

Edward Said's Lost Essay on Jerusalem

*The Current Status of Jerusalem**

Edward Said

Introduction by Rashid Khalidi

This article about the status Jerusalem was written by Edward Said fifteen years ago. It is nevertheless striking how accurate its description of the reality in Jerusalem remains, in spite of all that has changed since then.

Even more striking than Said's acuity regarding Israeli intentions and actions on the ground in the Holy City is the depth of his understanding of the method of operation regarding Jerusalem that Israel has systematically pursued since 1967. This consists in first projecting an essentially false image of what it wants the world to believe, and then acting decisively to make that vision a "reality." Thus declarative policy preceded actual transformations on the ground. Proclamation of Jerusalem as Israel's "eternal, undivided capital" and hammering this meretricious theme home via the many channels available to it, was the essential precursor to the actual process of making this vision a reality. This involved swallowing up Arab East Jerusalem, turning its population into a minority even in the Eastern part of the city via intensive colonization, and separating it from its hinterland in the West Bank. These real-world processes have continued for over four decades now. However, the precondition for their success was the declarative policy that Said so accurately summarizes. In spite of all the vacuous talk about "Zionist propaganda," few have written as perceptively as Said about how closely interlinked have been the discursive and the active aspects of Israel's policies: the establishment of facts on the ground has thus always been accompanied by the fabrication of "facts" in the realms of history, culture and the imagination.

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Also worth underlining is the barely veiled anger Said shows in this article towards the incapacity of Palestinian and Arab leaderships, both political and intellectual, to project a vision of Jerusalem that might counter that of a historically Jewish Jerusalem that belongs exclusively to Israel. This muteness, this blindness to the importance of having a humanistic and ecumenical vision and projecting it clearly to the world, was long a source of frustration to Edward Said. He constantly reiterated how important it was for the Palestinians to speak clearly to the world about their aims, their hopes, their visions, and their understanding of history. Sadly, in the years since his death in 2003, there has been little improvement. There is absolutely no articulation whatsoever of any Arab vision for Jerusalem, either by Palestinian civil society, or by the hundreds of ministers and senior officials of the two feeble "Palestinian Authorities" in Ramallah and Gaza, let alone by the autocratic regimes that blight the Arab world from the Atlantic to the Gulf.

Remarkably, little in Said's critique of the farcical "peace process" seems out of place, even fifteen years after it was written. Most of what he warns against in the article has sadly come to pass in Jerusalem, and indeed things appear to worsen with the passage of time. Far from bringing a just peace any nearer, this process has measurably furthered the entrenchment of the Israeli occupation and settlement enterprise, and has allowed Israel to tighten its grip on Jerusalem. As Said points out, however, there is nothing to prevent Palestinians and Arabs from fighting back on the level of information, not just explaining the enormity of what Israel has been doing in Jerusalem, but setting out a truer vision of what Jerusalem has been, is, and could be. That was true in 1995, and it is still true today.

In May of 1991 I was invited by the University of Capetown to deliver the A.W. Davie Academic Freedom Lecture which, as its title suggests, made the claim for academic freedom when in fact there was very little of it. Apartheid had still not ended, although a few months earlier Nelson Mandela had been released from his twenty-seven-year prison sentence. Since the academic and cultural boycott of South Africa was still being observed I had to be cleared by the boycott, that is, ANC committee, which I duly was, and after an exhausting journey from New York my wife and I arrived in Johannesburg for a brief visit before proceeding to Capetown. While in Johannesburg I was hosted by the University of Witwatersrand and the ANC, and this of course led us to a visit to ANC headquarters, then in the Shell Building in the center of the downtown area. There were numerous exchanges and seminars I participated in, since people seemed very interested in the Palestinian issue, and I of course was happy to oblige. It was possible to meet with Mandela quite briefly; he was then at the center of national and international efforts to take South Africa from apartheid into a non-racialist new state. So after seeing him we were then shepherded into the next-door office of his comrade Walter Sisulu who, like Mandela, had also spent a very long time in prison and was recently released. I spent about an hour with Sisulu discussing the history of the ANC's struggle, now for the first time in its history in the ascendancy;

it was for me a deeply illuminating discussion with obvious points of difference and comparison with the Palestinian struggle, then, as now, very much *not* in the ascendancy.

