absentees, never the *fellahin* themselves.) Now a surprising thing has happened. The land, as I had seen in 1980 between Latrun and Gaza, is once again worked by Arabs: but as hirelings, not for themselves. The fields once worked by Jewish violinists and

psychiatrists is increasingly one huge plantation, similar in structure to the great estates in the American South once worked by Negroes. Occasionally one passes what looks like a chicken farm: a kibbutz. Inside the wire fence, Israelis in white coats may be working. But the kibbutzim do not belong to the soil, they are imposed upon it and their symbols are ugly houses, wire and flapping polythene. There is none of the rural liveliness of an Arab village. They are sombre places, and I know, if I were an Israeli, I too should want to leave.

The landscape begins to change: stark hills, but with a few villages, as it were, growing out of them, a few minarets and, where there is an Arab village, Arabic has its rare place between Hebrew and English (or even Latin) on the signposts.

Suddenly, beyond Afula, one mounts dramatically – a sense of both relief and altitude – and a great gash appears: the chasm or rift through which the Jordan flows and bellies south. Jebel al-Sheikh, or Hermon, a snow-topped mass to the left, and low, angry – one projects emotions – hills to the south. Then a turn-off to Lake View, a truly hideous complex of cement, pebbles and dark, lowering, inner restaurant at a point where, in the Tyrol, there would be a merry chalet or, in France, a glittering *rôtisserie*. From Tel Aviv to Tiberias, I reflect, I have seen not a single restaurant, trattoria, taverna or place of joyful eating. Perhaps for this, or a similar lack of amenity nearly two thousand years ago, Jesus used convivial meals as a symbol of his rebellion?

Two Galilean towns, emptied of their Arab populations since 1948, express the desire which every non-Israeli visitor I met remarked on. Tiberias is one; Safad, which I describe later, is the other.

Nineteenth-century Tiberias was a charming walled town whose mountainous backdrop and minarets delighted painters of the Middle Eastern scene. Today, from afar, Tiberias repeats the familiar block-effect of Herzliyya, Netanya and other ruthless developments of modern times: gimcrack, high-rise, white. Close to, it looks as it it has been bombed, since a great tearing-down has not been matched by any replacement construction, except the huge Plaza Hotel, all concrete, with glass – aquarium effect – down one complete side. The centre of the town has been bulldozed of its picturesque Arab houses. Its mosques are closed

to Islamic worship. Great efforts have been made to uncover and restore the ancient and not particularly interesting city walls, but otherwise the Israelis have done nothing in the last thirty years or more to replace the ruins which they themselves created. The streets are as ugly as Mosul, from which many of the new settlers have come, but the shops are worse: trashy, dusty – a hint of new Turkey – with soldiers much in evidence in the shoddy shopping arcades. The Holmesian dog that did not bark in the night: on that principle, the Arabs here. There have been none since 1948 when they were chased out, we are told on site, and they have not been allowed back. Yet 'they come down to work'.

A curious echo of New Testament times when Jews would have avoided Tiberias since it was built by a pagan and named after a pagan on the site of a graveyard. Now, by an odd reversal, it is the native Galileans who come in, but do not merge. Amid the grumpiest waiters or hotel-owners – selling nevertheless St Peter's fish for tourists – much dirt, ubiquitous Middle Eastern cats and begging, an Arab in the parking lot unrolls a spotless carpet and creates his city on it. He is from Khalil (the Arabic name for Hebron). When I greet him, he is astonished, his *salaam alekum* duplicated and reduplicated. To the present townsfolk of Tiberias, who are in every gesture alien to this landscape, he could be from another galaxy. So could my mother and myself, except that we pay for lunch: chopped liver, fried chicken and those staples of Israeli cookery, *hummus*, aubergine salad and *tahina*.

After dinner, we walk on the Promenade, a well-made pavement by the slightly mucky lake, where Jesus had recruited his first followers; there is an omnipresence, in fact, of trash and litter. A tiny mosque stands in ruins, but with its Hansel and Gretel stubby minaret still intact. Above it looms, like the great observation-deck of an expensive spacecraft, the dining-room of the Plaza, full of foreigners drinking their cocktails. And they too, lodged in the hotel, lit up white and looming over the little mosque – the image of a gigantic concrete termites' nest might be better – are as alien to the Jews of the town as to the banished Arabs, who are allowed in on buses to work, but not allowed to sleep in the town at night.

For Tiberias was settled by Jews encouraged by the Zionists to

migrate from Iraq, Yemen and Morocco. Their average incomes are forty per cent less than those of the Jews from the USA or Eastern Europe. They know themselves to be second-class citizens, under-represented in the Knesset and the government. Their one minister in the Begin government, Aharon Abuhatzeira, is now on trial for abusing his position as Minister of Religious Affairs to embezzle money and use bribes. Although these 'Eastern' Jews speak Arabic, they have the reputation for being even more ruthless to the Arabs than the Jews from America or Germany.

The road to Nazareth illustrates the contrast between the ancient Galilee, to which the Arab villages were adapted and from which they grew, and the twentieth-century horror which is grappled to, or against, the land: alien and comfortless – not only Israeli, but affecting with its concrete and glass and tangled machinery the Arab too.

Day of cloud, turning, in Nazareth, to rain such as one hardly associates with the New Testament scene.

The day is as oppressive as the sights: pewter clouds as ponderous over the earth as Upper Nazareth is over the old: a skyline in part of gigantic rock tenements, in part of battery-fowl residences. My constant impression is that the Palestine of the heart has been literally annihilated.

In Nazareth itself, a chaos of cars and agricultural machinery. El Al described it differently! Its spectacular elegance, its spaciousness . . .

But Basingstoke might be called spacious, and there is nothing spectacular about Nazareth except when one escapes from the roads to the *souq* or the narrow lanes, where the elegance of Arab Palestine survives. Nazareth is still an Arab municipality. I go to the town hall, the *belediyet*, which has an atmosphere mixed of suspicion and melancholy. But also the underlying effectiveness which is Palestine's compensatory gift for the missing Egyptian smile and charm. Within minutes I am introduced to Geoffrey, who turns out to be a connection of Palestinian friends of mine in England, an intense, slight, clever young man, a student at Haifa University. He tells me of the problems there.

At Haifa, the Arabs, kept to around ten per cent of the student

body, are made to feel, except by a progressive minority, *unwanted*. All studies are in Hebrew and English, but an extra year has been introduced for Arabs at a low level, which they feel profitless, but they have to do it, after psychometric tests (Oh horror!), and this counts financially as a full year, though it is not worth it. Yet Haifa itself he describes as probably the best place in Israel for an Arab to live, as it is the one mixed city: mixed in the sense that Jews and Arabs live in the same place, though few Jews live in the Arab quarter or vice versa. (But when Arabs from overcrowded Nazareth applied to rent apartments in Upper Nazareth, there was a huge hullabaloo and in nearly every case they were barred.) The Arab students are, these last two years, facing real fascism. Before, the Jews did not like demonstrations, (of protest that is), but put up with them. Now, physical threats and violence. A group of Jews called 'Campus' has been formed though, to stand with the Arabs. And do.

Geoffrey's view of the world: 'Arab divisions, Sadat's regrettable policy, make us very pessimistic when we look close to; but further off, in the UN and Europe, the prospect seems much brighter.' Arab students are divided into those who want a rigorous policy whereby the 1947 Partition Plan is taken as the determining watershed: all those who came before are Palestinians, whether Jews or Arabs; but later immigrants must go; and others who start from accepting the present situation. And Geoffrey quotes back to me with approval my own dictum that for generations the Arabs have been misled by a daydream of swift military decision. Even if this could be achieved – which I would personally deplore – and all the Jews be driven into the sea, the cost in human misery, to both sides, would be enormous. Geoffrey believes the PLO is working for peace and is on the right lines. He opposes violence.

When I tell him how my June visit of last year left me hopeful, convinced indeed, that the Arab world is most alive here at the tornado's heart, he agrees; the Palestinians have learnt their lesson; they know what to do. 'Before, it was the big family in every community which was automatically the fount of power and the producer of the community's representative. Now at last, and this has been a good effect of the leftist movement, the emphasis, even at village level, is on *the right policy*. A great

step, this.'

I had hoped to meet the mayor but he had gone out, so I return to Tiberias. Next morning, telephone to Nazareth: calls subject to the usual delays – please ring again between noon and one o'clock.

So, to make the most of my time, I go to Capernaum: tiny – smaller than the smallest East Anglian fishing town. Splendid synagogue, though late; but the house of St Peter, later turned into a house-church, may be genuine. Hill of Beatitudes: an Italian hospice and a 1937 church (E.F. XV, for *Era Fascista*, still visible on its foundation stone) with long, clear windows giving views of the lake, Lombardesque views. No Arabs. No mosques visible. The Bedu owned Capernaum and sold it to the Franciscans.

I ring Nazareth at 12.05. No news of appointment. 'I'll ring back in five minutes.' The secretary doesn't. I ring at 12.25 – he has been unable to obtain the mayor. So I say, aiming to impose something fixed on this fluidity, that I'll come to the *belediyet* at ten o'clock on Monday morning, and chance it.

I reflect on the *smallness* of Capernaum: tiny. Black basalt, no wood; so no roof possible, except of the flimsiest. In Jesus's time, the 'centurion' could have afforded something small. Almost neolithic – St Peter's house. The hills are barren and, as in the paintings of David Roberts, dramatic; would support vineyards – small estates.

Jerusalem Post, Friday, 16 January: Chaim Herzog, visiting Egypt, is invited in an Egyptian air force plane to Aswan, to meet 'Sphinx-like, relaxed' Anwar Sadat. Anis Mansour has been the middleman: 'Anis Mansour, a philosopher and poet of stature, edits *October* magazine and is a close confidant of the President, with whom he meets weekly.' Sadat stresses 'what he considers King Hussein's subservience to the economic aid which he receives from his fellow Arab countries'. Sadat prefers a November election in Israel, rather than a spring one, i.e. a few more months of Begin! Predicts (a) civil war in Syria, events 'overtaking' President Hafez Assad; (b) an end of Iraq–Iran war 'following a change of regime in both countries'. Thus the Israeli-Arab dispute and the Palestine issue will tend to be pushed to the

sidelines. Chaim Herzog describes Sadat as 'one of the great statesmen of our time'. He is disappointed however that the peace progress 'is not being permitted to gain momentum at a sufficiently rapid pace'.

Imagine the feelings of Palestinians who have to read and hear this sort of thing as a constant diet!

17 January

The truth of Marx's dictum, that no nation that oppresses another can itself be free, is radically evident, particularly in a small town like Tiberias where people have been dumped, not knowing what they are. The Israelis have conquered; they have cleared the land; it is largely theirs, and new victories could clear the rest. But who enjoys the result? One can imagine the following as happy: those who are satisfied with a sunny Golders Green in Tel Aviv, by the sea; those who find satisfaction in politics, actors on a stage they would otherwise never have had; idealists crouched over a fishpond or a technical process; those making money; those, perhaps, with ringlets and hats who do not go as far as the Neturei Karta but who feel an Ezraic satisfaction in excluding themselves from others. But the rest . . . with an inflation rate of one hundred and forty per cent in a sea of vengeful people, whose hate they imagine (wrongly, I suspect) as implacable.

Deadness: the Lake seems dead of people; only birds and fish and waves; absolute contrast with a northern Italian lake with its vivacity, its trattorias and churches, its aquatic *va-et-vient*.

Admittedly, I feel this most acutely on a Sabbath. And so, as the light dies over the water, I go out into the Arab-free town to watch it come alive. The food stalls, the drab, shabby little holes in the wall selling olives and *tahina*, are the first, with a few rushing buses. A pedestrian or two. A middle-class family. But most of Tiberias stays obstinately dead and I can walk round shops which line a graceless piazza: Adidas sports clothes, with jogging shoes for 250 shekels (about thirty-one dollars) a pair; a bookshop entirely glorifying Israel in English, the only book on another topic being *The Arab Press*; camera shops – cheap cameras, dusty; a flower shop; men's clothes – American but

terribly dear. One can see, in this town where Arabic is spoken by non-Arabs, a kind of downtown worse than the old Jewish quarters in New York, but smaller in scale, even flimsier, more 'Anatolian', while up on the heights the termite combs mount, the condominiums . . .

Tiberias Club Hotel advertises in *This Week in Israel:*

> 'A two-room vacation suite in Israel I can *own* for $2,000?'
> 'That's right.'
> 'And I can get exchange privileges for similar vacation suites at over 200 resorts throughout the world?'
> 'That's right.'

