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A Conversation with Dr. Hanan Ashrawi

Hanan Ashrawi*

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A Conversation with Dr. Hanan Ashrawi*

Introduction: Dr. Ashrawi was the official spokesperson at the Madrid Peace Process (also known as the Madrid Conference) for the Palestinian Delegation and will speak about those issues and whatever issues you would like to talk about.¹

Dr. Ashrawi: Anything you are interested in, I would be glad to address, related of course, to what I have been doing. I am not going to address the latest space explorations, but I am quite willing to be diverse in talking about the Middle East Peace Process, how it started, the issues of Palestinian-Israeli realities, regional realities, questions related to human rights and democracy in the region, and developments in our part of the world. So, I do not know if you want me to begin with a brief presentation or if you would like to start with your questions and tell me what you are interested in, because every session I promise to be interactive, and then I end up lecturing, and this time I will do it too. I am going to have you ask questions and I will answer those questions.

* Hanan Ashrawi, who holds a Ph.D. in medieval literature from the University of Virginia, is the founder and Secretary General of the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy, an organization committed to human rights, democracy, and global dialogue in Jerusalem. As a feminist, one of Dr. Ashrawi's major goals is to strengthen the political participation of Palestinian women and to achieve equal rights in a new nation based on the foundations of credibility, freedom, and legitimacy. In 1991, she became the official spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Process and in 1993 was appointed General Commissioner of the Palestine Independent Commission for Citizen's Rights. Dr. Ashrawi was an active participant in the creation of the 1993 Oslo Accords. In 1996, she was elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council and named Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research. She is currently a member of the Legislative Council, where she has become an outspoken critic of corruption in government and a leader for the creation of a democratic Palestine committed to human rights and peace. Dr. Ashrawi is the author of several publications, the latest of which is her book *This Side of Peace: A Personal Account*. Dr. Ashrawi is married to Emil, a photographer with the United Nations headquarters in Jerusalem, and has two daughters, Amal and Zeina.

1. On March 8, 2000, Dr. Ashrawi held this conversation with students of Nova Southeastern University, Shepard Broad Law Center during her visit as one of five distinguished speakers at the Law Center's 2000 Goodwin Seminar on International Human Rights in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The *Nova Law Review* selected the materials included in the citations to this conversation.

Student: Although Israel is negotiating with the Palestinian Authority² for peace, are Palestinian authorities doing all that they can to influence the perception of the Palestinian community as to the benefits of peace and as to why they should want peace instead of organizing student demonstrations against the peace process?

Dr. Ashrawi: First, I doubt anybody can organize a student demonstration or tell the students to demonstrate now and not to demonstrate later. That is one. Second, Israel is negotiating with the Palestine Liberation Organization (“PLO”)³ and not the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority was sort of a formation of the interim phase agreements where a system of government was set up to govern part of the land and part of the people, only for the transitional phase. Then we get to permanent status issues. Supposedly, we will end up with the devolution of occupation and the evolution of statehood. One of the negotiating parties is the PLO, which represents the Palestinian people everywhere, because as you know five million Palestinians are refugees. We are not *only* going to deal with Palestinians who are in the West Bank and Gaza, because you do not make partial peace with part of the people. So, that is number one. Two, I do not know if you have looked at the facts, or if you have an underlying assumption, or if you have looked at the Israeli statements, but frankly speaking, Palestinian public opinion has moved and has made a serious qualitative shift in its political discourse, basically since 1991.

In 1974, the Palestinians accepted the idea. First of all, let me go back to 1967. In 1967, we proposed a one state solution, one democratic non-sectarian, pluralistic state in Palestine for everybody—Muslims, Christians, Jews, Arabs, Palestinians, and Israelis—after the war. That was turned down by the Israelis because they said that goes against the Zionist ideology. That was before the 1967 War. Then there was the revolution where we said all of Palestine belongs to the Palestinians because in 1947, 1948, when Israel was formed, there was such a thing as a Palestine.

2. Hillel Frisch, *From Palestine Liberation Organization to Palestinian Authority: The Territorialization of “Neopatriarchy”*, in *THE PLO AND ISRAEL FROM ARMED CONFLICT TO POLITICAL SOLUTION, 1964–1994* 75–77 (Avraham Sela & Moshe Ma’oz eds., 1997) [hereinafter Frisch]. The Palestine Liberation Organization (“PLO”) was established in 1964 for the purposes of liberating Palestine and establishing a form of government for Palestine. *Id.*

3. *Id.* at 56–57. The Palestinian Authority began as an interim government that expanded into Gaza and the West Bank. *Id.*

Historical Palestine was a country in which people were living for centuries on their own land. What happened then was that the state of Israel was created on the majority of what was Palestinian land. We ended up with a situation of tremendous suffering. We had the dual injustice of dispossession, dispersal, and exile. More than 750,000 Palestinians were kicked out, more than 400 villages were totally demolished.⁴ We had a series of massacres. We can talk about these later, which can only be described in modern terminology as ethnic cleansing in 1948. Then again, beyond that, when we made the concession, we made that historical shift, which began in the early 1970s, to accept sharing Palestine and to accept a two state solution. That was a very serious historical compromise.⁵ Because, as my father said, we are not denying this past, this history, the fact that *there was* a Palestine on all of Palestine but, we are dealing with a future for our children in which we recognize that a homeland, a historical homeland, is not the same as a state, a contemporary geopolitical state. So while we would *not* deny our past, while we would not change our historical narrative and deny our existence, we would at the same time accept to share historical Palestine within the two state solution.