The warmth and cordiality of my reception by Sisulu was slightly disturbed, however, by a copy of Teddy Kollek's coffee-table book about himself and Jerusalem¹ propped up on a table. It was the only book in sight, so I wasn't wrong, I think, to conclude that it was making a point for Sisulu, one intended for me. After my visit I mentioned the dissonance I felt that was caused by Kollek – who to most Palestinians is a symbol of Israel's annexation policy – to one of Sisulu's advisers, a young academic who had made the appointments for me with the ANC. She too was disconcerted by the symbolism of the Kollek book, but said that she would inquire. She later told me that Sisulu's idea had been to make me feel more at ease by putting out Kollek's book for me: Kollek, he had said was supposed to be a representative of liberalism and of Arab and Jewish cooperation; thus Sisulu had wanted to show his support for that process too.

Alas, I never saw Sisulu again, and never had a chance to inform him, for instance, that only a few days after the Israelis conquered the Old City in early June 1967, Kollek, along with Moshe Dayan, threw out almost a thousand Palestinians from their ancestral dwellings in the Haret-al-Maghariba, razed their homes, and built the monumental plaza that now stretches before the Western Wall, an area which has become *Arab-rein*, purely Jewish. This episode is superbly, if chillingly described in the wartime context of 1967, by the American journalist Donald Neff in *Warriors for Jerusalem* (1984).² While I was in South Africa I had heard about similar tactics being employed by Afrikaaner officials in downtown Capetown, which had formerly contained large numbers of Black and Colored peoples, whose districts were destroyed, their inhabitants moved out to the townships, so that the inner city could remain purely white. How was it that instead of seizing on this extremely similar thing about Kollek's past, Sisulu had instead fastened on Kollek's carefully marketed international image as a humane, liberal, pacifying man, someone whose open-collared wisdom and improvisatory style endeared him to the world, and who made him the overriding symbol of Jerusalem, Israeli-held Jerusalem it is true, but somehow that did not matter: what did matter was that he was everyone's mayor, and was honored as such all over the world. Even Sisulu and the ANC seemed to have felt that.

I need not dwell for too long here on how poignantly and ironically this episode resonates as we consider the current status of Jerusalem and the future of the peace process. In 1991 Jerusalem had already been annexed by Israel for twenty-four years, its topography, environment and historic aura massively intervened in, forcibly changed, demographically tampered with. Yet what had communicated itself of this unpleasant history to the outside world was a cheerful symbol of pioneering, humane enterprise, which is to say very little of what had been done to Jerusalem, and what its (then) Palestinian majority in the Eastern part of the city had been forced to endure in the way of quite considerable loss and suffering. The first thing to be noted then is not just the power of Israel to have done what it did in the face of initial resistance and

international demurrals – there were after all a number of United Nations resolutions protesting unilateral Israeli measures taken in Jerusalem – but its ability also to have communicated to the world that what it did so peremptorily, overrode and set right all the piddling objections that might have deterred or entirely stopped anyone else. This is a sign of how seriously Israel took its task in Jerusalem, which is to convert it from a multi-cultural and multi-religious city into a principally Jewish one with sovereignty controlled exclusively by Israel; what it did was to project an idea of the city that not only contradicted the city's history but its very lived actuality, and turned it into what appeared to be a unified, "eternally" central reality in the life principally of Jews the world over. Only by doing so first in projections and information could it then proceed to do what it has done on the ground during the late 1980s and early 1990s, is, massively undertake the architectural, demographic and political metamorphosis that would then correspond to the images and projections.

This process of projecting first, building and displacing later, continues even as we speak. It began in 1948 with what was then known as West Jerusalem, a part of the city in which I was born and where for a time I grew up. It is crucial to recall here that, as Rashid Khalidi put it in his 1990 Antonios lecture at St. Anthony's College, "much of what today is commonly thought of as 'Israeli West Jerusalem' in fact consisted of Arab neighborhoods before the fighting of the spring of 1948, when over 30,000 of their inhabitants were driven out or fled from their quarters like [Upper and Lower] Baq'a, Qatamon and Talbiyya, several months before some 2,000 Jews were forced out of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City."