Identical cell-like balconies in two adjacent masses like truncated Mexican pyramids scooped out and adapted for existing in – high above the small clip-joints and boutiques with crass colours and racks of desert-boots that look strong at first glance.

But up the other side of town, only a little way up, car graveyards next to Arab houses only just abandoned, like the Turkish villages in Greek Cyprus and vice versa: a general squalor in which one steps cautiously over a tawny rivulet from a midden draining behind heaped rubbish.

Mary, married to an Israeli, has been here for thirty-five years. She speaks with respect about the idealism of the early Zionists – 'but the young generation are turned-off; they hate military service; once they've done their three years, they want out.' Hence preoccupation in the press with the *yerida*, or downgoing, of up to half a million Israelis who, like equivalent Egyptians, go off to jobs abroad, and stay. Russian immigration is a trickle, as there just aren't the job opportunities for the highly qualified. 'This is part of the melancholy and gloom you mention. But there are other factors.' Up to 1973, morale was cock-a-hoop: total self-confidence. This was punctured by the war when the Israelis were, for the first time, faced with a protracted struggle, not a blitzkrieg. With difficulties, they survived. But the emergence of Arab military power, or its potential, was matched by the emergence of Arab financial power, which means an Arab ability to put pressure on America. 'For if

Reagan had to choose between Israel and oil, he would not choose Israel.'

Someone else speaks of the Israeli genius for short-term solutions, but total failure over long-term ones. Hence the makeshift impermanent look of things. In Tiberias, for example (as I have mentioned already), they have pulled down the houses between the Scotch Hospice and the Plaza – the old Arab quarter – all in pursuit of city walls, which are not that interesting. No attempt has been made at renovation which would have kept the atmosphere and charm of old times. The housing developments, whether battery farms or impressive, are far from the town-centre and lacking places of amusement, such as cinemas or cultural centres, or even shops. The only place where civic pride and town-planning have been allowed to work together is Bet-shean, where the creation of a university drew intelligent people, and it throbs with cultural life. Elsewhere, no civic sense: so, well-furnished houses lead on to squalid streets (as I have seen).

At breakfast I meet a mixed group of British and New Zealand nurses, who were first on the Jewish side of the line but are now at Ramallah. Their student-nurses go on strike with Bir Zeit's students: strikes are allowed, demonstrations are not. The police or army shoot at girl-students' legs – 'the only way' – but noticeably do not use these methods when dealing with Jewish zealots who also throw stones. Bridget was stoned her first Sabbath in Mea Shearim. Her dress reached to her wrists and ankles, but she may have been wearing some Christian symbol; anyway, a crowd of young men and boys pelted her.

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Sabbath over, but the tumultuous, lakeside rains turn the morning streets into rivers without bridges. I climb a wet pavement for several hundred yards before I find a main road where the water forms a torrent narrow enough to jump: the rest of the road is like a windscreen being ferociously washed. Soldiers everywhere, in hordes. I buy a cheap black umbrella; others use sunshades. Am more than ever conscious how the people down here (i.e., not in the tree-supporting villas on the heights) are a proletariat, not only speaking the Arabic of Iraq or Morocco, but worn, beaten down, by military service and high prices. The

umbrella, for example, costs exactly three times what it would in New York. The rain keeps us indoors until evening when, having had the car washed and its unstoppable motor remedied so that it turns off, we drive up through layers of squalor. At the top, overlooking the lake, visual squalor: utilitarian forms, whether giant watertanks like concrete toadstools, or heavy fortress walls and plate-glass windows with rusting or ill-fitting frames. But the worst place is the topmost settlement, five kilometres from Tiberias, which we approach, lost in the suburban jungle just described, by driving on the Nazareth road and taking the turning to Poriyya. Here we enter the suburb through a wilderness of prefabs on little stilts, dead cars and wire and hideous detritus among the unmade streets, and general neglect. Only a bank gleams, and then, as the view improves, so the suburb obviously gets relatively more costly, but not chic. Some of the girls work the same miracle on themselves as Egyptian girls stepping from houses of the dead in Cairo: cheaply smart Western overcoats, high boots. The young men wear khaki or anoraks of harsh colours; sometimes their *yarmulkas* are of the same colour. Many don't wear them. Beards are common. I remember the pathos of Herzl's evocation of a place 'where we can have hook noses and long hair and not be despised'.

I should already have made clear, I realize, that in Tiberias my mother and I are staying, as befits our name and frugal nation, at the Scotch Hospice, *not* at the Babylonish Plaza; it is a vast, rock-built complex of buildings, inspired long ago by the zeal of a judaizing MD from Edinburgh.

This same wet Sunday morning, we attend (Mother has a turn) an interminable service conducted by a facetious, hip young 'meenister' whose sermon takes up the idea of sacrifice (used loosely to mean 'giving up what you value'), and repeats it without development: 'Nowhere does the Bible repudiate sacrifice; the New Testament only repudiates the animal sacrifice of two lambs daily, which had brought God near to Israel.' *Et cetera*. An elder is ordained: a good, scraggy Scot, a very Stewart. Hymns, psalms, all judaic. An American follows on afterwards to say what progress the Church of Scotland is making with the Jews in Tiberias. A service in Hebrew for them on Saturdays: 'They keep their own customs.' I say that secular Jews

might be a good target for his mission. He: 'It's strange, their devotion to Judaism.' D.S.: 'Even though they don't believe in God?' He goes on about the billions poured into Israel by American Jews. D.S.: 'I wish they'd pay to bring pressure on Begin to stop settling the West Bank.'

A pretty young blonde Scots nurse from Toronto works at a kibbutz. 'In Syria.' 'On the old frontier – now the frontier has moved fifty kilometres east.' She wears a Star of David necklace; comes to kirk each Sunday. On her kibbutz, seventy-five members, twenty-five volunteers, all free-thinkers, all passionately 'Jewish'. She has been there for three and a half months; is leaving after visiting 'Ofira'.

'Sharm el Sheikh – it is in Egypt,' I reply.

13

Nazareth

Nazareth provides a melancholy instance of how an entirely Arab municipality suffers in the supposedly democratic State of Israel. A regional centre since Ottoman times, it retained its purely Arab character even after 1948. This was in large part due to a long struggle under the British Mandate which led to the creation of a highly articulate and organized civic leadership. Unable to dislodge the Arabs from the old town and, because of Nazareth's links with foreign churches, aware that what had been tried in Deir Yassin might be inadvisable here, the Zionists created instead a New Nazareth, a shoddy suburb overlooking the town in which the Virgin Mary had, according to tradition, brought up the Messiah. Nazareth itself numbered some ten thousand people in 1948: its numbers have now swollen to forty-five thousand, in part the result of natural increase, but in part as Arabs have been dispossessed under one pretext or another. Yet the city is now forced to confine its limits, and the area on which it can build housing, to 7,000 *dunums*, half of the land at its disposal at the end of the British Mandate. The new land has been *confiscated* – a word as much on people's lips as 'liberation' in 1948, when this meant, in vulgar parlance, theft by soldiers.

Bright sun misleads: reminds one of Lyautey's plan for Morocco, a cold country with a hot sun. (By causing fear – a chill.)

Yet despite being squeezed into a congested town (for the Arabs are excluded from New Nazareth on the hilltop), I find that the people have retained a sense of humour and objectivity in stark contrast to the repetitive propaganda of the Israelis.

I do not see much of the mayor, as things turn out, but have a long and rewarding conversation with someone else instead.

Salim Jabran, a poet and graduate in English of Haifa University, where he suffered the difficulties invariably inflicted on Arab students, is a man of Nazareth whose humanism embraces all parties to the conflict. Broaching a theme that I shall hear more of in Safad, he says baldly: 'They have confiscated even the smiles, and from Jew no less than from Arab.'

He goes on to define the position of Arabs in a Palestine either incorporated into a racist state or under military occupation. 'Our position is worse than that of the Blacks in America. For the Blacks are at least assured of their citizenship. No one contemplates confiscating that. But a permanent Zionist question-mark hangs over our heritage as Palestinians, our very link with Palestine. For the classical Zionist dream envisaged no Arab citizen of a Jewish State. If they had had time in 1948, and if we had not had a strong local leadership, they would not have left one hundred and fifty thousand Arabs inside their *de facto* frontiers. Now we number more than half a million.

'But I see our conflict in political, not biological or racial terms. We have to transform the Israeli policy and attitude towards the Arab minority in order to construct a new mode of relations. The coming electoral defeat of Begin and his party, which I take for granted [wrongly, as it proved], will mark a great step. Not that Peres of the Labour Party is an idealist, or all that different. But the repudiation of explicit chauvinism will mark an irreversible change. In the last elections, which put Begin in power, poor Jews voted for his party. But they have been bitterly disappointed. A diet of anti-Arab chauvinism has been a poor substitute for good food and decent housing. Thoughtful Israelis increasingly admit that Camp David brought no solution. For such a solution there must be a settlement between Palestinians and Israelis, with eventual recognition of the PLO and a Palestinian State.'

This remark, and the one that follows, interest me, for they

refute the argument that the PLO does not enjoy the backing of Palestinians in Palestine:

'I want to emphasize in particular the positive role played by the increasingly sophisticated leadership of the PLO. Any student of history knows that, in fact, the Israelis were the aggressors and the Arabs their victims. But world opinion for a long time saw things the other way round, largely as a result of Arab phraseology. In truth, the question has always been, not whether Israel exists, but whether Palestine exists.' He quotes the poet Qadoumi: ' "I am interested in not being killed – not in killing Jews." This is the exact opposite of the way in which the Zionist Rafael Eytan has defined the situation in the Occupied Territories: "We must be killers or be killed: and the latter option does not interest us."

'Israel could not play its aggressive role in the Middle East for one minute,' Jabran continues, 'without US backing. In Kissinger's day, the US sought to lessen its reliance on Israel as its sole Middle Eastern agent. It began to use Sadat and others as colleagues in the superpower struggle against the USSR and national liberation movements in Africa and the Middle East. But Sadat presents too ugly a face for the US to rely on Egypt as an equal. The Israeli government, on the other hand, whatever its complexion, still has the basic support of its people, unlike the regime in Cairo. This means that in US eyes, Egypt is only an agent, whereas Israel is a full, autonomous partner. Both Likud and the Labour Party have frankly stated their hopes that Reagan will use muscle against Russia. They are also the most persuasive exponents of the theory that peaceful co-existence benefits the Soviet Union more than the West. Sadat, on the other hand, is unique. As an historian, can you think of any other leader capitulating so fast and then signing a full peace with his enemy while that enemy still occupies a large part of his national territory? In betraying the Palestine cause, Egypt has sacrificed twenty-five Arab embassies for the Israeli Embassy in Dokky. The country which was the centre of the Afro-Asian, as well as the Arab, struggle is now a US base.'

What does Jabran see as the Zionist plan for Palestine?

'The classical Zionist programme is double. First, to judaize the territory. Then – which has been less widely noted – to

convert the Palestinians into landless peasants to provide a temporary pool of cheap labour. Israel is now so dependent on this Arab proletariat that, on such occasions as major Muslim festivals, you find the country virtually paralysed. Arabs and, to a lesser extent, oriental Jews have become the Negroes of Israeli society. They do the dirty, unskilled, ill-paid jobs, but are rarely found in highly rewarded positions. Helots in the ancient Spartan sense, seventy-five per cent of them work outside their communities, which means they have to be bussed to and from their work, adding another three hours to an eight-hour day. Very few can now afford to live from agriculture; the overwhelming majority work for wages. A new development symbolizes the change. Against all Zionist theory, Arabs are now hired as labourers in the *moshavs*, or settlements of Jewish workers. This often means that they are employed as hirelings on what was their own, now confiscated land.'

'Is there any sign of the confiscations slowing down?'

'No, no, the Israeli policy is to go on confiscating. A new plan put into action over the last four years testifies alike to the Israeli government's failure to bring in new immigrants and to its determination to take over totally.'

He adds as a kind of aside: 'The technique of confiscation? The Israelis run up small groups of houses to act as watch-towers, and stock them with dogs. If the original owners try to return under cover of dark, the dogs raise the alert and the "pioneers" rush out, firing from the hip.'

Salim Jabran has studied Zionism from daily experience, not from books or treatises. 'It reflects the current mood of imperialism in its changing phases,' he says. 'For example, at the turn of the century, imperialism still had a liberal coloration. So at that time, Zionism passed itself off as an idealistic, even liberal movement. But imperialism is now entering its phase of violent sunset.' His phrase reminds me of *Apocalypse Now*, the film on Vietnam. 'It injects this mood into all such bourgeois ideologies as Zionism. Thus, the proportion of liberals steadily decreases, while fascist-style chauvinism is the fashion.' He quotes Professor Yishayahu Leibowitz, a spiritual Zionist who has courageously opposed Gush Emunim, the bigots who spearhead the colonization of the West Bank: 'Nowhere on earth are the Jews in greater danger

than in Israel: because of their policy of occupation.'

