

DELIBERATELY CREATED CRISES



ERNST ABEL

BY ELLEN CANTAROW

I am Jewish. I am a writer. From 1979 to 1989 I reported for the *Village Voice*, *Mother Jones*, *Inquiry* and other U.S. publications from Israel and the West Bank. During those years I witnessed on the ground the rapid growth of Israel's settlements and the seizure of Palestinian land and water for them: today over half the West Bank's resources are now in Israel's hands. (About a third of Gaza's resources have suffered the same fate.)

I conducted in-depth interviews with ultra-rightwing settlers and settler-leaders whose cry was: "Let them bow their heads, or let Israel expel them." I interviewed Palestinian villagers who had suffered settler vigilante actions and read accounts of these by Israeli Jewish reporters of conscience in *Ha Aretz* and other Israeli papers.

These vigilante actions ran the whole gamut: wanton destruction of property and crops, rampages through villages with cries of "Death to the Arabs" and smashing of car windows, casual in-the-street humiliation of Palestinian civilians, beatings, murder. Within Israel I witnessed the increasing polarization of Israeli society by the occupation; the growing virulent racism of new generations.

Take for instance Moroccan Jews in Kiryat Shemona, members of Menachem Begin's voting base about whom I wrote for the *Village Voice* in 1982 and who most commonly told me, "The only good Arab is a dead Arab."

Throughout Israel's 35 years of occupation, collective punishment for the alleged acts of individuals have been the order of the day — for example, 23 hour a day curfews lasting for weeks on end; the bulldozing of homes.

During the time I was reporting, stone throwing and street demonstrations were what brought collective punishment.

Suicide bombing is a post-Oslo phenomenon triggered by the doubling of settlement population after the Accords were signed and by the dawning realization that Oslo consolidated a South African-style plan for permanent Bantustanization of the West Bank.

On the political front while I was writing, in 1980 a group of democratically elected Palestinian mayors (Israel allowed this process a single time) was targeted for assassination by ultra-rightwing Israeli-Jewish thugs. Two were permanently maimed when their boobytrapped cars exploded under them. The perpetrators were found but not punished. Israel's alarm that the mayors all proved to be Palestine Liberation Front supporters rather than docile pawns meant, of course, that there was never again such an election.

Israel tried desperately, during the time I was reporting, to circumvent the PLO by installing a Quisling government apparatus throughout the West Bank, the "Village Leagues." It also began funding Hamas in the vain belief that a religious group would not work against colonial subjugation as did the PLO. Both ventures crashed, of course — the latter with the results we observe today of the extreme polarization of Palestinian political life.

On all my stays in the West Bank I personally witnessed casual daily humiliation of Palestinians at Israeli checkpoints, the casual landscape and social scenery of apartheid. The most obvious and continual manifestations were the checkpoints with differing treatment of Palestinians on the one hand, Israeli Jews and internationals on the other; and the different color of license plates, blue for Palestinians, yellow for Israelis.

I interviewed villagers whose homes had been blown up and/or bulldozed by Israeli soldiers. I heard accounts by men and women jailed, abused and tortured in Israel's prisons. On the subject of torture, London's *Times* issued a well-documented report in the early 1980s: the practice is an established fact acknowledged by Israel's B'tselem and foreign human rights organizations.

Torture is ongoing as I write: *The Financial Times* on April 6 reported, "The Israeli human rights organization B'tselem yesterday petitioned the High Court after receiving reports of torture at the Ofer detention center near Ramallah."

Throughout the 1980s I spoke with Palestinian officials, doctors, lawyers and other professionals, all of whom gave personal testimony about ongoing, deliberate acts that, under

the 1949 Geneva Convention articles governing occupation, were clearly illegal.

The Hebrew press was often quite open about all the foregoing while the U.S. press was almost invariably silent.

We now arrive at the current nightmare. What is underway is collective punishment of the sort I and other journalists have documented for decades, ratcheted up a thousand fold in full-blown war atrocities committed throughout the West Bank and almost certainly beginning in Gaza, from which I received an American relief worker's e-mail recently. My computer has delivered to me daily — even hourly — accounts of war crimes from Ramallah and other Palestinian cities by Palestinian doctors, lawyers, authors and students, and by internationals.

The desperate e-mailers plead with me and others to call our Congress people and Senators, to write letters to the press, to organize publicly.

They describe ambulances shot at and stopped from arriving at their destinations; hospitals invaded and medical personnel prevented at gunpoint from carrying out their responsibilities; people bleeding to death while soldiers block, at gunpoint and in tanks, their safe passage to medical relief; corpses rotting in hospital corridors (numerous e-mails warn of the threat of imminent epidemics); relatives forbidden to carry out decent burials (one group of the slain had to be buried in a Ramallah parking lot); civilians shot if they venture outside their doors; massive looting and vandalizing of homes; cultural institutions invaded and files destroyed; electrical systems for water pumps destroyed so that whole urban areas have their water supplies cut off; internationals and Palestinian press members wounded by Israeli gunfire.