Now, this took a lot of doing and I discovered, through a very painstaking debate and dialogue, even within the Palestinian circles. In the 1970s it was very difficult not just to mention the two state solution, but even to talk to any Israeli or Palestinian or to propose a peaceful settlement for the conflict. I am saying this to give you a background as to the major changes and to the political thought in Palestine. Then, in 1988 there was a meeting of the Palestinian National Council ("PNC") in the aftermath, or when the intifada was still active. We set up a meeting of twenty-two Palestinians from all over the world and we issued a statement.⁶ We sent it to the PNC. We said that this is our position, and that the *only* resolution for the conflict is through peaceful means. The only way it can be done is to accept the two state solution and we should launch a peace initiative. We

4. See Wendy Lehman, *A Return to the 4 June 1967 Borders: Critical for Peace. Report from a CPAP Briefing with Faisal Hussein*, available at <http://www.palestinecenter.org/news/20000918fr.html> (Sept. 18, 2000).

5. Samer Badawi, "Ashrawi Delineates Palestinian 'Red Lines,' Reiterates Need for a Two-State Solution," *Report From a CPAP Briefing With Hanan Ashrawi*, available at <http://palestinecenter.org/news/20000316fr.html> (Mar. 16, 2000). This article is based on remarks delivered on March 14, 2000, by Dr. Hannan Ashrawi and was written by Samer Badawi, staff writer for the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine. It should be noted that Dr. Ashrawi's views do not necessarily reflect those of the Center.

6. Palestine National Council, *Political Communique and Declaration of Independence*, Nov. 15, 1988, 27 I.L.M. 1660 (entered into force Nov. 15, 1988).

called it a peace initiative then. In 1988, the PNC, which is the parliament in exile, accepted the two state solution in Algiers and declared Palestinian statehood.⁷ And, of course, there is a beautiful declaration of independence.⁸ I would like you to read it at some point, as it is a very good basis for a constitution. And then, we moved from there, giving rise to the acceptance of the peace initiative and the peace process itself in 1991, when we participated in the peace process. Now, although we started the process earlier, when we started the official meetings with Baker in 1991,⁹ the majority of Palestinians were against the meetings.¹⁰ We had about forty percent in support and sixty percent against the meetings. Systematically, we continued with an internal dialogue and debate until we got a constituency for peace.

I do not know if any of you remember the launching of the Madrid Peace Process in 1991, but when we came back from Madrid, we had eighty-seven percent support.¹¹ We managed to do this with the most *open* system of dialogue, of debate, and of discussion. People were involved in the decision making. People would hold *us* accountable. They would ask us, "what did you do, what did you say?" They would come to our homes and have a right to know, and say, "we are telling you what to say next." So they had a stake in it, they understood it, and it was absorbed. It was not imposed from above. That is why I believe the discourse for peace has a legitimacy and constituency which we *gained, systematically* through not just persuasion, but through active participation. You have a stake in the process. Until now, there has been a majority of support for the peace process or for peace. This is despite all the problems. It is despite the fact that the peace process has produced more suffering for the Palestinians. It is despite the fact that more land is being confiscated, more houses demolished. Despite living, we will live in an area that is like a series of Bantustans or isolated reservations. And Israel still controls our crossing points and we have no freedom of movement whatsoever.

Approximately fifty percent of Palestinians are still critical of the process itself and the way the negotiations have been conducted. But, we have over seventy percent *consistently* in favor of a peaceful solution. Israel cannot claim the same because they are almost down the middle, for and against the peace process.

7. *Id.*

8. *Id.*

9. HANAN ASHRAWI, THIS SIDE OF PEACE: A PERSONAL ACCOUNT 79-94 (1995).

10. *Id.*

11. *See id.*

Now, of course we have political pluralism. We have those who do not approve of our coming to Madrid and starting the peace process, but we will defend that right to dissent and to disagree. We have the right to disagree. Why is it that in Palestine when we have democracy and pluralism and people express different points of view, we are told, “well you are not unified, you are fragmented or you have extremists.” And, if we *all* agreed, you know, as a nation of sheep, they would say, “you have a monolithic dictatorial system.” Well, no, we do not all agree. We have different points of view. We are not a nation of sheep and we have never been. Nobody can dictate to us how to think and what to think. Palestinian Authority cannot *brainwash* people and cannot prevent people from speaking out, from expressing their opinions. But it must safeguard the rule of law, and it must hold people accountable through *due process*, of course. The peace process said in some of the agreements that there would be no incitement. And at the same time there was tremendous emphasis on Israeli security, no emphasis on Palestinian security whatsoever. And while, if you look at it numerically, and I hate to do that, more Palestinians have been killed, *daily* actually, by Israeli violence, by settler violence, by soldiers who do it with impunity.¹² The last time settlers killed the Palestinians, they were fined one cent each. So we said “this is the value of Palestinian human life.” The soldiers, who in the early days buried people alive, were demoted, reprimanded. This is the kind of distortion that you have. While Palestinians, I suppose, are not only to safeguard their own security, they are supposed to safeguard Israeli security and prevent any possible dissent and action, or violence, which has led to internal distortions and violations within Palestinian society.