This mature attitude – which finds an echo in some of the more recent statements of Nahum Goldmann – has its most dramatic expression in the remark made by an Israeli about to leave forever to a young Palestinian. 'We Israelis of this generation envy you Palestinians, even if we do not all admit it. You at least have a cause: but our cause is dead.'

The inner collapse of Zionism was the first surprise of my visit to different parts of occupied Palestine; Esther, whom we shall meet in the next chapter, was also to mention an ex-conscript as saying: 'No point in filling this territory with cemeteries – I'm off!' – his motives compounded of shame and a desire for self-preservation.

The extent to which the Arabs are still in place, still resisting, still believing, was the second.

14
Safad

With two companions – a Jesuit priest who has lived thirty years in Japan and has written a book called *Silent Music*, and a bearded novelist from California who teaches comparative religion – I set out for Akko by way of Zefat – or Safad. But we only reach Safad, perched on a gaunt, limestone peak 2,790 feet high and looking down through forests at the lesser hills below. Like Tiberias, it is officially all-Jewish. Glossy pamphlets proclaim its once-Arab beauties under its Hebrew name: 'Zefat's quality of light and its endless charming vistas have made it an artists' haven. A warren of tiny lanes, broken here and there by carved or painted doors, has been taken over by some fifty painters and sculptors.' They have also taken over the town mosque for selling their art-work.

We park the car and follow a sign to the Artists' Quarter. We pass padlocked studios and enter the first gallery which is open and not hung with Diner's Club and American Express stickers. In a tiny room sits a sad-looking woman surrounded by pictures on the walls and in portfolios. Behind her are shelves of books on Sufism and Jewish mysticism. Her face lights up when she sees us come in, and her pleasure has nothing to do with money. She shows us none of her pictures, but at once starts talking. Of mixed German, Spanish and Polish descent, she is animated and

charming; she speaks excellent English. As she is deeply into Sufism, and our Jesuit into Buddhism, and the bearded novelist into Hinduism, and all four of us into talking, we talk. For the first time, one aspect of Israel becomes articulate to me.

Esther is also a poet in Hebrew and German, as well as being a trained psychologist. She has studied Arabic in Haifa and claims to be an unashamed 'dove'. Her favourite place in Jerusalem is the Dome of the Rock. She was meditating there one day when two Palestinian women in peasant dresses, one completely blind, came in to pray. She made to move off. 'Don't go,' said the Arab woman. 'We know you are Jewish but you are also a mother, as we are. We want to end all this killing.'

When I ask her if this ghetto of artists is a good idea, she is emphatic.

'It is a monstrous idea. The artists – my ex-husband is one of them – are consumed with jealousy and talk only of prices. Never of art. Besides, hardly anyone comes here in winter, and people are leaving all the time.'

Yerida casts its shadow everywhere.

'Safad,' she says, 'is a small city where no one smiles – it is a nationwide depression.'

'What about you, then?' I ask.

'I want to leave too. Where to? Jerusalem, if I am to stay in Israel, or Spain.'

She telephones her only two friends in Safad, a former American rabbi and his wife. They at once invite us to 'a simple Israeli lunch', which turns out to be *felafel* and *hummus*. The rabbi is short and conservative. His wife is plump, gentle, highly intelligent, and with the eyes of a saint. Both live by a faith in the God of Sinai. We eat a simple meal, the best kind, since offered in the most spontaneous spirit of hospitality. Because there is no meat, we can drink milk with our coffee. Their generosity is simple and unaffected, and the rabbi introduces the meal with a Hebrew grace.

Esther's friends live in a truncated version of a Connecticut villa. Her pictures hang on the walls. It is cold – Safad is truly a hill-town – as we discuss the kind of topics usual in Western academic circles. Is dualism perhaps out of date in Western academic circles? Anyway, that is what the Californian novelist

broaches. The rabbi is dogmatic, assured, but a man of faith and, in streaks, of that humour which Esther admits is lacking in an Israel where 'we live between wars'. He readily grants that one must either believe in two powers (for good or evil), or one; if in one, as Jews do, then one must accept that the one power is in some way responsible for evil. Question, then: can God be responsible for evil? The solution to this notorious conundrum is to translate the Hebrew word for evil as 'excess'. When a creature steps beyond his limits, or beyond the divine limits, he is in excess – a fascinating insight into what is impressive about the Jews: their delight in the intellect, their simplicity, their piety, their subtlety.

But then I drop the fatal word, 'Palestine'.

The rabbi's wife looks worried. Her natural sweetness of expression consorts with her remark: 'We hate being occupiers.'

But the rabbi is evidently a 'hawk'. Instantly the trained polemicist appears and, to the alarm of the Jesuit and the novelist, I counter.

He: 'We seem to have only two choices. Either we annex the West Bank, as many of us would like; but then in ten years our Jewish State will have an Arab majority – they breed faster than any other group on the planet. Or we allow some kind of independent State there, which will be a permanent menace.'

I compress his argument a little, but never once – learned, good, even humorous as he is – does he seem to see that this preferable course of annexation means, from the Palestinian point of view, loss of land and livelihood.

'In any case,' he says, 'how do you determine land-ownership?'

'By title-deeds. The Arabs have them.'

'Since when?' he asks.

'Documents, anyway since the British Mandate.'

'A lot has happened since then. Wars mean changes. Wars mean loss of lands. In 1947, we must admit, there was a population exchange. Six hundred thousand Arabs went out; six hundred thousand Jews came in from Arab countries. We document and custode; they don't.'

'But they were made to leave. Deir Yassin. . .'

Says the rabbi, 'I have written a chapter on Deir Yassin. The British CID falsified the figures.'

'A Swiss representative of the International Red Cross testified to two hundred and fifty-three killed.'

'They were Arab fighters.'

'They were women and children.'

'Women and children get killed in wars. They were harbouring fighters.'

'Deir Yassin was part of the Arab State.'

'We had to open the road.'

Civil but intense, we argue on lines that never converge, but when his innocent wife says there had been sniping at Jewish cars, he concedes that the people of Deir Yassin had previously got on well with the Jews.

'How many do you think died?'

'Not more than two hundred.'

'And then the Irgun paraded the survivors?'

'It depends how you look at it. They were certainly put into trucks and driven through Jerusalem. You could say paraded – or you could say they were driven to safety in East Jerusalem.'

The impasse is total.

When I say, 'Why not settle for a united Palestine with all its citizens having equal rights?', he says, 'Show me one Arab State where minorities co-exist with Muslims.'

I point out, Egypt with its eight million Christians, for one.

'But the Copts are unhappy,' he says.

'Only thanks to outside meddling. As an instructed man you must know that in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians were known as the "faithful *millet*" – until outsiders deliberately worked them up.'

I wonder to myself when I shall ever meet an Israeli who will say: 'We Jews suffered terribly in Europe. We came here because it was the only refuge we could see and, in the process of surviving, harmed the Arabs. Now we want to be reconciled, to make what amends we can.' But the attitude always is: 'This is our land, and Arabs who don't move out are criminals who deserve to be liquidated.'

But the Jesuit himself intervenes when the rabbi taxes the Palestinians with resorting to violence: 'But violence isn't just throwing bombs by individuals. As in Central America or South Africa, when the State embodies oppression, can the oppressed

do other than strike back?'

He tells me afterwards that at first he had thought it unwise of me to take up the argument, but changed his mind in the course of it. The rabbi, he said, was living in a dangerous dream-world and should know what people thought in the world outside.

The mention of Central America seems to give the rabbi an unspoken twinge of regret for the carefree abundance of his native USA. What he actually says however is: 'From 1967 to '74, we were an independent country. It was a wonderful feeling. Then 1974 taught us the speed with which modern arms are used up, and therefore our need for an arms pipeline. We lost our independence.'

To which his wife added: 'We were also far too arrogant. God punished us.'

Melancholy descends on all.

As we say goodbye, the painter sighs: 'Safad is a place where nobody smiles.'

But I get a smile as I fill my tank with expensive petrol. Unconsciously I break into Arabic and am answered in the same language. The man with the smile, like the rabbi's maid (whom he invariably addresses in Hebrew), comes into Safad daily from a nearby Arab village.

15

The Golan Heights

Tiberias shuts down at sunset and from the darkened western shore of the Sea of Galilee one sees the twinkling lights of the settlements with which Israel has covered the Golan plateau. These fortified, wire-entangled strongholds are strategic, not agricultural, in intention; they are one factor in the overspending which has given the Jewish State the highest inflation rate in the world.

By a curious irony I pass the long evening reading one of the books on Hitler's Germany which crowd the shelves of Israeli bookstores. *The Face of the Third Reich* by Joachim Fest describes the Nazi policy for settling and subduing Eastern Europe. It surely gives the source for much Zionist practice:

> A widespread network of defensive villages was also envisaged, not merely to make it possible for members of the Order, the 'New Nobility', to maintain their dominant position by force of government, but also to re-establish the ancient contact with the soil . . . Himmler described as 'the happiest day of my life' the day on which Hitler gave his consent to the plan for the creation of soldier-peasants.

There is little that angers Zionists more than to be compared to the Nazis. Yet here the parallel is complete. The only difference

is, as I have said before, that Hitler preferred to dispossess the Poles and Ukrainians without an audience of tourists. The main bus-station at Tiberias advertises thrice-weekly tours of the Golan Heights. I buy two tickets and next morning an orange bus does the round of the hotels, picking up would-be visitors to Occupied Syria. The bus is less than half full and we are a motley collection: a party of English Jews, an Irish Jesuit, another Jesuit, a couple from Brighton, an American priest, the Californian novelist, my mother and myself.

Our guide introduces himself on the microphone and starts a day-long monologue of propaganda. It soon ceases to inspire confidence, not only because he puts such an event as the Islamic conquest in the wrong century, but because everything the Arabs do or have done is backward or wicked while everything Israel does is wonderful and well-intentioned. Assuming that his audience is entirely ignorant, he asserts that the country is and always has been Israel: he even refers to Napoleon's 'conquest of Israel'. When the Irish priest points to a group of black basalt houses lacking roofs or windows, he replies without blinking:

'Early Jewish village from two thousand years ago.'

They are, of course, Arab houses emptied in 1948.

When some years ago the Syrians hanged Eli Cohen, a Jewish spy, in Damascus, the Western media protested at a miscarriage of justice. Our guide boasts that Cohen informed the Israelis of a typical act of Arab stupidity: the Syrians had planted clumps of eucalyptus round all their gun-emplacements, making it easy for the Israelis to destroy them in 1967. As the bus mounts the steep plateau, we are given a lecture on how the Israelis cultivate 'their' land right up to the frontier wire. At Kuneitra, for example, their ploughs are at work close to the western limits of a city which, although handed back under the disengagement agreement of 1974, is still largely empty. What we are not told is that the Israelis, thanks to Kissinger, kept the entire land on which Kuneitra depended. Nor, of course, are we told of the large-scale destruction of ordinary houses before they moved out, nor of the mass-desecration of Syrian graves by the occupying Israelis. The Syrian Christians were accustomed to burying their dead in their daily clothes and with their personal ornaments. In the days when Cairo still cared about such things, the

Information Department had shown all foreign journalists a Canadian film showing grave-desecration hardly equalled since Pharaonic times.

As we pass a landscape as wild as the Yorkshire moors, dotted here and there by the crude settlements of the occupiers, the novelist asks if there had been no Arab villages on the Golan?

None, says the guide. The Syrians had cleared the whole area of everyone and everything, keeping it exclusively for military training. Only four Druze villages are left.

This sums up the main thrust of Israeli propaganda. It follows the thesis worked out by Abba Eban, that the Middle East should be balkanized, that is, divided into tiny, separate groups, each hostile to the other but all held in check by the Israelis, who would play the same role in the Middle East as the Ottoman sultans had two hundred years before. The chief obstacles to this policy are, nationally, the overwhelming majority of Sunni Arabs, and, politically, all those with progressive or modern ideas. The Palestinians, who largely combine the two elements, are an obstacle demanding physical liquidation: most Israeli propaganda is designed to show the prime victims of Zionism as those to blame for all the problems of the Middle East. Thus, to us foreigners, the guide keeps up an affectionate patter about, first, the Druzes, and later in our tour, the Lebanese Christians – whom he identifies exclusively with the right wing of Major Haddad.

We pass a Druze village where children are playing outside a school exactly as they play in Syria, Jordan or Iraq. But our guide stops the bus as if we were to examine a zoological specimen. We are told that until 1967 they had no light, no water, no school. Now, thanks to the Israeli big brother, their houses are roofed and they learn to read.