Before I returned for a visit in 1992, I myself was last in Talbiyya, where the family house stood and still stands, forty-five years earlier, in late 1947, although my oldest cousin Yousif remained in the house till the early part of the new year. But with a young and pregnant wife he soon found it difficult to get in and out of Talbiyya which was in a different zone from where his business was near the juncture of the Old City Walls between Bab el Jedid and Bab el Khalil and Mamilla Road. He then moved to a rented house in Baq'a, and remained there till late April, at which point he left with his wife for Lebanon via Jordan. The area had become unlivable, with shooting and bombing at night disturbing the mostly unarmed, and totally unorganized Palestinian residents. The Deir Yassin massacre on April 9 had frightened everyone; the fall of, and the Palestinian exodus from, Haifa later in the month sent panic through the community. He told me some time later that what made matters worse was that the Palestinian leaders had left by the end of April, leaving individuals like himself in a situation of extreme vulnerability, especially that since early spring Hagganah patrols with loudspeakers would periodically appear on the streets in West Jerusalem announcing that residents should leave, as the whole area was about to fall to Jewish forces. There was no protection and no sense that the Mandate government, still nominally responsible for providing law and order, was able to do much; they too seemed to have abandoned the Palestinians to their well-armed and organized Zionist opponents. My cousin also told me that he had asked a single male relative of ours to stay in the Baq'a house while he took his wife to safety. In the meantime the house

was broken into by the Hagganah, and because they found my cousin's hunting gun in the place, they first beat, then imprisoned his hapless relative for six months. And of course they simply commandeered the property.

None of this concrete history of loss and deprivation ever made it into official records of Israel's War of Independence, as it has rather callously been called, and of course, the world heard little from people like my cousin who in the years after 1948 were too engrossed in the daily struggle for survival in new, and usually hostile environments. Jerusalem, *Israel*, quickly accounted for much of the world's approbation after 1948. According to the authorized version of reality, this after all was the most famous city of a country that like the Marshall Plan, and the reconstruction of Europe and Japan, was considered to be one of the great postwar achievements, celebrated, saluted, noticed with every kind of salutary label. Israel made the desert bloom; it farmed the wastelands; it redesigned the environment; it created democracy. And in West Jerusalem it built a memorial to the Holocaust and also built its legislative capital, the Knesset. It remained for a later generation of Israelis, the so-called revisionists like Benny Morris, Tom Segev and others³, to reveal some of the costs of Israel's creation, costs that were borne mainly by the essentially silent and unheard Palestinians. Only in the past year, moreover, have some Israeli cabinet records for 1948 come under scrutiny, and they too tell a tale of programmatic policies designed to remove Palestinians, officially erase their traces, consign them to legal and institutional non-existence⁴.

It is, however, no less a sign of Palestinian powerlessness and, it must be said, collective incompetence that to this day the story of Jerusalem's loss both in 1948 and 1967 has not been told by them, but – insofar as it has been told at all – partially reconstructed either by Israelis both sympathetic and unsympathetic to them, or by foreigners. In other words not only has there been no Palestinian narrative of 1948 and after that can at least challenge the dominant Israeli narrative, there has also been no collective Palestinian projection for Jerusalem, since its all-too-definitive loss in 1948 and then again in 1967.

So to get to the main point of my comments: I want to draw attention to this quite extraordinary act of historical and political neglect, whose effect had been to deprive us of Jerusalem well *before* the fact. In so stating my thesis, I want neither to point a finger, nor to lament what has happened and for the most part is very likely to be irremediable. But what I want to say is that if we want to assess Jerusalem's current status in the peace process, and if we want to come to a full understanding not only of Israel's designs and accomplishments in the Eastern city since 1967 but also of what Palestinian designs and accomplishments have amounted to, we must be prepared to admit that an astonishing disparity exists between the two sides in the contest over Jerusalem. This was certainly true in 1948. It is, I am very sorry to say, equally true in 1995, although now we Palestinians claim that we have a legitimate representative who since the summer of 1993 has been engaged in direct negotiations with Israel over the transitional period; these talks are to lead to final status negotiations.