The Palestinian Authority is now arresting people on the basis of their political beliefs in order to show good faith and that they are committed to the peace process and to prevent any acts of violence. They have cracked down on the opposition. They have implemented a state security court that is a military court to try people instantly. And, the Israelis keep pushing for more. Now, when you distort internal realities, you upset, you violate the rule of law, you create a police state, and you are not going to have peace with anybody. The peace process should not be an instrument for the distortion of Palestinian ideologies, it should be for the *empowerment* of Palestinians because only the strong can make peace.

So, when I get questions like this I generally answer more than just the question. Because these questions are generally being sent out by the Israeli

12. See generally HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, A LICENSE TO KILL: ISRAELI OPERATIONS AGAINST “WANTED” AND MASKED PALESTINIANS 1–4 (1993) [hereinafter HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH].

government and by the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (“AIPAC”). I even received some of these questions last night. They are misleading because they are not based on facts. You have to look at the whole context *and* you have to look at the facts. The facts are that the Palestinian Authority and the PLO have bent over backwards to fulfill *all* their obligations as per the agreements, *even though* it meant self-negation with the Palestinian people, and then erosion of their own credibility and their own support among the people. They have accepted their role as guardians of Israeli security when the Israelis, for more than thirty years of occupation, using the most brutal military means, could not guarantee their security because there was a situation of occupation and injustice.

And of course we do not control or patrol Israeli streets and cities. And not only that, the Palestinian Authority and the PLO accepted to do that without having any assurances that Palestinian security would be safeguarded, be it in terms of territorial security, political security, economic security, or human security. You can lose your land, you go to bed owning a home and you wake up in the morning and it is gone. Your house can be demolished, you could be deported, you are living in a state of siege and at the same time you are measured and judged *only* in accordance with how much Israeli security you can provide.

Now, I told everybody that if we were all secure, if we were living happily ever after next to each other as good neighbors, there would be no need for a peace process. The peace process is there in order to prevent any situation of conflict and violence and to promote security for *everybody*. So, if you make security a prerequisite, it means that you make peace impossible. Security comes from signing a peace agreement, from dealing with the causes of conflict, from removing the grievances, and creating a situation that is conducive to cooperation rather than one that produces more conflict. You can not occupy a people, a whole nation and enslave a nation, rob them of all their rights, and then tell them they have to sit back and take it and that if they defend themselves, if they resist, they are automatically terrorists. Then, at the same time in the context of the peace process, we should find democratic and peaceful means of expressing dissent. Otherwise, you would end up having to arrest more than half of Israel which, is against the peace process.

Student: Yes, but these Israelis that you say are against the peace process do not go around blowing up buses within the Palestinian Authority.

Dr. Ashrawi: Will they kill Palestinians with impunity? Yes. They shot people in the mosque. The attack at the al-Ibrahimi Mosque during Ramadan at the hands of Baruch Goldstein is a famous example, but I can tell you of daily incidents.¹³ I do not want anybody's loss of life. There is equal value to all human lives. I do not want violence at all. That is why we entered the peace process.

Student: How can Israel be asked to create peace if the PLO cannot control these terrorist organizations within its nation to create peace? How can you make peace with someone who cannot control his own people?

Dr. Ashrawi: How do you control your own people? Of course, anybody who breaks the law should be punished in accordance with the law.

Student: Should be, but can be? What about Hamas?¹⁴

Dr. Ashrawi: Why do you assume that Hamas is all terrorists? Hamas is a political organization.¹⁵ It has a military wing.¹⁶ I have a constant dialogue with Hamas. We should. You have to give them a stake in the process. You cannot accept that Israel dictates to exclude all political parties who disagree with you, then they will turn to violence. Anybody who breaks the law should be punished. Be it Israeli, be it Palestinian, but you cannot suspend rights, including political rights, and you cannot have political prisoners and political detention.

Also, you do not say, "control everybody." Otherwise, every time there is a bombing, whether in Oklahoma or anywhere else, you could hold Clinton accountable and you punish him. No, you have to have a system, a legal system. You have to have a law enforcement system. This is just law and order, but it does not mean that you outlaw anybody who disagrees with you or who criticizes you, which is what is happening now. And actually,

13. ASHRAWI, *supra* note 9, at 282.

14. *About the Islamic Resistance Movement "Hamas"*, at <http://www.palestine-info.com/hamas/about/index.htm> (last visited Jan. 21, 2001) [hereinafter *Islamic Movement*]. Hamas stands for the Islamic Resistance Movement that dates back to the 1940s. *Id.* It stems from the Muslim Brotherhood with the purpose of emancipating the Palestinian people. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.* Military action is the Movement's main strategy against Zionism. *Islamic Movement, supra* note 14.

even the language, can Arafat¹⁷ control this? No. Can anyone control every individual person, short of creating a police state and having a policeman with everybody? No. However, you need to create a collective atmosphere, a discourse of peace that is not conducive to violence. You need to end Palestinian victimization. I cannot tell people whose lands have been stolen, whose houses have been demolished or whose relatives have been killed, whether their children, or their sisters or their brothers, “you have to act peacefully, you have to love the Israelis. They are good neighbors. They are doing nothing wrong.”