'Arabic or Hebrew?' asks a tourist.

'Although they are not Muslims,' says the guide, 'their culture is Arabic.' He tells us that they still own several rich valleys. But strangely, despite the protestations that the Druzes want to assume Israeli nationality (energetically denied by the leading Golan Druzes two days later, who affirm that they are Syrian citizens under an unwanted occupation), all the signposts and notices are written in Hebrew. And the Druze villages are

heavily outnumbered by Israeli settlements. There is even a new Israeli capital of Golan, situated near a conveniently discovered ancient synagogue.

'Yet Israel would love to evacuate the Golan,' the guide claims. 'Only two things deter us: a brotherly concern for the Druzes and fear of the fanatics in Syria: not at all like the Great Sadat.'

The north-west corner of the Golan, just before the plateau slumps into the Huleh depression, reminds me of T.E. Lawrence. He visited this area on foot when an Oxford student and found much to admire. But our tour permits us only brief glimpses of places of interest. We see a squalid ski village, empty of all life, just below Kasr Nimrud, which we do not visit as it is filled with soldiers. We stop for a bad cafeteria lunch at Banias and just have time to see the cave where the pagan god Pan was thought to direct the stream which forms one of the headwaters of the Jordan. But our guide is in a hurry to make a new propaganda point. This involves a lengthy detour to Metulla. An undistinguished town, Metulla was founded as long ago as 1896 by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, a Jewish financier with none of the modern Israelis' claimed concern for their Druzi brothers. He selected particularly ruthless settlers to dominate the warlike Druzes of the region. But since the Lebanese Civil War, Metulla plays an important role in Israeli public relations. It is known as The Good Fence. For here the frontier with Lebanon – the closing of which in 1948, according to the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, cut the pioneer township off from the best land – is open. Or if not with Lebanon, then with that strip of Lebanese territory which, with Israeli direction and American arms, has formed itself into a dissident state, recognized by Israel only, to serve the purposes of Zionism. The Good Fence is marked by notices forbidding photography, and stalls selling trash. Once more the Israelis manifest a zoological approach to their protected neighbours. They have constructed, as in some of the more progressive European zoos, concrete observation pads from which foreigners may quietly watch the contented natives crossing into Lebanon after a day's work in the factories of Israel. For the inhabitants of this luckless strip have joined the Arabs of Gaza and Galilee in serving, under monetary pressure, the plantation

economy of a state the manpower of which is largely devoted to defence, the diamond and aircraft industries and the black market. The Good Fence symbolizes the general Israeli policy of uniting all those elements in the Middle East who are willing to oppose Arabism, Islam and any form of progressive democracy. But the truth becomes transformed on our guide's lips. If we believed him, we should picture the Lebanese as living in a state of medieval poverty until the Israelis brought them water, electric light and, in all probability, the alphabet. As an Arab put it to me later: 'To judge from their propaganda, the Israelis must indeed be geniuses. They have only occupied the West Bank for thirteen years and already we have lost our tails.'

But to my surprise, this propaganda nauseates even those whom the guide thinks gullible. The American priest has seemed to listen passively throughout the tour. Unlike the Irish Jesuit and the Californian novelist, he has asked no awkward questions. But as the bus returns to Tiberias and the party of English Jews continue their ranting about backward Arabs spending the whole day squatting on the ground, he leans forward and says to me and my mother in a stage-whisper:

'I know it's usual on these occasions to tip the guide. But do you see any reason why we should pay him for his load of propaganda? I don't intend to give him a shekel.'

16

The new road

I have described the military settlement of the Golan Heights and the political intrigues focused on Metulla as they evidently pose important questions about Israel's strategy – and the strategy of the superpower which underwrites it. The financial cost of the military infrastructure is surely rivalled by the political cost of so evidently supporting a regime in open rebellion against the authority, not only of the Lebanese government, but of the international community. Yet both Israel and the US obviously see the physical and moral expense as justified.

A key to the strategy lies in a dramatic change to the landscape of Galilee.

On our return from Metulla, just south of Rosh Pinna, where the map shows the road to the coast going west by way of Safad, I glimpse from the bus a wondrous new highway. How puzzling! My touring map of Israel, the latest, produced in 1979, does not mark this highway either as an existing fact or even as a project. I decide to inspect it next day.

It dawns: a day of dramatic stains of rain across the Lake, giving moments of exquisite, shimmering pearl, tinfoil, opalescence, followed by moods of grey and gloom – just right for a change of scene and a visit to Akko (otherwise Acre).

The new road runs, a superb engineering achievement, right through the Galilee hills to hit the Mediterranean at the ancient Crusader port of Acre. The road is plainly the work of the same

US engineers, the product of the same disregard for cost, as has covered the difficult landscape of Anatolia with highways, making it possible for the Americans to rush armed forces anywhere in Turkey that suits their purpose. Suitable in all weather, capable of carrying the heaviest transport, the highway makes no economic sense in the context of the small-scale production of the Golan settlements and the townships along the Sea of Galilee's western shore.

The road has three obvious justifications, one political, the other two military.

A law recently passed by the Knesset was entitled 'Law for the Judaization of Galilee'. It shows the purely cosmetic functions left to the small-scale opposition groups in the Israeli parliament (including the Arab members) that all they were able to achieve was a name-change to 'Law for the Development of Galilee'. No one is under any illusion that the 'Development' in question is the development of Jewish settlement and the eradication of the Arab presence, or at least its curtailment and eventual asphyxiation. For the visitor to Galilee soon sees that, thanks to the courage of the Arabs who stayed behind, and to the natural fertility which the Creator has bestowed on them, Galilee's Arab character is still powerful. The new road cuts clear through a belt of almost continuous Arab villages. Their minarets and architecture rooted in the soil stand out in striking contrast from the settlements that merely underline how alien the Israelis are to this particular countryside. The vast, age-old plantations of olives remind one constantly that theirs is an invading presence, not among nomads in some backward aboriginal reservation – hard enough to justify to upstanding conservationists today, one might suppose – but among the direct descendants of people who were going about their settled and civilized business in the time of Jesus and as long again before that.

The new road undoubtedly owes a part of its appeal, to Israelis at least, to the way in which it bisects Galilee and breaks up what would otherwise be an embarrassingly continuous Arab zone – a zone awarded, as the world is encouraged to forget, to the Arab State in the 1947 Partition.

But as Miles Copeland remarked to me recently, the Americans do not share the Zionist passion for reforging histori-

cal links, real or imagined. The Golan Heights are important in American eyes for their strategic roles, not for the fact that a ruined synagogue has been found on the site of the new Israeli provincial capital. And it is the Americans, not the bankrupt Israeli State, who have footed the bill.

What precise role does this major new highway play in Israeli and American strategy?

A glance at an atlas provides the answer.

The highway's western terminal is Acre, until 1948 a purely Arab town of 12,000 inhabitants. (The Arabs are now confined in the Israeli equivalent of a Red Indian reservation, the old town. Although by 1948 most of Acre's inhabitants had migrated to new suburbs surrounding the town, they moved back into the walled city during Zionist attacks which added western Galilee to the Jewish-held area even before the British had surrendered their mandate. An Israeli law then decreed that all land or property abandoned during the struggle, even temporarily, became automatically the property of the Jews.) During the Crusader period, Acre had been the capital of Palestine. Its position at the north of the Gulf of Haifa, a port often suggested as a possible American base, is of obvious strategic value.

The highway's eastern terminal is a few miles north of the Sea of Galilee. It thus makes possible the rapid deployment of supplies of men and matériel from the Mediterranean to the very threshold of the Golan Heights. Avoiding Safad to the north and Arab Nazareth to the south, it provides a direct, uncluttered access to the area whose strategic importance outweighs, in American eyes, the political disadvantage of alienating, apparently permanently, those Arabs who object to foreign domination of their land.

The purposes for which the road could be used are defensive or offensive. If Syria should attempt to exercise the right to liberate its national territory, the Israelis and their friends could quickly reinforce the 'network of defensive villages' which the 'New Nobility of soldier-peasants' have erected on the Golan Heights. Syria's ability to liberate her territory, already complicated by the defection of Egypt, is thus made more hazardous by the knowledge of the speed with which the occupying forces could be reinforced.

But the odds against the road being used for defensive purposes are considerable. In the four wars which the Zionists have fought against the Arabs, only the war of 1973 was in any sense defensive, though then Israel was 'defending', on both her two fronts, territory which did not belong to her. But in 1947/48, 1956 and 1967 the Jewish State was as clearly the initiator of the conflict as she was its beneficiary. The so-called War of Independence, dated by Israel to 1948, in fact started before the withdrawal of the British and was marked by the seizure of western Galilee, a part of Palestine awarded to the Arabs. No one now denies that in 1956 Ben-Gurion colluded with Britain and France in the attempt to regain control of the Suez Canal, and most historians would admit that in 1967 it was Israel who struck the first blow. It was therefore reasonable to conclude that those who built the Galilee highway from the Mediterranean to the Golan Heights had offensive, not defensive, actions in mind.

The evolution of the Middle East during the coming years, or even months, will clarify the question. If the Zionist hawks in Washington prevail, it is likely that massive interference in the Gulf could be accompanied by a thrust towards Damascus. Such a thrust would facilitate an updated version of the plan for the *tamzeeq* and *tafkeek* or (in plain English) dismemberment of Jordan, discussed in earlier days by Ben-Gurion with President Eisenhower.

Acre Old Town – someone says it now encloses ten thousand Palestinians – shows a majority now becoming a minority: overcrowded, hopeless, inward-looking, untrusting. A few places only benefit in this reservation – a tourist shop, a restaurant – but outside are the substantial houses seized on the pretext of 'abandoned property' when their Arab owners fled within the walls, and to which, as I have already said, they are forbidden to return.

As we walk, we see advertised a 'Museum of Heroism' in the Acre Citadel.

'Archaeological?' I ask a surly Israeli reading, open-legged in a chair, a Hebrew newspaper.

'No, the story of the Jewish resistance.'

Another Israeli tries to sell me a ticket, but the first deters him: 'Don't bother with this one' . . . To me: 'It's a political museum.'

An anti-British museum, in fact.

On our return from Akko to Safad, we get lost in a rain-fog as thick as a London pea-souper. In the curious half-light, the trees take on a positively Austrian look. How strange that this city, of all cities, seems glum and dying. I want to visit Esther, the artist, both to ask her if she minds being named in this book and to thank her for the hospitality of her friends, the Rosens,

She is at home, crouched over the red dome of one of those kerosene heaters, 'fireside', we used to have in Baghdad. 'Either I freeze,' she says, 'or crouch too near the fire and fall asleep. These Arab houses, though tarted up outside with something of an Andalusian look, inside are pokey and comfortless. The whole idea is so *voulu*, so contrived. Gossip, jealousy, tourist art are all that can be predicted from such places; their true emblems are the Diner's Club notices on the doors.'

'I hope I wasn't too frank with the rabbi – whose goodness is evident.'

'On the contrary – we were too tired afterwards to go to Tiberias. Your visit was so engrossing, we talked and talked about it for ages afterwards. What I said was: "How wonderful for four people to meet and discuss these matters, deep, divisive matters, from totally opposed standpoints, yet in an entirely civilized manner! If only all disputes could be so discussed, we would be nearer solutions." '

Just as I finish saying that I found the rabbi's wife to have the qualities I associate with a saint, she arrives: 'Not talk of the devil, but the opposite.'

We, Esther and I, say politics are a curse.

'But no game,' says Mrs Rosen. 'They concern matters for us of life and death. The basic tragedy is two peoples claiming one country.'

'And neither accepting, emotionally, the claims of the other,' I say.

'Are you at all involved in Ireland?' she asks. 'Sometimes I think such things can be approached by way of analogy.'

'My mother is of half-Irish descent,' I say, 'but I feel no commitment to the rancour; only a wish that they would stop killing one another.'

'But it does show how people ferociously divided can do atrocious things to one another.'

No doubt about that.

I conclude to myself: If we grant such a double pull, we are all bound, or liable at least, to take some kind of side; Christians of the Scotch Hospice type are influenced by the Chosen People idea and the prophesied return; I myself, disgusted with colonialism, am totally inclined the other way. But in that case, and if integration cannot work, or at least not now, then there must be a balance of loss and gain. One of the two will at utmost peril attempt to impose a totality of control, since if the situation enabing him to do this were to alter, his adversary might inflict one of those particular horrors in which Jewish history abounds. I think of the Arch of Titus in Rome and the coins with the inscription *Judaea Capta*. In 1947–8, the Arabs were poor, ill-led, divided; the USA controlled the United Nations, in which Afro-Asia was represented by Ethiopia, Liberia, India, South Africa and Egypt; the Jews were largely Europeans, with Canadian and American volunteers. Ineluctably that situation changes: the Arabs, first, are no longer poor; soon they may be provided with a truly convincing leader; and what if the USA finds her interests lie elsewhere – as, for less economic reason, she has already found with China/Taiwan?