I believe it does need to be said, and reiterated that an Arab Palestinian claim in Jerusalem – a very real claim based on history and culture – does exist and must very strenuously be made. But it cannot, in my opinion, be made with any credibility at all unless the history of our gradual loss of Jerusalem is understood precisely and dispassionately to begin with. Only then can we begin to understand what is necessary for the claim to be pressed with some modest hope of success. Consider that at the time East Jerusalem was occupied by Israel in early June 1967 there were approximately 70,000 Palestinians who lived there and in the nearby villages. Almost 200,000 Jews lived in West Jerusalem. By the end of the month the barrier between East and West was eliminated, and the city's municipal boundaries were set at twenty-eight square miles, an area that included the Eastern part of the city. Kollek took over the city council, which so far as its Arab component was concerned was summarily dissolved, and over the years the two halves of the city were welded together. Although the Palestinian population doubled to about 150,000 in the early nineties, they were allowed to build on about ten to fifteen percent of the land. Israeli Jews in East Jerusalem now [1996] number about 160,000. Nearly ninety percent of new building was for Jews, about twelve percent only for Arabs.⁵ Expropriations of land in and around Jerusalem have been systematic; its area has been increased; and the city is now surrounded by a ring of massive (and massively ugly) Jewish settlements that dominate the landscape, stating the provocative idea that Jerusalem is, must be, will always be a Jewish city, despite the existence of a sizeable, albeit disabled and encircled Palestinian population. The Dutch geographer Jan De Jong has written therefore that:

Those who expect that the map of Jerusalem unfolded at the [final status] negotiation table will cover only post-1967 Jerusalem will be in for a cold surprise. More likely it will extend from Beit Shemesh and Mod'in in the West (almost half-way to Tel Aviv), to a few miles from Halhoul and Hebron in the south, to beyond Ramallah in the north, to within miles of Jericho in the east. This vast area that Israel conventionally considers Metropolitan Jerusalem comprises approximately 482 square miles, of which three-quarters are situated within the West Bank⁶.

Thus Jerusalem in its current expanded form (only slightly less in area than the projection described here by de Jong) accounts for about twenty-five percent of the West Bank. Its Palestinian residents have an anomalous and resolutely eccentric status given them by Israel. Although Israel has annexed East Jerusalem, its non-Jewish residents are not citizens, cannot vote except in municipal elections, and have the legal designation of "resident aliens." During the Israeli-joint Palestinian-Jordanian negotiations that began after the Madrid Conference in Washington (late 1991) residents of Jerusalem were not permitted by Israel to be members of the negotiating team, and now, even during the discussions concerning elections that have been taking place between Israel and the Palestine Authority, the question of whether Palestinian

residents of Jerusalem may or may not vote is a thorny one. On the other hand the closure of Jerusalem to most of the inhabitants of Gaza and the rest of the West Bank has created great hardship for them since, as Israel well knows, East Jerusalem is the hub of the West Bank; any design terminally to fortify, isolate and incorporate it into the scheme of “separation” now being pursued by the Labor government in effect means amputating it from its natural connections with the rest of the Palestinian territories, as well as gouging out a gaping hole in the territories which would permanently impair them.

But this is exactly Israel’s plan which, in effect, is an assault not only on geography but also on culture and history, and of course religion. Whatever else it may be, historical Palestine is a seamless amalgam of cultures and religions, engaged like members of the same family, on the same plot of land in which all has become entwined with all. Yet so powerful and, in my opinion, so socially rejectionist is the Zionist vision that it has seized on the land, the past, and the living actuality of interrelated cultures and traditions in order to sever, carve out, unilaterally possess a territory and a place that it asserts is uniquely its own. Here again Jerusalem is an excellent example of what I mean. It has had a recorded history of some 10,000 years, during which an almost unimaginable series of conquerors, inhabitants and coexisting traditions have maintained their presence sometimes harmoniously, sometimes precariously. It would be extremely difficult now to say – using any mathematical or equitable formula at all – that the predominating influence in the city over the whole period was Jewish. Certainly for the last 3,000 years there has been a Jewish presence and, for a short period before and shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, there was a Jewish kingdom with its capital in Jerusalem.