No, they are doing all sorts of things wrong. But we can say that we will deal with the occupation. We will deal with it through peaceful means. We will end the occupation. So it is much more than the simple slogans, you know, “control your people,” “stop all violence.” No. You want to stop violence, let us stop it on all sides then. How do you do that? It can only be done through a just and genuine peace that addresses the causes of the conflict and ends the sense of grievance and hostility.

Student: Just to put a little bit more of a historical perspective on this, what was life like in Palestine before 1948 and even in the early 1960s before the Palestinians got ejected?

Dr. Ashrawi: I wish you would ask my parents. I was a baby in 1948, I am telling you my age now, which I do not mind. It is the worst kept secret anyway. But, I am not one of those who have idealistic memories and who have romanticized the past with nostalgia. Palestine was a country that had been under several occupations. The Ottoman occupation, and then the British Mandate, and then the West Bank annexed to Jordan after 1948, and Gaza was under the control of Egypt. So before 1947 or 1948, even before the nineteenth century, if you read the travel books and literature, Palestine had a society which was predominantly peasant. Agriculture was the major source of income. It was also a land of pilgrimage.¹⁸ So even before the days of tourism, even in my medieval studies going back to Holy Jerusalem¹⁹

17. See generally SAÏD K. ABURISH, ARAFAT: FROM DEFENDER TO DICTATOR (1998). Born in Cairo, Egypt, in 1929 as Abdul Rahman Abdel Rwout Arafat Al Qwdua Al Hussein, he is now known as Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestinian National Authority. *Id.*

18. See Marshall J. Breger, *The Future of Jerusalem: A Symposium: An Introduction*, 45 CATH. U. L. REV. 653 (1996).

19. *Id.* at 653–54. Mr. Breger points out that each religious group has long recognized Jerusalem as being the most holy place in the world, and each had co-existed for

and Holy Palestine, there were Christian communities and Christian pilgrims, constantly. It was a land of pluralism also, because three religions coexisted in Palestine.

Student: Are you talking about before 1948?

Dr. Ashrawi: Before 1948, of course. There were three religions. The principal religion was Islam. The second was Christianity. The third religion was Judaism. They were a distinct minority. In 1923, the boundaries of Palestine were delineated and then the League of Nations placed it under the British Mandate, as Palestine.²⁰ The people there were, on the whole, highly educated, because historically Palestinians have placed tremendous emphasis on education, and I know that was the case of my parents' generation. My father studied medicine. He used to write all the time. He wrote on women's rights and I will give you some of his writings.²¹ When he died, at his memorial service, the bishop chose those statements dealing with women to read. In the 1920s, before he married and had five daughters, he said that women were equal by right and not as a gift from the men.²² And he said "beware, if you do not recognize that right, I advise the oppressor to be aware of the anger of the oppressed, once women rebel and take what is theirs by right, by force."²³ He said they should have it without force.²⁴ So in a sense there was a movement for women. There was a movement in education, there was a center of intellectual and literary achievements. Palestine was thriving. There was a lot of trade. There were key urban centers. Jaffa was the greatest city in Palestine, along with Haifa, and of course Jerusalem. These were the major intellectual trade and

centuries. See also Ruth Lapidot, *Freedom of Religion and of Conscience in Israel*, 47 CATH. U. L. REV. 441 (1998).

20. FRANK J. CALABRESE, *THE PALESTINE LEGACY: A POLITICO-LEGAL HISTORY 1917-1990* 33 (1994):

The British Mandate acquired jurisdiction *de jure* over Palestine in September 1923 following conclusion with Turkey of the Treaty of Lausanne. Before this, the *de facto* administration was first in the form of a military government from December 1917 to June 1920, with a civilian High Commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, taking office on July 1, 1920.

Id.

21. See generally ASHRAWI, *supra* note 9.

22. *Id.* at 47. For more information see Andrea E. Bopp, *The Palestine-Israeli Peace Negotiations and Their Impact on Women*, 16 B.C. THIRD WORLD L.J. 339 (1996).

23. ASHRAWI, *supra* note 9, at 47.

24. See *id.*

cultural centers. At the same time, Jerusalem remained a city where we had a lot of pilgrimages, a lot of activity, and was always an education center. Many of the journals, books and so on, written during the intellectual renaissance, started in Jerusalem by some who were friends of my parents. So it was mainly agricultural and rural areas and city centers that were based on education, culture, and trade, and of course the pilgrimage and tourist industry.

Student: So it was a sovereign nation by itself?

Dr. Ashrawi: It was under occupation. It had boundaries. It was recognized. My parents' marriage certificate says Palestine. My birth certificate says Palestine. The money said Palestine. Even what is now the *Jerusalem Post* was called the *Palestine Post*. So there was a Palestine with its own currency, with its own laws. Israelis use the fact we were always under occupation or unjustly treated to justify further occupation and lack of justice. No, there was a culture, it had a history. We had institutions. We had colleges and schools. We had everything. Actually, we were known as the most advanced country in the Arab world.