The conclusion to be drawn: to work for a generous, accepted peace *now* is the work of a well-wisher of the Jews in Palestine. A neo-Nazi would advise them to be as intransigent as possible, the effect ultimately being to turn Palestine into a mousetrap for the Jews, as the rabbi Joseph S. Bloch warned Herzl as long ago as 1895.

Looking back, I see my talks with Esther and the Rosens as the highlight of my experiences in Israel: the value of articulation, of spiritual and cerebral exercise, of an inner life in which certainties spring from anguish. If only – what grammatical optimism! – a fusion or co-existence could occur, what values the Jews would contribute, on this level, to a State wherein dispute could be allowed and a law protecting all be upheld. But against this, the gun of the fanatic. Just as, on the Arab side, there is a failure to project oneself into the skin of others. When did one find an Egyptian *really* concerned about Gaza, Soweto or Vietnam? What Middle Eastern writer has chosen, successfully, a non-parochial theme?

17
Universities

22 January

Time for a change of terrain, time too for preliminary inquiries about plane reservations. So, leaving Mother behind in Tiberias with her sketchbook, I set off, beautiful sunshine following me all the way to Tel Aviv, where I drive to 54 Basel Street, a shuttered residential fortress with the Egyptian flag furled round its flag-staff in embarrassment. This Egyptian embassy is very security-conscious. It has one window for Israeli applicants, another for 'other nationalities'. A shuttered door on the street leads into the embassy proper, where a few ex-commandos look nervous and unhappy.

There is chaos and mess in the VIP suite, where brusque manners are shown. I am led to a chair, then asked to vacate it for someone else. A young girl takes pity on me and advises me how to thread my way through the confusion to the air-booking department on a different floor. The answers I get there are quaintly indefinite as regards a direct flight to Egypt, ally now of Israel though it be. Would I be in touch again tomorrow? As I shall be spending the next few nights in Jerusalem, that should be convenient enough – by telephone.

On my way out, I run into the same nice girl and ask her which is the best way to drive out of Tel Aviv. She says it is almost

impossible, and so it proves as I lose myself in 'Yaffo', an old town half-devoured by a new one. Yet, in days gone by, Jaffa was the centre of Palestinian culture. I get lost in endless shoddy suburbia and am several times wrongly directed on how to get out of it. Nobody cares particularly, except me. Finally an elderly Israeli who speaks a little German accepts a short lift from me and guides me rightly through. A bit of luck, as I am on the wrong road, heading for Latrun with an almost empty tank.

On reaching Jerusalem, I get lost again and find myself nearly in Bethany before I realize my mistake and turn round. When near the Wailing – or West – Wall, the yellow light starts to flicker on the dashboard and an urchin, mahogany-skinned and with long unkempt hair, offers to show me a petrol-pump or even to fetch me petrol – an Arab.

'Where are you from?' he asks.

'Egypt,' I say, since I live there most of the time.

'I love Sadat.'

'I don't.'

'Of course he's a traitor. Still, peace is good.'

'Of course.'

He takes another look at me.

'You're not Egyptian,' he says.

'No, I'm an English writer *from* Egypt.'

'England best writing,' he says.

The degraded conversation continues. I buy petrol. He then pilots me to Salahaddin Street. I tip him just under a dollar. Demand for more. Then:

'You are no good.'

This is what happens in a national bondage-situation . . .

In the American Colony Hotel, all is peace. The Swiss manager invites me to take a glass of white wine. He knows, but a lot of his clients evidently don't, as witness the exchanges that now follow.

A German couple come in and join us. She, characterless and pretty: 'Wherever I go I have a knack of making local friends.' She ascribes every personal problem that arises as due to her sense of guilt over being German. She then surprises me by commenting on the backwardness of the Armenians. Ambiguously, I say, 'If true, they must feel very sad.'

'But no, you are wrong. In this hotel, everyone's charming.'

'Because every single person is Palestinian.'

' At the desk? Impossible!'

The manager confirms the fact.

'I suppose,' she says, 'the Palestinians feel like the Boers in South Africa; they've taken the land and don't want to give it up.'

I am dumbfounded.

Friday, 23 January

My cold kept me awake with nose-bleeds. Then an hour spent in making plans for getting out, via Egypt or straight to England. Then a visit to the Palestinian Press Office, where I meet vivacious Raymonda Tawil, the author of *My Country, My Prison*. She had been in prison with Hind. Anne Lesch got her out. Muhammad Batrani is in the office too; he works (as I said before) at the Arab Electricity Company which, employing about four hundred people, is the largest employer of labour in East Jerusalem. I lunch with Raymonda, her husband and six teenage girl-students – a jolly party.

But their days are eaten up by the cerebral side of this struggle, this outwardly hopeless struggle in which nearly every activist is either confined to his town or held under administrative detention for periods of up to three years, by virtue of a regulation used by the British in colonial days and in those days heartily denounced by the Zionists. The courage of those who stay; the understandable motives of those who leave; and the exasperation of those who struggle. For example, Anne Lesch, whom I last met more than five years ago at lunch at the British Embassy in Cairo. She has just written and published *Political Perceptions of the Palestinians of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip*. She went through what seem to be the normal hoops. The book was commissioned by Robert Prager of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, which is apparently Big Business and not the CIA. She was given $500 for research, with promise of another $500 on completion. She completed the MS by the deadline. O.K., she could have the remainder due if she would accept some editorial changes proposed by two readers. She agreed and made them. Then the palpable silence. The refusal to answer the phone. The intermediary voice: 'Mr Prager

objects to your non-use of terms like "terrorist" to describe the PLO' – though Anne, who in her time worked with the Quakers, had paid due attention to violence in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Finally Prager himself agreed to speak, saying it was a sensitive moment and her book could damage the autonomy talks between Israel and Egypt. Realizing that no amount of editorial changes would ever be adequate, once having twigged that Prager had developed cold feet about a scholarly but cogent study of how pressure-groups affected foreign policy in the Middle East, she sent her book to the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C., who published it immediately.

As against this pathetic sort of pusillanimity on the part of someone who in these sad controversies might wield more clout than most, I am impressed by the high standard of debate, and certainly of acute polemic, maintained in *The Jerusalem Post.* Today (23.1.81), for instance, Shmuel Katz tears to pieces Chaim Herzog's flattering references to Anis Mansour (see above, Chapter 12) and quotes a February 1972 contribution by 'the philosopher and poet of stature' to *Al-Akhbar*: 'They have what they call Passover, the feast of unleavened bread, which is celebrated by bleeding a non-Jew . . . The rabbi himself does the butcher's work. This is the nature of our enemy.' He quotes *Le Monde* (21.8.73) for a fuller translation in which Anis Mansour acclaims Hitler as 'a genius, the value of whose anti-Semitic policy, history is now beginning to prove'. A neatly researched article, and spot on.

Yet, curiously, the same edition of the paper publishes a windy and worthless effusion by Muhammad Shaalan, 'Professor of Psychiatry at Al-Azhav (*sic*) University in Cairo': all claptrap and bogosity, larded with preposterous quasi-technical terms. He describes his visit to Israel as 'an act of individuation'. On reading this, I am transported back a quarter of a century to the senior common-room in Baghdad, where 'Doctors of Educational Theory' from Columbia (not the university, as it turned out, but a degree-factory) would hold forth at suffocating length on 'the conceptualist approach to higher studies' or some such fashionable twaddle of the day . . .

What alarms the impotent watcher of the political situation and

the equally impotent reader of *The Jerusalem Post* is the acceleration of Zionist settlement of the West Bank – new land has just been confiscated at Jenin, for instance – to create 'facts'; as had been the strategy from the start. Thus any Labour Government succeeding this one, whatever its wishes, will have its hands tied, being faced with a choice of *either* uprooting Jewish settlements in Judaea and Samaria, *or* having no peace of the kind that Arabs of any sort could live with.

24 January

It is a truism that the lonely develop verbal diarrhoea: landladies, the unmarried, drinkers in unfrequented bars. In Palestine one of the anguishes is that the sympathetic visitor unleashes torrents. *I know about Balfour* or *Deir Yassin* might be the title of any Palestinian's autobiography . . .

Much has seeped even into the Western press about individual acts of oppression under Israeli occupation. These range from the torture of young men in Israeli gaols, the shooting of girl-students in the legs, to the blowing up of thousands of houses belonging to families whose children have thrown stones at passing jeeps. Less commented on, but to the Palestinian community no less wearing, is the dull daily pressure on their surviving institutions.

The most flagrant example – and because it has occurred in Jerusalem, the least easy to hide – has been the attempt by the Israeli government to take over the concession of the Arab Electricity Company. The aim here is obvious: to integrate the West Bank into the electricity system of Israel. Such a new 'fact', apart from being highly profitable to a Jewish company, would reduce still further the shadowy autonomy towards which the Camp David talks between Israel and Egypt are supposedly directed. As the Arab Electricity Company is also the largest single employer in East Jerusalem, its takeover would increase the hardships of the Palestinians: some might be tempted to emigrate while the remainder would be poured into the pool of temporary labour on which Israel increasingly draws.

Less publicized, even in Arab media, are the daily struggles of two other types of institution: the institutes of higher learning and the one large Arab town which, at least until this year, has

retained the status of an urban municipality.

Palestine has the highest ratio of graduates to population of any country in the Middle East. A small proportion of these graduates come from the West Bank's three universities – but this proportion will have to increase, since the expense of educating young men and women abroad is considerable, while their absence gives the Israelis the opportunity, in many cases, to prevent their return.

Of these three universities, Bethlehem has suffered the least. There are two reasons. In the first place, the university concentrates on a course of study – hotel management – which is less dangerous to the occupiers than an academic course involving ideas. In the second place, Bethlehem comes under the Vatican, which has consistently opposed the appointment of a Palestinian or Arab dean, though a current move to have Archbishop Capucci appointed *in absentia* enjoys widespread support.

The other two universities – Bir Zeit outside Ramallah and Al-Najah in Nablus – are in the tradition of free inquiry which seems to alarm the Israelis more than anything else. The educational strategy of the Zionist State emphasizes once again its close affinities with racist South Africa. The only education with which the Israelis would feel comfortable would resemble that produced by the framers of the Bantu Education Act, which ensures that the South African blacks are educated at a tenth of the cost of the ruling race and to an inferior level.

Today, I want to visit Bir Zeit University. I drive up to Ramallah from Jerusalem feeling ghastly. A dusty mist over the ice-cold city has given me worse sinusitis than ever I suffer in Cairo: all night long my nostrils bleed.

To find Raymonda's house, once I get to Ramallah, she has suggested I make inquiries at any taxi company, which proves hard enough; but a big, solemn man in a huge taxi escorts me in my small Fiat to a large stone residence overlooking a valley of harshly beautiful, rocky declivities beyond which, to the west, are Tel Aviv and the sea. The house is typical of the Palestinian middle-class: on the walls, an idealized painting of a fierce hands-bound-behind-back male, *I am a Palestinian*. And Kipling's *If*. A glass verandah which must be lovely in summer. The utter gene-

rosity – taxi paid for, and also the lozenges and nose-drops I buy in town.

The road up to Bir Zeit leads through villages whose immaculate white stone contrasts with the ugly makeshift appearance of the Zionist settlements. Bir Zeit itself overlaps an entire (Christian) village much as the Artists' Quarter in Safad was supposed to overlap a segment of that formerly Muslim town. But whereas Bir Zeit lacks the credit cards which symbolize for me that desperate ghetto, the whole place smiles. It is small-scale and intimate. Its four faculties are dispersed through rustic-style buildings, though an impressive new campus is almost finished on the outskirts. Ramzi Rihan, a physicist who has been in charge of administration for the last ten years, gives me a few statistics. Of the approximately 1,700 students, forty per cent are women. Of the 150 teachers, around a quarter are expatriates, in some cases Palestinians who have returned from the diaspora, but also visitors from Europe and America. I see the students coming out of their cafeteria, a former church building. Rihan comments that the thing which both surprises and disturbs him about the students is how normal they are, how little they are deflected by an academic situation which must be unique in the so-called civilized world. Even at a casual glance they have a unity, a spirit, a morale that might be difficult to duplicate in most other Middle Eastern universities.