As I write, an urgent e-mail describes a spreading catastrophe: "*Deliberately Created Humanitarian Crisis Reaches Intolerable Point.*" I read that six field hospitals report scores of people in serious-to-critical condition, doctors are forced to operate with minimal equipment.

In one such improvised center, a mosque, corpses rot in the operating room while Israeli snipers fire on anyone trying to enter or leave. Another section of this particular cry for help tells me that Apache helicopters in Jenin "attacked and seriously damaged around 50 houses in the western side of the camp, 20 people are reported injured, bleeding in the street. Reports from the inhabitants are that there are 15 dead bodies in different locations, but again ambulances came under attack when trying to gain access to these bodies, this time with ammunition from the helicopters."

Still another section reads: "Yatta near Hebron also came under sustained attack... Dozens of tanks surrounded the town and opened fire on the inhabitants. The hospital reported two Palestinians were killed while in their homes — Jamal Hamad Karaysh, 22, live ammunition to his head, and Nader Jamil Al Khadder, 21, live ammunition to his chest. The hospital buried them in the cemetery, immediately and without a funeral, as they were afraid that after the Israeli army completely invades the town a health crisis could erupt — similar to the crisis in the other West Bank towns where bodies sit in hospitals and homes decomposing, as they cannot be buried."

Like Nero, President Bush has fiddled while Rome burns and has issued too little too late. What is needed is an immediate order for withdrawal and threat of economic sanction (this is what President Eisenhower did in the Suez Crisis of 1956, resolving it immediately). Ariel Sharon, the Milosevic twin ordering these atrocities, is the self-same war criminal who commanded the infamous Unit 101 that killed 99 defenseless civilians at Kibyah in October 1953; who in August 1977 ordered the destruction of 2000 Gaza homes and expulsion from them of 16,000 civilians during an Israeli "pacification" onslaught in the strip; who oversaw the Israeli Defense Force while it enabled the Phalangist massacre of over a thousand Palestinian civilians in the Beirut refugee camps Sabra and Shatila in 1982 (for this he was forced to resign as Defense Minister by his own government).

Sharon, a past-master at Machiavellian provocation, triggered the second intifada when, with an armed escort of 1000 soldiers, he "visited" Al Aska mosque in September 2000 — the visit was followed next day by the shooting of Palestinian demonstrators at the mosque by Israeli troops. Sharon's aim as Housing Minister in the 1970s, as Defense Minister during Israel's invasion of Lebanon, and now as Israel's Prime Minister, is permanent expansion of Israel's borders, permanent retention and expansion of the settlements. It is clear that this project not only destroys Palestinian society, but also Israel's economy and its political and moral fabric; as well as the stability of the entire region.

As a Jew old enough to remember a childhood just after World War 2 I am filled with a mix of grief, helplessness, despair and anger as Israel, pretending to act in my name and using the Holocaust to exonerate its crimes, proceeds with a clear effort to obliterate the economy, the social, political and cultural institutions, and the entire infrastructure of the Palestinian people. Those who do not speak out against the abominations of these horrors are complicit by their silence. Those who exonerate Israel for committing them are guilty by association.

MIDEAST RANT

The solution to the Middle East insanity: The Palestinians need to do a Gandhi. Lay down their arms. Do not raise a finger to Israel.

The Arab Brotherhood needs to follow suit. Shut down their oilfields. Sit and wait it out. No more oil for the world until the brutalities stop.

The Israeli citizens need to do a Gandhi also. Sit down and refuse war as a solution. No more violence upon brothers and sisters of the world. Unload their bullets from their guns. Refuse politics as an answer.

Strapping a bomb to oneself, loading a rifle — both a vote to continue fighting. *Fuck both your egos!* The world is being challenged by much more important problems than your hatred for each other, and the only way this shit will end is from you!

Or are you both too chickenshit to drop your egos and look deep into the eyes of your frightened children? Tomorrow is for them. Can't you give it to them without all your memories of some *past*? Now is the time to stop the bullshit, the tears, the sorrows.

How many people have died from AIDS, starvation, the cold, from viruses, from guns? *You two* are not the only fucked over people on this planet. Look around this big planet and see the trees dying, the waters polluted, the food chain being recklessly depleted.

I am sick of your petty hatreds. Grow the fuck up and show the world that you both want to be a part of its solutions and not some nationalistic movement towards an illusory isolation from each other. It ain't gonna happen! This world has gotten too fucking small for you to hide behind your thousand year old belief systems. It is a new millennium. A new way of the world. And your bullshit is a big problem in the way of new. Join the march into what can be. There is room for all. There has to be.

~CECIL LEE

Cecil Lee is a poet, writer and artist from El Paso, Texas.

Bikes & Beyond

1089 MARINE DR.
ASTORIA, OREGON



Columbian Cafe
1114 Marine Drive
Astoria, OR 97103
503-325-CAFE (2233)

Hours: Mon - Fri 8am - 2pm
Sat 10am - 2pm
Dinners: Wed - Sat, Open 5pm

GRIAH HULSEY