Now our development, our growth, was rudely suspended in 1948, of course with the partition²⁵ and then with the war.²⁶ After that, in 1951, the West Bank was next to Jordan, which was the kingdom of Trans Jordan and Gaza was graced under Egyptian rule. These were the days of Arab nationalism, when the Arabs said "we want to have Arab unity and what we will do is we will save Palestine for the Palestinians." This created a greater mess because the Arabs were certainly not democratic regimes, nor were they equal to Israel in military power. It was not until the mid 1960s that the Palestinians had even set up the PLO as part of an Arab venture. The Palestinians decided to rescue Palestinian decision making from Arab decisionmaking, resulting in our own organization and our own world. Not because we were against Arab unity. No, but because it was under the guise of unity Palestine was lost, and it was subsumed by an Arab cause. What we

25. *Report to the General Assembly by the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine*, G.A. Res. 181, U.N. GAOR, 2d Sess., Supp. No. 11, at 322, U.N. Doc. A/364 (1947) [hereinafter *Report on Palestine*].

26. Salman Abu-Sitta, *Palestinian Refugees and the Permanent Status Negotiations*, at <http://palestinecenter.org/news/19991116pb.html> (last visited Jan. 27, 2001). "In 1948, 85 percent of the Palestinians who lived in the part of Palestine that became Israel were driven out of their homes by Jewish forces." *Id.*

wanted was to, first of all, get an affirmation of our identity and our history, regain our rights, and build our state.

Now, in the meantime, in 1967 of course, Israel occupied the rest of Palestine. If you look at it historically, the United Nations Resolution 181²⁷ and the Partition Plan²⁸ gave Israel fifty-six percent of Palestine at that time.²⁹ These are historical facts. Fifty-six percent of the land of Palestine was given to the Jews. At that time they owned seven percent of the land. And they were less than ten percent of the people. Then they became thirty percent of the people with the Holocaust. We were made to pay the price of Western anti-Semitism and Western crimes against humanity because many of the Jews started coming to Palestine and of course Britain, as the occupying power, as the mandate power, did help and bring them into Palestine. And now you are going to begin to see the narrative of 1948 Palestine coming through the Israeli new historians, who were called revisionist historians. Now, they are called the new historians, because they are relating authentic history and not the revised history. I would advise you to read people like Benny Morris,³⁰ Teddy Katz,³¹ and Norman Finkelstein.³² These authors went through the intelligence archives of Israel and they not only interviewed Palestinian survivors about what happened, but also interviewed members of the Jewish armed gangs then in 1948.³³

Thus, a picture is going to emerge. Only a couple of months ago, the history of Al-Tantura came out.³⁴ Al-Tantura was one of the villages that was destroyed by the Israelis in 1948. Nobody believed the people of Al-Tantura when they said that there was a massacre. Then, two months ago, a

27. *Report on Palestine*, *supra* note 25, at 322.

28. *Id.* at 323.

29. *Palestinian Refugees in 1948*, at <http://www.cyberus.ca/~baker/title2.htm> (last visited Jan. 27, 2001).

30. See generally BENNY MORRIS, *RIGHTEOUS VICTIMS: A HISTORY OF THE ZIONIST-ARAB CONFLICT, 1881-1999* (1999).

31. See Ramzy Baroud, *Al-Tantura: Over 50 Years of a Denied Massacre*, available at <http://msanews.mynet.net/Scholars/Baroud/tantura.html> (last visited Feb. 2, 2001) (describing the Israeli historian Teddy Katz and his research at the University of Haifa).

32. See generally NORMAN FINKELSTEIN, *THE RITUAL OF NEW CREATION: JEWISH TRADITION AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE* (1992).

33. See *Deir Yassin Remembered*, at <http://www.deiryassin.org/main.html> (last visited Feb. 2, 2001) (describing the Stern Gang's attack on the village of Dier Yassin on April 9, 1948).

34. Wafa Amr, *Israeli Researcher Uncovers 1948 Bloodbath*, available at http://www.gsnonweb.com/gsnlib_a/GSN2000/2000_01/20000119/58655.html (Jan. 19, 2001). The massacre of Al-Tantura occurred on May 15, 1948. *Id.* Over 200 people were killed in one of the biggest attacks by Israeli troops. *Id.*

journalist, who was doing his research for a masters thesis at the Hebrew University, issued his findings showing that some of the gangs that went into the army, who were involved in Al-Tantura, came out with a horrible story.³⁵

Now of course there was a resistance to that, because everybody would like to believe that the creation of the state of Israel was done somehow in accordance with the myth of a land without people for a people without land. So they denied our existence as a people, and they considered our land empty, believing that Israel was a heroic venture, and that it was suddenly attacked by the Arab world. Not that it came to displace a whole nation and to expel and massacre a whole people. Now that these things are coming from Israeli sources, people are beginning to listen. I am not saying this in order to encourage extremism. I am saying this in order to say that, at a certain point, you have to come to terms with history. You have to acknowledge and recognize guilt and culpability. Then, you have to move ahead and find solutions because if you want a historical reconciliation it has to be based on truth, on a narrative which is not twisted, which is not a myth, and which does not impose a distorted reality on both sides' perceptions. Come to grips with history and move ahead. This is part of the process of reconciliation. Then, when you make peace, you make peace knowing that the Palestinians were first excluded and totally denied, even as a people, and as a nation. The Palestinians were told we did not even exist. Even Golda Meir asked, "who are the Palestinians?" They did not exist. Once you begin the politics of recognition, re-recognition, of history and identity, the politics of inclusion, that we are all people with equal human rights, regardless of objective power, then you can begin the politics of reconciliation through a just peace process. I think it is a healthy process of rectification because we are involved in a historically "redemptive act," not just in an act of appeasement and recapitulation.