The university is secular, with no affiliation to any particular religious group. Yet this quality – which one would expect to impress the Israelis, if their own propaganda were true – only makes the occupying authorities more, not less, difficult. In particular, they play a cat-and-mouse game with the work permits and residence permits of teachers from abroad.

Perched on its beautiful hills, Bir Zeit is not however the oasis of peace it seems, but a lightning conductor. I had been unable to explore it last June – it was then on protest-strike after the assassination attempt on Bassam al-Shaka and his two fellow-mayors. Only a month before my visit last time, the TV screens of England and Europe had shown Israeli soldiers firing from rooftops at girl-students. The daughter of the university dean was among the victims. They were then protesting against a new law, 854, passed not by the Knesset but by the Military

Governor, which gives the military authorities total control over every aspect of academic life. By restricting those admitted to the university, as well as those teaching inside it, the obvious aim is to create a class of collaborators, not an educated generation. It is one further ironic footnote to the Camp David Agreements.

I meet two people of note in Ramallah: Dr Waheedi, who has been under preventive detention, and the Reverend Audeh Rantisi, the Anglican assistant mayor. The mayor himself, they tell me, is in constant pain from the injury done to his legs which are torn and ache.

Dr Waheedi tells me of a new refinement adopted by the Zionists while they destroy the houses of Palestinians (a destruction which incidentally is going on somewhere all the time). If a stone is thrown in protest, all males between the ages of fourteen and fifty are forced to stand out in the night air, the rain and bitter cold for eight hours at a stretch. Israeli journalists, to their honour, have protested about this. (Even Raymonda was beaten up by an Israeli officer and given a bloody nose for answering back.) I can hardly bear to listen. An interesting point: the Israelis now fear the moderates most. The step-by-step progression of opposition: extremists can be disarmed and isolated, but those who firmly take a little now and work for more later are in a sense adopting the same tactics as the Israelis themselves, working *dunum* by *dunum*.

A vignette of life in Ramallah: Rabbi Meir Kahane followed up the hooligan night of breaking one hundred and fifty cars and the verandah glass by addressing a rally, in which Israeli police defended him, not the entirely Arab population, as he screamed: 'This is only a first lesson to make you leave our country. Next, we shall kill you.'

The priest Rantisi, a dapper figure speaking exquisite English and married to an English wife, was one of the hundred thousand Palestinians evicted from Lod (Lydda) soon after the mandate ended: a fact which Rabin (Prime Minister before Begin) admitted in his *Memoirs*. Efforts were made to suppress these, but their contents were leaked by a progressive Israeli – again to whom honour is due. The evictions occurred like this: A knock

on the door. The occupants expect that the Israelis, like the British soldiers before them, will search the houses and that will be that. Meanwhile they are held under guard in the square, or in the church. But there is no return. They are stripped of all they possess and then marched away without food or water by back-roads for three days with the Israeli troops firing over their heads. One young man is killed for refusing to surrender his money. Such was the 'miraculous cleaning of the land, the miraculous simplification of Israel's task' applauded by Israel's first president, Chaim Weizmann.

And the results: just as the *yordin* emigrate, so do middle-class Palestinians. Ramallah is emptying. By the same token, influential communities of many thousands build up abroad in foreign cities, San Francisco for one. But even when the middle class departs, over his bare, challenging patch of earth stands a peasant who will *not* leave – unless under bullets.

25 January

My cold is still so terrible that I accept Raymonda's suggestion that I hire a car to go to Nablus. I eventually pay five hundred shekels for it and this includes driving back a girl-student and Lea Tsemel, a progressive young Israeli lawyer who is defending thirty-two students on a charge of demonstrating on campus against the new education law . . .

Bir Zeit may be future Palestine's Oxford: it already has the daily contact between the teachers and the taught which goes back, in one direction, to Plato's Academy, a garden in Athens; in another direction, to the medieval Islamic tradition where students gathered at the feet of their teachers in the teaching mosques of Baghdad and Cairo.

Al-Najah University in Nablus, as befits the largest and most politically conscious city in Palestine, is more like those universities which have shaped the political destinies of France or Italy. Originally a secondary school (when Bassam al-Shaka was one of its students), it is now a university with a student enrolment approaching two thousand. With the financial backing of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, it plans to have a student body of ten thousand by 1988: or about three thousand more than the Oxford at which I myself studied.

Meetings with the staff instruct me as to a few of the problems that exist already and will be sharpened by Law 854, if it is put into force.

1. The new law explicitly excludes from admission all those who have been gaoled for political acts. This would mean the loss to the university of its fifteen per cent most active and courageous students.

2. A censorship of all texts used in teaching or admitted to the library. The Vice-Principal, Mrs Rajda al-Masri, tells me one hardly credible example of what the Israeli censors find objectionable: the *Muqaddimah* of Ibn Khaldun. Written five hundred years ago, this pioneer work on the study of history and man in society was described by the late Professor A. J. Toynbee as 'undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever yet been created by any mind in any time or place'. Ironically, the best English translation is by Franz Rosenthal, a Jewish scholar.

3. A total ban on any book whose title incorporates the word Palestine. This applies equally to geographic works as to books published before the establishment of Israel in 1948.

4. Similarly, no map will be allowed which shows Palestine in its pre-1948 shape.

5. All university teachers are to be approved by representatives of the Israeli Military Governor.

6. No subjects are to be taught unless approved. A request to establish a Faculty of Agriculture has been repeatedly refused.

7. All plays performed by the students must first be performed in front of a military censor and must obtain his approval.

During my visit to the university, I learn from Lea Tsemel, who is undertaking the defence of the latest batch of students charged with illegal political activity – in this case demonstrating *inside* the campus against law 854 – one of the striking injustices which is common practice. Those arrested on a charge are forced to confess. If they do so, after threats and torture, they are let off lightly: but the next time they are arrested, they are permanently expelled from the university. But if they persist in denying the charge, they are given a prison sentence (which includes routine torture) and their families are forced to pay fines of around 7,000 shekels (approximately £350).

I ask Lea if she manages to get acquittals.

'Hardly ever in ordinary, run-of-the-mill, unspectacular cases.'

I am shown bullet holes in the entrance hall: the students demonstrated inside the campus: the soldiers shot through the gates. Neither press nor ambulance was allowed in.

I congratulate her on at least bridge-building between Jews and Arabs. She replies: 'The bridge is easy to build but few Israelis want to cross it.'

Yet despite these difficulties, Dr Muhammad Shadid, who is of Palestinian origin and obtained his degree in the USA emphasizes:

'Don't get a picture of complaints only. We are a very determined people. We will lay our bodies on the ground, we will pile ourselves by the campus gates, before we allow the application of a law which university people throughout the world should be denouncing too.'

The university is well equipped, though congested; but new building is going forward, paid for by the municipality, overseas Palestinians and Saudi Arabia. One individual has donated a splendid site of an engineering faculty. The Israeli authorities have given oral permission . . . but refuse to put it down in writing. The ground is ready but . . .

One academic says: 'If they were serious about wanting peace, they would welcome education, since a new secular mentality would emerge. But they want the Palestinians ignorant, as labourers, nothing more [as I saw in Galilee]. No national pride, no sense that Palestine has been theirs since Canaanite days: all this must be suppressed. The government-approved history courses emphasize Jewish activities in complete disregard of Arab continuity.'

Easy to deduce, in this context, why no agricultural faculty is allowed: the Zionists don't want qualified competitors.

I am struck by the overall seriousness which is accompanied by a smile. 'Though we are defenceless and they are armed to the teeth, they are scared of us.'

Another horrible aspect of occupation: it breeds mutual mistrust

among the occupied. At Nablus, for instance, it seems all wrong to me that my driver should have to eat his lunch in the car, given the solidarity of the oppressed, the brotherhood of Arabs and all that. The university staff agree: it would be undemocratic at the best of times. But they wonder whether I have chosen him by random selection, or whether he has been planted on me as an informer. If the latter, then as an informer on them too.

18

The Mayor of Nablus

I don't really consider myself a journalist. And perhaps my lack of professionalism is best shown in my interviews. I do not care for this particular form; I am conscious neither of excelling at it nor of preparing correctly for it. The only interview of which I am proud is the one I conducted with Gamal Abdul Nasser in 1957. This occurred on my second or third visit to Egypt when I was preparing my book *Young Egypt*, a study of the causes and effects of the Egyptian revolution, and which forms the climax and conclusion of the book.

'A wall, a guard, a door: and through the door, Nasser's house is visible, a moderate-sized villa, no more pretentious than a doctor's house in Surrey, with a lawn in front. A nurse is looking out of an upstairs window, holding a small child. As I go through the front door, I hear someone say in Arabic, "We have guests." I wait alone in a drawing-room and while I am sipping orange juice, a secretary comes in, and I follow him across the hall to Nasser's study.'

Such was the homely environment in which the *Rais* received me, and a meeting of hearts was the upshot.

Back in my hotel, the neat questions which I had typed before going are crawled over by spider traces of ink: new questions and their answers in hieroglyphics which puzzle me, their scribe. For

the plan I had imagined for the interview was incorrect. I had expected a formal half-hour, of silence punctuated by questions and deliberate answers . . . But I had arrived at five to twelve, and left at three. For the first hour Nasser had talked, warming up from a certain shyness to a swift interchange of thought.

At the end of the second enthralling hour, I said, 'One thing I would ask, please kick me out when you are tired of me.' And it was only then that I spread the typed questions on the table as a formal *aide-mémoire* for my own future reference. But the essence of the interview had been almost impossible to record: his amazing changeability of expression, for instance, his good humour, his conviction and sincerity. He sensed in me (I suspect) the warmth of a disciple, while I felt the excitement of a novelist who meets someone who justified his profoundest intuitions of a character in time and place. The result had been an incandescent experience certainly for me; who knows if not for him? And when on my return to Beirut, the fanatical Alan Neame put the question to me: 'Is this he that should come, or look we for another?', the reader may judge what reply I made.

There is no such warmth however between me and Bassam al-Shaka: only cordial Arab courtesy from his side and, from mine, respect – although, having been at the hospital the day he was half-killed, I am aware that I am talking to a man who is a living martyr: a man whose courage never deserted him, who emerged from anaesthesia and a loss hard to imagine, as a combatant, defiant. Although too, in his own way, al-Shaka is as much a symbol of the Arab struggle in its present phase as Gamal Abdul Nasser was in the 1950s and Feisal ibn Abdul Aziz in the mid-1970s. And whereas Nasser, whose eyes lit up when I quoted Swinburne to him, acted from a set of nationalist principles inherited from men like al-Afghani, Mustafa Kamil and Saad Zaghlul; and King Feisal from a passionate sense of Islamic solidarity; Bassam al-Shaka has been taught by direct personal suffering and daily contact with the oppression of his people.

The town hall at Nablus seems as crowded today as his hospital last June. I am welcomed into his office where, in front of a window revealing the city of minarets and stone-built houses, he is receiving a delegation of women. Middle-aged or elderly, they could be a Women's Institute from my own part of England,

except that these are mothers, aunts or cousins of young men tortured in Israeli gaols for the crime of demanding the independence which the United Nations has so often demanded on their behalf. The mayor's message to the women is emphatic: national unity is meaningless without organizations. He specifies trade unions and youth groups. 'Without these, national unity becomes as ineffective as an army without troops.'

He talks, not like an intellectual, but like a man whose experience has forged a statesman from the head of a borough council; a man simplified by physical loss into a spiritual force. This force is devoted to the struggle, longer and more bitter than any ordinary battle, for his people. This in part explains his hold. But to the women, to all those whose hearts can feel, it is impossible to watch this resilient, courageous man defending Arab Palestine from his Nablus desk and forget that the neat shoes, the trousered legs, conceal artificial limbs.

The women get up to leave. Their exquisite politeness includes me, whom they have no reason to see other than as the heir to those who officially opened their country to Jewish settlement. To reassure myself, as much as to ask a question, I suggest that the mayor will have seen the dramatic shift of attitude to Palestine in the West.

'There is a shift, but it is not nearly adequate. Talk, dialogue, the European initiative: useful, excellent sentiments, but without, so far, action. And I could see for myself in London how the Zionist apparatus still gets its way. A small bomb explodes in Paris and everyone protests. Vast crowds on the street. But when the Israelis murder more people in Lebanon, it is taken for granted.'

An interview I had with Miles Copeland for *Al-Majalla* just before I left for Palestine remains in my mind: 'Do you think that some Arabs see in Israel a bulwark for their interests and a defence against Soviet penetration?'

Mayor Shaka, who started his political life as a Baathist, is not of the type or class from which Communists recruit. But the question brings him to vibrant life.