But there has been a longer, more continuous Muslim presence, and certainly a very dense Christian one too. To override all this by saying that only the Jews have a right to exclusive sovereignty over the city is, I believe, a very willful and insensitive act which has the effect of dispossessing everyone else. I will not deny at all what many scholars and religious experts have said, that Jerusalem occupies a special place in the Jewish religion and tradition, perhaps even more special than that of any other single group. But admitting that does not by any means guarantee Israel’s right – Israel after all is a modern state – to say that Jerusalem is its eternal undivided capital to the exclusion not only of the city’s present Palestinian population, but also to its past, extremely varied, mottled, and interesting in multi-cultural terms.

I find the whole debate about the possession and concrete ownership of Jerusalem in these terms to be extremely unpleasant, unedifying and objectionable. It neither does justice to the nobility of the city’s unparalleled aura and grandeur, nor to its unequivocally rich-textured history of religious, cultural, and even political significance. The saintly Bernard of Clairvaux, preaching in the heart of the Burgundian countryside had no compunction at all in proclaiming the centrality of Palestine and the necessity of crusading several thousand miles in order to possess it. Seventh-century Islam, although much closer to Palestine than Europeans were, did something of the same thing without, however, that appalling disregard for

and demonization of the Other that is very often the European hallmark. And in a perspicacious study of the role of territory in the Jewish imagination, Uri Eizenzweig has described the projections, fears and exultancies that characterize the role of sacred land for Jews in Europe.

But of course it is one thing in a scholarly way to examine the pattern of the past, and quite another to confront the coarse interjections of the present, those, that is, by which Israel since 1967 has adopted in Jerusalem. The plan is nothing less than to dispossess Palestinians and turn them into a numerical minority, at the same time building up, interposing, implanting a fortified Jewish presence that will either dwarf or totally marginalize all the other of the city's myriad actualities. A report in the *Washington Post* by Elaine Ruth Fletcher talks in detail about the Israeli building spree all over Jerusalem's gently rolling hills, its once green valleys, and peaceful environment. High-rise hotels and office building right up against the ancient walls are designed by the lamentable Likud mayor Ehud Olmert (who makes one almost sentimental about Kollek) to dominate everything Arab and Muslim, says Fletcher; in Ein Karem, "birthplace of John the Baptist, plans are being laid for a controversial hotel, tourist, and road development project to coincide with Israel's late-1995-96 celebration of 3,000 years since the biblical King David named the city as his capital." Roads, apartment houses, malls and the like are creeping up everywhere, so much so, says Fletcher, that the three mile "urban distinction" between Bethlehem and Jerusalem is being erased.

It is worth nothing that several Israeli individuals are at long last beginning to speak up about this insensitively crude strategy. I read somewhere that Knesset member Yael Dayan was prepared to show up at a meeting with Palestinians and declare that Jerusalem was the capital of two peoples and two states (she subsequently did *not* appear). Elaine Fletcher cites Elinor Bazrachi, deputy director of Tel Aviv University's School of Architecture and Jerusalem's former chief planner, as saying that Olmert's building drive is like putting a mustache on the Mona Lisa; "incidentally," Bazrachi resigned recently in a dispute with Olmert over the city's present development course. There are undoubtedly other Israelis who are dismayed at the unseemly land grabs, the egregious building procedures, the nasty possessiveness of the whole business.

In the main, however, Israel seems undeterred, aided and abetted in the stampede by members of the US Congress who have started a drive to move the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, thereby breaking with a constant in US foreign policy since 1948. All this is part of the feeding frenzy that descends on elected American officials as the presidential campaign season approaches. It is true of course that the most recent expropriations – actually the 100th all over the Occupied Territories since the signing of the Declaration of Principles in September 1993 – in Jerusalem seemed to have finally been temporarily stopped by a combination of internal and international pressures. But note that these measures were only "suspended" pending further ministerial investigation; this leaves Israel with the option of taking more land in different circumstances at a later date. We also know thanks to a report by Patrick

Cockburn in the *Independent* that Zionist organizations have been using Jordan as a place to buy up more Palestinian land in Jerusalem. Besides, as any resident in East Jerusalem will tell you, there is a constant threat to the Palestinians of the Old City that their houses might be broken into, seized, and occupied at any time.