Student: How widely are the facts of which you speak accepted in the international community?

Dr. Ashrawi: They were totally suppressed for awhile and the Palestinians who spoke out, the victims, were denied because nobody believed them. The Palestinians and the Arabs were easily labeled in international public opinion. We were the Muslims, we were the "other," we were not part of the Judeo-Christian tradition. We did not have many Arabs or Muslims living in the United States or the West and so we were not part of the Western

35. *Id.*

dialogue. Now, because it is the *Israeli* historians who are conveying these facts, who are writing scholarly books on history and even archeology, they are beginning to be accepted and understood.

In Europe, these things were better known because Europe was close, Europe was part of it. The British were part of it, if you look at the British archives. Terrorism was introduced into the region by the Jewish gangs, not by the Palestinians. They were the ones who assassinated Count Bernadotte. They were the ones who blew up the King David Hotel. However, it was not called "terrorism." It was called "liberation." When we were expelled, when our religious sites were razed and when a series of massacres took place, again, this was called "liberating the land"; this was not called "ethnic cleansing." It was heroic to do that to Palestinians who were primarily unarmed and primarily peasant communities. Now, with the truth coming out, I think that it is a very healthy process because the Israelis also have to come to grips with their own history and they have to understand that denial is not a way of forging a future—that you have to recognize the "other" in the same way the Palestinians have to understand the Holocaust and the horror of what happened.

My father used to say "we *have* to take in the Jews, they are our cousins and it is the *West* that is anti-Semitic, it is the West that is killing them and massacring them and torturing them, and that we should give them refuge." Then later he told me, "but we didn't do it so they would kick us out." We thought we could live together because of the Semitic bond, because Arabs and Jews are Semitic and everybody says that we are cousins. Yet blood relations and blood ties are not enough. You *have* to deal with the fact that a grave historical injustice has been done to the Palestinians. It was "ethnic cleansing."

Now, how do we undo that injustice? How do we make room for both peoples to co-exist? How, in historical Palestine, in two states, as good neighbors, not as occupier-occupied and not within a zero sum game? So it is a clash of legitimacies, a clash of identities. It is a clash of many things. However, it has to be understood so that the solution can emerge from the conflict, from the causes, on the basis of truth, not on the basis of myths, legends, and distortions. I think we are on the way to reconciliation because of the historians, the change in attitude, the recognition that power, politics, and dictates do not make peace. You have to remove injustice to make peace.

Student: Two questions. One, were there ever talks of carving Israel out of a piece of Germany because it was Germany who dealt the injustice to the

Jewish people and that is where the Jewish people were from, primarily in Eastern Europe? Two, when the British had control over Palestine, did all three religions live together fairly peacefully without it being a police state?

Dr. Ashrawi: Okay, first the Zionist movement³⁶ started in the nineteenth century. Zionism as you know, is an extension of nineteenth century ideologies, of nationalism, and nation states.³⁷

Student: Of the Bible.

Dr. Ashrawi: No. The Bible is not Zionist. I am explaining that where Zionism started as an ideology. I have read the history of Zionism. I have read Herzl's diaries. I have read everybody. Do not worry. Zionism as a political ideology began in the nineteenth century. Judaism was viewed as a religion, not as a national identity. It was with the early Zionists, in the late nineteenth century, that they started asking for a state for the Jews. First they were offered, and I think they were contemplating, Uganda, at one point. Then, I think at some point in the late nineteenth century, early twentieth, they were offered Cypress. They contemplated different locations. Only at the beginning of the twentieth century, between 1910 and 1912 did Palestine emerge. Then, they started with the land without the people.

Zionism was primarily a left wing socialist ideology.³⁸ Therefore, it did not have any kind of territorial sort of preference. They said, we need a homeland for the Jews because we want the Jews to express themselves as a national identity, not as a religion. When the religious Jews began to be more powerful and injected themselves into the Zionist ideology, they brought in the idea of the Bible. Then, Palestine was introduced as that homeland, even though there were still several alternatives being discussed.

Now the question is how can you arbitrarily or even willfully select other peoples' lands to create or superimpose a new state on it? Secondly, we were never asked as Palestinians, are we willing to give away our land, our history, and so on to create another state? Thirdly, and I think this is the main issue, it is the guilt of the West over the horrors of what they did to the Jews that led them to totally deny and disregard Palestinian rights because they could put all the Jews in one country. They would not have to pay the

36. For a more comprehensive history of the Zionist movement see ZIONISM AND RELIGION, 25–39 (Shmuel Almog, et al. eds., 1998).