'Any Arab must see that the chief danger to the Arabs comes from Israel. To the whole Arab world, not to us Palestinians only. We are simply on the front line. In the clash between the

superpowers, the Americans, not the Russians, are the proved danger. They are in Somalia, they are' – (the mayor's phrase) – 'in Sadat. To overlook this you would have to be blind or mad.'

Since President Sadat and his publicists often claim that his moves are supported by many West Bank notables, even if condemned by the absentee PLO, I ask the mayor if the Palestinians under occupation have benefited in any way from Camp David.

'The exact opposite. Camp David marked a new step in the continuing conspiracy against the Palestinian people, the conspiracy whose ultimate aim is our liquidation. The fashionable argument that Sadat has exposed Israeli intransigence convinces no one. Apart from the fact that no one who had studied the Israeli record needed such a new exposure, it is utterly trivial compared with the split in Arab ranks, and above all, the separation of Egypt from the rest of us. For we should not delude ourselves: the policies of Israel and America in the area are one and the same. The aim of Camp David was to give these two partners the chance and time to penetrate our area yet more fully, each in his own way.'

'Have you met any Egyptians from the regime since it became a simple matter to fly from Cairo to Tel Aviv by Nefertiti?' (This is the phantom airline established by Cairo to link Egypt and Israel.)

'I have refused to give a single interview to any journalist representing the Egyptian media. I refused, for example, to be interviewed by a journalist who came from *Al-Ahram*. We want to deal with the fixed pyramids of Egypt, not the shifting *Al-Ahram*.'

What did the mayor see as the next stage?

'Things will develop in accordance with the logic of the Palestine liberation movement and its organization. The European dialogue is no substitute for genuine movement.'

'And the much-discussed Jordanian option?'

'Simply one more trap set by those conspiring to liquidate Palestinian rights and the Palestinian identity. If it came to anything, it would be a tactical blow against the Arabs, serving the purposes of Israeli occupation.'

I tell him of my meeting with the American rabbi in Safad, and

his two choices: the clear-cut annexation of the West Bank, which would mean an Arab majority in Israel almost immediately, or a Palestinian entity permanently threatening Israel.

For the first time he laughs, and from the heart.

'You were lucky. You met a very intelligent rabbi – and a very faithful Zionist.'

'But what if those two choices conceal a third, which cannot be spoken. What if the settlements are strategic, not rhetorical? I mean, if they are being put up, as I have seen them all over the West Bank, not, as they claim, to define a right, but to extend possession?'

There is no laughter now, but no panic either; only the calm talk of one whose personal memory, to say nothing of the collective memory of his people, has seen hell and survived.

'That is indeed a dangerous possibility. It was the case before 1967 when the settlements in what is now "Israel" were strategic: key-points from which to organize mass expulsions. But even now the settlements have a function. The day-to-day brutalities of an occupation that is answerable to no one, and to which international protests are mere words, are intended to subdue our spirits, making life so difficult for Palestinians that they will be tempted to leave. For the permanent aim of Zionism is territorial and racist. As late as 1967 they practised a policy of racial uprooting in three villages – Beit Nuba, Yalo and Amwas – and also on the huge refugee camps established round Jericho. They emptied the villages and the camps by sheer brute force. Classical Zionist policy has not been modified. It has got more, not less, extreme. So a new policy of continued, large-scale eviction is by no means inconceivable. It fits their logic.'

19

Canada Park

28 January

The time has come for us to leave Tiberias and Palestine for home. As we drive south in brilliant sunshine through the beautiful West Bank hills, I consult a recent issue of the weekly *Al-Fajr*. Its front page marks the huge new areas officially set aside for Zionist settlement in and around Jenin. My mother and I play a game almost as far south as Nablus: whenever we see a stretch of rich, level ground, we exclaim, 'Ah, this is just right for a future settlement.' But we soon lose heart to continue. For, nearly every time, an embryo settlement is there already: the Star of David flaps over a disused Jordanian barracks or above the barbed wire and watch-towers that guard new clusters of prefabricated huts. Signs in Hebrew mark roads to new establishments. But never an Israeli working, that we can see. Perhaps in a white coat somewhere?

The rough, heavy work is all done by Arabs.

The Palestinians live under direct and open, not internalized and spiritual, oppression. They know precisely what their enemy is and who their friends are. But, because of thirty years of virtual Zionist censorship of the Western media, few Arabs outside Palestine realize the naked reality of Bassam al-Shaka's reference to uprooting and eviction. The mayor had referred to Beit

Nuba, Yalo and Amwas. I asked the young graduate who took me in to meet him if he would accompany my mother and me to see what had happened to the three villages, the bulldozing of which was described by Michael Adams in 1967.

As Michael reported at the time, the three villages of what was then known as the Latrun Salient were simply removed from the face of the earth.

The Israelis' pretext was as alarming as specious: security. For it was a question of each side threatening the security of the other. Between 1949 and 1967, Israel had, in fact, been repeatedly censured by the United Nations for what amounted to over-reaction and to wholesale massacre. Yet Israeli security has constantly been vaunted as overruling all other considerations: hence, for instance, the most 'dovish' Israeli on the horizon, Abba Eban, associated with the Labour opposition (*Time* Magazine, 2.2.81), proposes *eventually* to hand back seventy per cent only of the West Bank to any Palestinian State of the future.

On the map, Beit Nuba, Yalo and Amwas have now been replaced by something marked on the map as 'Canada Park', which gave my mother a particular reason for going. She had been born in Canada, a country which prides itself on its progressive record and which recently set the Western world a lead by demanding the removal of US nuclear weapons from its national territory.

After first visiting the ruins of one of the two houses belonging to our guide which the Israelis had blown up, we reached an area of quick-growing trees on the western edge of what had been the Jordan-held West Bank until the June War. So this is Canada Park! Traces of Arab houses, a piece of cut stone, a doorstep, are still visible among the trees. In clearings there are rustic benches for picnics; there is an adventure playground for Israeli children. Nothing survives of Amwas which the 1912 Baedeker identifies with the village where Jesus appeared to his disciples after rising from the dead. The Israelis have left, as a picturesque feature, but no longer as the *waqf* (or religious foundation) which it correctly is, the hilltop tomb of Sheikh Ibn Jebel who died two years after the Islamic conquest of Palestine from the Byzantines under Omar. An Israeli notice says he died of bubonic plague. The interior of the shrine is covered with Hebrew graffiti and the

floor with muck.

Canada Park confirms Bassam al-Shaka's allegations of Zionist power. The villages belonged to that part of Palestine awarded to the Arab State under the 1947 Partition Plan. Their lands were entirely Arab-owned. According to international law, no occupier is entitled to change the demographic character of a territory he temporarily administers. The Park was paid for, not by the Canadian government, but by the Jewish National Fund of Canada. Naming it Canada Park is as impudent an affront to an independent government as it would be for the Italian Communist Party to establish an 'Italy Park' on the ruins of bombarded villages in Afghanistan. Yet, so far as I know, no church has protested at the annihilation of a village intimately connected with the New Testament, and successive Ottawa governments have remained silent at the use of 'Canada' to cover a cruelly cynical act.

Down from the sheikh's tomb, no more now than an insalubrious gazebo or derelict viewing-point on its holy hill, and past the rustic benches, dispiritedly we wander. The dry leaves rustle and crackle underfoot in the deserted adventure playground. Canada Park is an emptiness: every house, street, mosque, every sign of life, has gone. Only the trees remain, dead leaves and angry ghosts.

No more sightseeing for us in this land of misrepresentation and oppression.

We have seen the plight of the Palestinians.

We have seen more than enough.

Epilogue
by Alan Neame

As the reader will have noticed, Desmond Stewart's Galilean diary for January 1981 contains a number of references to his health: sinusitis, allergies, colds, prolonged nose-bleeds. In editing his manuscript for publication, I have left them in, since they have a greater relevance than would at first appear. They were not, as it sadly proved, the passing trials afflicting the traveller in winter, but advance warnings of a fatal illness that struck him down two months later and ended his life prematurely in June the same year.

At his death, the manuscript account of his two visits to Palestine was complete, except for the twentieth chapter. According to a synopsis which survives, it was to have contained further diversions at the expense of the barricaded Egyptian Embassy in Tel Aviv and a description of his flight to Egypt on the semi-mythical airline Nefertiti: 'the delay while the new captain is trained'. Then, an analysis of current reactions in Cairo to the Egypt–Israel alliance and Camp David peace process: 'a new confidence, a feeling that Israel is, as Moshe Dayan says, a state, not a nation'. How this distinction was to be worked out is not expressed. But, taking up the key-words again, he noted: 'As a state, in many ways more progressive than its neighbours; but as a nation, a ragbag of neuroses. . .'

What was in his mind here, I know – since he explained to me on his sickbed. As a well-known and influential champion of the Palestinian cause, he had been impressed by the unrestricted freedom he enjoyed in Israel to go where he liked and talk to whom he pleased: in a word, to spend his time in an exclusively Arab milieu, to interview Arab patriots and to visit individual Palestinian victims of Zionist over-kill.

What also impressed him in Israel was the rigour of the parliamentary opposition: not one particularly helpful to the Palestinians, it is true, but capable nonetheless of curbing the ruling party in its worst excesses. His reflections on the new parliamentary alliance between Likud and the religious groups would have been worth hearing, had he lived. True Scot that he was, he would have felt satisfaction, like the sympathetic rabbi of Safad, at seeing Menachem Begin grounded on the Sabbath.

He was also impressed, as appears in his diary, by the freedom and vigour in controversy of the Israeli press: its willingness to protest against the government's often brutal treatment of its Palestinian subjects. Leaving aside the censorship imposed on the Palestinian press for a moment, where else, he asked, between Athens and San Francisco is free and lively journalism to be found?

And he was impressed and touched by the generosity, the clarity of vision, the intellectuality, the awareness of their moral quandary, that a number of Israelis, all chance acquaintances, had displayed. While acutely ill, he spoke about them with unaffected affection and respect: Esther the painter, Rabbi and Mrs Rosen, Lea Tsemel, the journalists, the blood-donors. He sympathized with them in their heart-searchings: What was to be done? His answer, given over and over again, and not without eloquence: Have faith, be reconciled, make amends.

As to the 'ragbag of neuroses', his text and the tragic history of the Jewish people speak for themselves. Those of us who are not Jews cannot begin to imagine the cumulative effect over the centuries of casual contempt, deliberate insult, imprisonment, torture, enslavement, proscription, sequestration, isolation, forced conversion, rapine, confiscation, deportation, expulsion and sudden massacre or sustained butchery. With such a traumatic past, what idealistic and dynamic people, escaping from

the house of bondage, might not over-act and over-react, driven by subliminal motives incomprehensible to a culturally distinct, conservative and predominantly peasant race, whose overlords these fugitives suddenly become? 'And what this means to a *fellah* people . . .' If we Europeans cannot imagine it, how much less can they at the Islamic end of the Mediterranean! Why us, the Palestinians ask in bewilderment, why for us the casual contempt, deliberate insult, sequestration, imprisonment, torture, plundering of our goods, confiscation of our lands, deportation from our homes, expulsion from our country, the terror, the massacre? What have we done to you?

They have asked for the last thirty-five years. Meanwhile, a new house of bondage has been created. And within it, and also outside it, a new Palestinian leadership has evolved in response to the challenge. Times have been bad, perhaps are to get worse; plots thicken to abolish Arab Palestine for good. 'Yet nowhere in the Arab world is morale higher.'

Such was to have been the substance of the concluding chapter and all the summing-up he intended, since his day-to-day experiences in Palestine, set down so vividly, hardly needed any further gloss. And indeed, his perceptiveness of problem and trend, his acuteness of observation and accuracy of reporting, have been amply demonstrated in the few months since his death.

The Arab mayors, for instance – obscure enough worthies, the reader might be tempted to think, on the world stage – have now emerged as key-figures in the negotiations for Palestinian autonomy: which is what the incessantly discussed Camp David peace process is all about.

And one of these three elected representatives mentioned in Chapter 5, Ibrahim Tawil, mayor of Al-Birah – the one who escaped the assassination attempt of 1980 – has now (in March 1982) been removed from office, ejected by Israeli soldiers from his town hall and placed under town arrest. This might seem, on the face of it, part of a consistent policy of suppressing influential individuals, in line with the virtual kidnapping of the mayor of Hebron and his expulsion from Palestinian soil. But in fact it marks a sharp escalation in the policy of repression, since not only has the mayor of Al-Birah been removed from office but the very municipality of Al-Birah has itself been disbanded.

Meanwhile, to make sure that the 'Palestinian autonomy' being discussed at international level should be as un-autonomous as possible, municipal elections all over the country have been postponed indefinitely, ensuring that there can be no democratic expression of the views of the Palestinians on how they should be governed; the National Guidance Committee (a vocal patriotic organization) has been outlawed, thus blocking another channel of self-expression; and every effort has been made to undercut the nationalistic influence of the larger Arab municipalities (that is, Nablus, Ramallah, Hebron, Al-Birah and Nazareth), by building up the fictitious prestige of what in England would rank as 'local authorities', the Palestinian equivalents of district and parish councils – which of their very nature are easier to intimidate and control.

The aim is thus to silence any expression of patriotic sentiment and, more particularly, all internal support for the Palestine Liberation Organization, at any level audible to the outside world, in the hopes that the 'Palestinian autonomy' ultimately endorsed as being acceptable by the parties to the Camp David peace process will be so void of content and so deprived of energy as to cause the Israelis no inconvenience whatever. And hence it would not be surprising if, before this book appears on the market, other – or even all – of the remaining twenty-four Arab municipalities have been dissolved after the inevitable demonstrations and general strikes that are the Palestinians' only means of expressing *en masse* their disapproval of their rulers' policies.

Or again, the reader might think his account of the ill-treatment of Arab travellers in Chapter 2, or of Arab school-children in Chapter 7, or of university students in Chapter 17, is exaggerated and partisan. But the Israeli government would not agree, having since endorsed the author's protests as not in the least unbalanced or overdone. Moshe Brilliant reports to *The Times* (12.8.81) from Tel Aviv:

'The new Israeli Defence Minister has ordered more considerate treatment of Arabs in the territories under military government . . . The purpose is to improve the atmosphere in order to encourage inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza to participate in the peace process . . . Soldiers have been ordered

to stop raids into West Bank schools, *which the local inhabitants had found offensive* . . . Soldiers at check-points searching for terrorists were ordered to treat *innocent* Arabs more courteously . . .' (My italics.)

So much for his treatment of the schools. What of the universities? Again his accuracy is borne out in the columns of *The Times* (19.3.82) – and in perhaps even stronger terms – in which Mr David Astor, Miss Elizabeth Monroe and others equally responsible and well informed on Arab and academic affairs protest over 'the plight of Arab students in Israeli-occupied territory, whose human right to education is effectively denied by Israeli authority, until recently in uniform, now in civilian dress'. The reference is to the transformation that the military controllers of Higher Education have recently undergone: they are still army officers, but now wear civilian clothes to perform their duties – a 'cosmetic' change, again for the sake of the outside world, but altering nothing in reality.

The authors of the letter make no bones about it: 'All Arab students', they say, 'suffer harassment', and they continue, very pertinently:

> But the 2,000 who attend the University of Bir Zeit seem to be singled out for special attention. Closed last November for two months and re-opened in January, Bir Zeit has now been closed again for a further two months on what are termed 'security' grounds.
>
> Tactics like this, coupled with frequent and arbitrary exercise of powers to accept or reject the appointments of lecturers, or to ban the importation of books, make it close to impossible to maintain satisfactory academic standards . . .

Like him, they pay tribute to those few but intrepid Israelis who are prepared 'to brave the tear gas' for the sake of victimized students and eroded standards of education.

Similarly, in an interview with Salim Jabran in Nazareth, which took place on 19 January, he reports the latter as saying:

'In Kissinger's day, the US sought to lessen its reliance on Israel as its sole Middle Eastern agent. It began to use Sadat and

others as colleagues in the superpower struggle against the USSR and national liberation movements in Africa and the Middle East. But Sadat presents too ugly a face for the US to rely on Egypt as an equal. The Israeli government, on the other hand, whatever its complexion, still enjoys the basic support of its people, unlike the regime in Cairo. This means that, in US eyes, Egypt is only an agent of imperialism, while Israel is a full, autonomous partner.'

Strong words, you might think, displaying extreme Palestinian bias. Yet six months later, Henry Brandon reports in the *Sunday Times* (17.8.81) as follows:

'In a letter handed to President Reagan, President Sadat has promised to provide the United States with "every facility" in any future crisis affecting the Arab or Islamic world . . . The two countries, in recent years, had been friends and collaborators. But after the delivery of the letter, the US and Egypt are now partners. Sadat said, "*In the past, Egypt served only as an agent. There is a great difference between being an agent and a full partner.*" ' (Again, my italics.)

The wording is uncannily similar, isn't it?

As for Sadat himself, whose assassination surprisingly took the Western diplomatic world unawares, he had predicted this as certain and imminent, though, since he resided in Egypt, he could not for obvious reasons say so in print. Never had the world seen such an example of a man of good will and reasonable intelligence being flattered to death. Suddenly and spectacularly raised to the heights of world-statesmanship by a combination of his own good nature, the gullibility of Washington and the opportunism of the Israelis, praised to the skies by the Western press as 'a far-sighted architect of peace', fêted as a political genius, Sadat had lost sight of what were, to the acute observer, the most obvious facts: that although his mastery of Egypt seemed unchallenged, he was well on the way to alienating the entire spectrum of Egyptian support by which he ruled. He could no longer trust himself to the streets of his traffic-jammed capital, but invariably overflew it in a helicopter . . . And with good reason: for if he could be sure of the glittering reception he would receive in America, he rightly mistrusted the reception he

might receive at home, where he was no longer liked or even grudgingly approved of. He was kept aloft by foreign adulation when popular consent, or even bored assent, had gone. In a country as centralized and cohesive as Egypt, he could not last, however much the foreign press might praise or foreign politicians flatter.

At last came his final act of folly – whether sprung from his own wit or suggested by his foreign patrons, who can tell? – of arresting and imprisoning every notable in Egypt who stood for anything at all: leading Muslims, leading Christians, leading proponents of Arabism, leading sympathizers with Palestine, liberals, old-fashioned nationalists, Muslim Brothers, Communists, even leading realists, to name only Muhammad Hassanein Heikal. So he united every possible faction against himself in his own homeland, in his only power-base, and still the Western world applauded. Then the young officer's bullet struck home. Sadat had been flattered to a violent death.

These events were still six months in the future but, while the destructive applause grew more and more deafening, the perceptive observer had already pronounced him doomed.

But these and other confirmations of Desmond Stewart's awareness of issues are not really surprising, given that he devoted thirty-seven years of his life to intense study of the Middle Eastern scene. He had lived in, or many times visited, all the Middle Eastern states, except Israel, the Yemens, Aden and the sheikhdoms of the Gulf. He knew most of the rulers personally, knew more about the area than many of them, had even taught a few of them. He was received, not as a working journalist, but more like an itinerant sage. Occasionally, as is described in Chapter 18, he thought he had found a potential philosopher king; more often, like his beloved Plato, he was disappointed. But his interest never lost its intensity and impetus, as witness the succession and variety of his books.

The first, *New Babylon*, (written with John Haylock) was a study of pre-revolutionary Iraq from the inside and appeared in 1956. Next came *Young Egypt*, quoted in the present work; to be followed by *Turmoil in Beirut*, an account, again from the inside, of the Lebanese civil war of 1958. Then, three handsomely

illustrated volumes for Time-Life: *The Arab World* and *Turkey*, followed by *Early Islam* – no easy subject – and his first biography, *Orphan with a Hoop*, the life of the self-made Lebanese industrialist Emile Bustani. After this, he wrote a portrait of Cairo, his second home: *Great Cairo, Mother of the World.* The colossal amount of experience and research in these works – for no one was able to impugn him on matters of accuracy or fact – culminated in a major historical treatise, *The Middle East: Temple of Janus* (published in 1971), a comprehensive history of the Middle East from 1869 to the present day, in which he traced the rise of Arab self-awareness and nationalism in conflict with a dying colonialism on the one hand and a militant Zionism on the other.

The Middle East: Temple of Janus marked his arrival on the grandiose plane; he had become encyclopaedic. And on this plane, he wrote, in quick succession, a monumental trio of biographies: the life of Theodor Herzl, founder of militant Zionism (1974), the life of T.E. Lawrence, agent of dying colonialism (1977), figures both forever linked with the Middle East; and the life of Jesus Christ, *The Foreigner* (1981), eternal incarnation of Middle Eastern genius, tragedy and hope.

At the same time as writing all these, as well as sumptuously illustrated volumes on The Alhambra and Mecca, meticulous for their scholarship, yet all in the sharpest contemporary focus – such was his intensity of mind – he produced, as their spiritual complement, a series of novels mirroring his own inner reactions to the Middle East but transposed into the theatre of the imagination. The first, *Leopard in the Grass* (1951), when he was still finding his feet as a young academic in Baghdad, took for its hero a student-rejectionist imbued with the nihilism of the desert and the zeal of the Muslim Brotherhood, fighting a lone war against the encroaching world of liberalism, technology and comfort. Poor Nimr was faithfully observed, and in real life was later hanged on suspicion of Communism. Iraq was like that then, and students are like that now. But behind the central figure we may descry the very young author, still more in love with the past than at grips with the present, yet already escaping from the romantic thrall of Mary Queen of Scots (for whom, in Nimr's case, read Hassan al-Banna) and the wonder-world of Ancient Greece and

Rome (for which, in Nimr's case, supply the never-never world of nomadic innocence).

His next novel, *The Unsuitable Englishman*, was more overtly confessional since, by the time he wrote it, he had himself become very much the odd-man-out in the British-dominated Iraqi capital. His appointment as tutor to the boy-king Feisal II, for instance, had been quashed by a British cabal the very morning he was to have given his first lesson. Someone more 'suitable' and much drearier replaced him. The Iraqi revolution had of course not yet occurred, but the situation was already explosive. And the book and its affirmations were explosive too. It was shortly followed by *A Woman Besieged*, this time an odd-woman-out, though in the same claustrophobic ex-pat society. Like D. H. Lawrence's heroine, she too eventually rode away, metaphorically at least, to commit acts of race-shame among the Yezidis. Or was it with the Baghdadis – who cares? At any rate, she chose freedom. And the British were scandalized, as they love to be by anything more concrete than verbal homage to freedom.

After this, at about the same time as *Young Egypt*, came a novel of the Nasserist Revolution, *The Men of Friday*. By now, he too had chosen freedom and left Iraq for the Lebanon with its easy access to Egypt. And the book was less concerned with individual, personal perspectives, and open to a wider world. Then – and by this time he had settled in Cairo – he wrote a massive trilogy, *The Sequence of Roles*, which in the imaginative dimension corresponded to *The Middle East: Temple of Janus*, since it traced four fictitious generations of a Scottish family, semi-resident in the Middle East throughout the same period.

There was a play about the Algerian struggle against the French, *Room at the Paradise,* the quandary of the *pied-noir*, produced in Coventry when the war of liberation was at its hottest. And there were translations of two intricate Egyptian novels, *The Man who lost his Shadow* by Fathi Ghanem and *Egyptian Earth* by A. R. Sharkawi. And a constant output of essays and articles on political and social developments in the Arab world, not to mention other novels and plays and poems unconnected with that perennially absorbing scenario.

His next commissioned work, had he lived, would have been a

portrait of Ephesus for Time-Life, taking him back again to Turkey – a country which, like Egypt, he loved – to re-create the worlds of the Greeks and Romans, of the Byzantines, the Ottomans and Ataturk, amid the Hellenistic ruins sanctioned by residence in old age of Christ's own mother and his beloved disciple John the Evangelist. The book, I imagine, would have carried the story of the first-century Jesus into the second century and well beyond.

In all this corpus of work, of interpreting the Arab world to the West, as is the case with most great writers and artists – light upon light, in expanding circles of light – thematic cycles developed and interlocked. One topic led to another, the next commission led to something else, but that in turn led back at a more advanced level to what had gone before. And so on, and so on, in an expanding spiral, with gaps being filled, new subjects introduced, new inspirations incorporated, to be rounded off in their turn in an ever more complex but always consistent whole. 'It all coheres,' cries the poet, and poet he was in the constant ringing of the changes on his chosen themes; or – to switch similes – a veritable weaver-bird, laying genetically-constant eggs, season by season, in new nests plaited of last year's and this year's fibres, and often – prophetically enough – of next year's fibres as well.

Or, to switch similes once again, the Round Mosaic (title of the first volume of his three-decker novel) is not an inappropriate image for this constant expansion and intertwining of many themes: precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little, as Isaiah says . . .

Except that one essential piece was missing, the most dramatic medallion of them all. Until 1980, strange as it may seem, he had never visited Palestine. But now, this final piece of the mosaic, which took so many painstaking years to construct, has been fashioned and slotted into place, completing – yet, in miniature, reproducing – the entire and intricate design: but for, that is, the tiniest chip off one corner, I mean this last chapter which I have written for him as a tribute to my old and well-loved friend.

October 1981.

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