37. *Id.*

38. *Id.* at 3.

price and then they could ignore the Palestinians. Thus, they unleashed a whole cycle of conflict and violence. They solved, at least they thought they solved, an injustice by creating another. Accordingly, if you simplify the situation, nobody has the right to give away somebody else's land.

In response to your other question, no, nobody thought of Germany. Germany was paying reparations. However, they were perfectly happy to support Israel right or wrong, the same way the United States supports Israel, right or wrong, as a means of paying back for their guilt. Anybody who even mentioned Palestinians or said we were a people with rights was immediately branded anti-Semitic, which is amazing since we are Semites as well.

But the real issue is that historically, Palestine has always been pluralistic, always. It has never been the home of one religion. Palestine has the longest recorded culture and history in the region, yet it was totally denied. Until now, I know many Jewish friends who still say they are Palestinians and those who did not stay in Israel and came to the States, and those in Israel who say they do not have a problem being Palestinian. However, the issue is that a religion cannot be a national identity. Frankly, that is what I think. I do not think that you can set up, in the twentieth and twenty-first century reality, states on the basis of exclusive religions. We are talking here about pluralism interaction, not of exclusivity. Imagine if we said we want an exclusively Muslim state or an exclusively Christian state, or you have rights only if you happen to be of one religion. Had any other state done that, it would have been an outrage. It is a combination of the guilt of the West and the Zionist ideology itself. A sense of insecurity within Jewish communities and Israel per se, which to me nowadays is needless because I do not believe that contemporary societies allow for discrimination or racism. Now Israel has to decide, does it want to be a nation among equals? Does it want to be a Middle Eastern state? Or, does it want to be an artificial construct and an extension of Western Palestine?

The peace process is giving Israel the opportunity to gain recognition, legitimacy, and a place in the region to open up. I believe you cannot have a democracy if all the rights and if all the laws are geared toward exclusivity, whether you happen to be of one religion or not. I certainly do not like to see it in Iran. I would not want to see a theocracy in Israel either. However, it is not up to me to redefine Zionism.

There is some very interesting literature now coming out, the post-Zionist literature, the new Zionist literature. The Truman Institute is doing a lot. The Institute is reexamining Zionism to try, first of all, to change it from nineteenth century roots and its twentieth century expressions, and to make it

contemporary with, and consistent with, twenty-first century requirements of democracy and, of course, interactive regional and global realities. That means that there is a lot of soul searching in Israel taking place. This is taking place among intellectual circles and it is a very exciting debate that I follow regularly. But I certainly would not be interested in solving the Palestinian question by creating another injustice. The cycle of injustice has to stop and the cycle of vengeance has to stop. Therefore, we need a language of accommodation, not just inclusion, of *re*-recognition, not denial of legitimacies.

One Israeli friend told me, "one reason we do not trust you as Palestinians is because if anybody did to us what we did to you we would never forgive and forget." Really, and he said that openly and I appreciated the honesty. I told him that I am not here to prove to you that I am sincere. Look at what we are doing. We have launched a peace process. We have recognized Israel. We have accepted this, although it is a tremendous historical shift and compromise which did not come easily. We risked our lives to do it, heaven knows, I mean from both sides. I have had Israeli settlers try to kill me with machine guns several times. I have had extremists try to kill or bomb me several times. It does not matter. The thing is you take risks if you want to resolve the conflict. You do it by addressing the substance and the issues, not propaganda and statements of distorted history. No. We need to deal with the truth. Deal with realities. We must include others and recognize the legitimacies. I always say, disengage from this fatal proximity a relationship of occupied, unoccupied, and injustice, and we will reengage as equals and cooperate as equals and forge new realities based on mutuality, on trust, and on mutual benefit.

Student: In a time when there is so much disharmony in the Middle East, what is the role of Palestinian women or women of Israel in the Middle Eastern states?

Dr. Ashrawi: That is a topic close to my heart. The Palestinian women's movement goes back to the 1920s, as I told you.³⁹ It was mainly middle class, urban-educated women, a sort of charitable societies with intellectual organizations. Now, since the 1970s, actually the early 1970s, we were involved in the women's movement with a real gender consciousness. It is not that Palestinian women were ever excluded. We never had a culture that was entirely closed. We have the discrimination of a traditional patriarchal,

39. See ASHRAWI, *supra* note 9, at 47.

male-dominated society, which is true I think of most countries in the world. There has been discrimination. But, we do not, in a sense, have a total exclusion of women from education, public life, or work. We have never done that.

In the 1970s we started the women's movement on the basis of a clear gender agenda asking for *full* participation, on an equal basis. And, of course, rejecting the argument that a national struggle supersedes social justice. And that there are issues that can be postponed and issues that are primary and that are secondary. The women's issue is a primary issue and is not capable of being postponed. If you are fighting for justice, you cannot tolerate social injustice. If you are struggling for liberation, you cannot enslave women. If you want self-determination as a nation, you cannot withhold it from women. So our argument was always the integrated comprehensive approach to liberation.

You have to struggle against the mentality of oppression, exclusion, and discrimination on all fronts. You cannot say I want national liberation but I will enslave the women. That is how we intruded on our patriarchal society. We are nowhere near where we want to be. Of course the Arab world, predominantly Muslim culture, tends to be more conservative and has the whole spectrum—from the most oppressed, excluded, and silenced women to the most liberated, outspoken, and defiant women, and everything in between. So we do not generalize about Arab women. But we can say that Arab society on the whole is traditional, with social conservatism based on a recognition of a sort of patriarchal system of property and of power. Women are involved, of course. We have a strong women's movement with several organizations that have a general agenda.⁴⁰ There is a tension between the traditional women who still talk about the national agenda as being separate, and the women activists who are involved in the gender agenda as being an instrument of internal empowerment to face external challenges.

We do have support systems for women. We are trying to change the whole bent of a shame-oriented culture to a guilt-oriented culture when we deal with issues of honor. For example, honor was always associated with women's behavior in Arab societies, right? Honor was the whole link to her social behavior, her sexual behavior, and her obedience. The family honor was linked to the women and therefore, the women had to pay the price. They were contained and controlled. There is still the phenomena of honor

40. See The Palestinian Working Women Society, at <http://www.pal-pwws.org> (2000) (discussing the goal of developing greater women's involvement in building a Palestinian democratic civil society); see also Michele Landsberg, *Women Missing From Mideast Peace Negotiations*, TORONTO STAR, Jan. 13, 2001, available at 2001 WL 4022113.

killings which, in Jordan, now has come out in the parliament because they are trying to change the law.⁴¹ There was, by law, a mitigating circumstance that if you kill your daughter or your wife or your sister because she shamed you through dishonorable behavior, then you get a very minimal sentence, a life sentence.⁴²

Quite often there is collusion among the judiciary, the police, and everybody else to hide these things. I was just dealing with a case before I came, and this is an extreme case. The case involved a young woman who, as a child, suffered from incestuous rape having been repeatedly raped by her brother and her father. Then they married her off at an early age to somebody who used her as a prostitute, to make money off of her. She ran away. They threatened to kill her on the basis of honor, that she dishonored the family by running away. She came to a women's shelter in Jerusalem where she was sheltered for a while. We agreed that she should be trained to start a profession. She insisted that she wanted to make peace with her family. We said "okay, you want to make peace with your family, and with your past? We will go with you, we will send our lawyers with you, you should not go alone." So we did. The lawyers went with her, women lawyers. The family said that of course they will take her back and they were happy that she was being trained. They also said they would not force her to go back to her husband who was abusing her and was using her for prostitution, as well as subjecting her to physical abuse. They said she would stay with her family, and she would start her training program with the women's organization, the legal aid center. I think it took two weeks before her body was found in a well and the family said she committed suicide. The doctor who found her, the coroner, was *asked* to say that it was suicide. The judge immediately signed a statement that it was suicide. We had a demonstration and went to that village, which was unprecedented. We said that we knew that it was not suicide. This woman was starting a whole new phase, she was being trained. This was a case where a woman was intensively oppressed. And I used this as the most extreme case with which we dealt. It is not the case of all Palestinian or Arab women. This is an extreme case to show you how far this can go.

41. Carol Anne Douglas, *Jordan: Working Against "Honor Killings"*, OFF OUR BACKS, Jan. 1, 2001. The National Jordanian Campaign Committee to Eliminate Crimes of Honor has been working for the past two years against "honor killings." *Id.* Honor killings are killings of girls and women by their male relatives. *Id.*

42. *Id.*; see also 20 *Jordanian Women Died in 2000 in "Honour Killings"*, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, Dec. 31, 2000, available at 2000 WL 24790096 ("[a] murderer in Jordan would ordinarily face the death penalty").

What we need to do is to redefine a woman's honor. By redefining dishonor and shame as being part of the national establishment, being a collaborator, women gained new recognition as activists, political activists. Women who went to jail under occupation quite often did not get married when they came out of jail because there were questions of virginity—there were questions of abuse in prison, whether they were tortured, and whether they were still virgins. Who would marry them?

One woman was released after ten to twelve years of imprisonment and torture, when she married another person who was imprisoned and it was a source of honor. We had a huge breaking point just to show that these two instances have redefined again the concept of honor; that she was honorable and she was a source of pride and this gradually changed many things for all Palestinians.

For example, a young girl, my niece, was elected head of the labor department of our political party. Accordingly, she was giving instructions to men who were her father's age, who were doctors and lawyers while she was a student. In the political hierarchy, women came into positions higher than the men. Thus, the men could not use the traditional means of control such as "I am your father. I am your brother." And so, we also changed the system of government. You have to do this systematically.

Now there is dialogue between the Palestinians and the Jews. It started in the 1970s with what is called the activist dialogue, and the solidarity movement. It started with a coalition of about thirty-two anti-occupationist organizations and we asked them all to work together. We were activists and we went to universities together to create a dialogue. The dialogue was interactive. The 1980s began what was called political dialogue. They wanted a different approach and wanted a Palestinian-Israeli partnership. In 1988, there was a historical meeting. We argued and fought but we discussed the issues and then, after two to three days, everybody ended up respecting and understanding one another. We came up with a declaration and it was honest.