The most impressive thing about all this is not just that with the US employing its Security Council veto to protect Israel's delinquent, not to say criminal, behavior, the international community seems powerless to say or do anything, but that the Arabs and Muslims together, plus especially the Palestinians have yet to mobilize their considerable resources to counteract Israel's behavior in Jerusalem. Why for example was the Arab League summit, which had been scheduled as a response to Israel's announced expropriations, summarily canceled? And why, despite endless amounts of evidence proving Israel's bad faith, does the Palestine Authority supinely proceed with its negotiations, all the while doing absolutely nothing either locally or internationally to mobilize Palestinians against Israel's continued assault on Jerusalem?

To get answers to these questions we must first ask why in the Declaration of Principles itself Jerusalem, already annexed illegally, already aggressed against in all sorts of ways, was split off from the West Bank and Gaza and left, or rather conceded, to Israel from the outset of negotiations? The answer must lie in two closely connected facts, (a) that being much more powerful and backed to the hilt by the US, Israel simply asserted that fact unilaterally, reserving for itself the right to do what it wished both in Jerusalem and elsewhere and (b) the Palestinian conviction that there was no other alternative but to make that, as well as many other concessions. The implications of all this have been well spelled-out in a scrupulously careful study of the Oslo Accords by Burhan Dajani, which appeared in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*. One passage, which underscores not so much only the weakness but the prior moral capitulation of the Palestinian leadership, deserves quotation:

Given the power configuration, the only way the Palestinians can secure any gains in the welter of negotiations unfolding is in exchange for concessions. (For Israel, of course, anything it offers as a concession or sacrifice would be seen as requiring compensation by the United States and regional bodies and through regional funds.) The question is what the Palestinians have left to concede. They can make concessions on the delimitation of the territory of the self-governing authority [and have already done so in Cairo on May 4, 1995], concessions to the jurisdictions of the various authorities [each of which is carefully sculpted for them by the Israelis, then handed to them on the understanding that nothing the Palestinians do should go against Israeli interests or security; if they do then Israel can re-intervene], and – inevitably – concessions on the status of Jerusalem and the final shape of the so-called permanent status. Indeed, this “permanent status” will be no more than what is left over at the end of the transitional period; everything that is chopped off and conceded during the transitional period will be taken from the permanent status⁷.

There is a valuable insight into the mentality that produced so catastrophically supine an attitude near the end of Hanan Ashrawi's recent book *This Side of Peace*⁸. Expressing some dismay at the text of the Declaration of Principles Ashrawi is told by, as I recall, the architect of the accords, Abu Mazen, that she should not worry. We shall sign now, and then, he says chivalrously, you can bargain with them to try to get back the things we have conceded. I wonder where this prodigiously endowed intelligence got its ideas, or its impressions – they were scarcely more than that – about how the Israelis work, how they sign agreements, how they concede, and so forth. Dajani does well to remind us that it took the sovereign country of Egypt five years to win back the less than half a square mile area of Taba, and this with a mobilized foreign office, enormous experience and training in diplomacy, and little interest in Taba by Israel. It is also perhaps worth recalling that the Palestine Authority usually negotiates without consulting lawyers, with no experience whatsoever in settling international disputes, and with no real conviction in actually winning anything at all, except what Israel might deign to throw its way. The problem of Jerusalem in the peace process today is therefore largely a problem of the incompetence, the insouciance, the unacceptable negligence of the Palestinian leadership which has in the first instance actually agreed to let Israel do what it wishes in Jerusalem, and in the second instance evinces not the slightest sign that it is capable of comprehending, much less executing the truly herculean task that is required before the battle for Jerusalem can really be joined.

If then Jerusalem has been taken from the Palestinians by Israel, dispossessing them of it, what are some of the steps that need to be taken, what are the values and principles that need to be asserted, what are ways by which it can be re-possessed in the future? Jerusalem, for all its vaunted sanctity and importance, is no different from the other Occupied Territories in principle: that is, according to international law, it is not Israel's alone to dispose of, or to build in, or to exploit to the exclusion of Palestinians and others. From the outset then we need a clear statement of purpose and principle to guide our way, and if this in effect involves re-thinking and re-doing Oslo, then so be it. Israel has been re-interpreting, or rather violating Oslo, all along. The principle is this: there is a massive Palestinian-Muslim-Christian-multi-cultural reality in Jerusalem, and we will not tolerate either its obliteration or its supervision by Israel. Our role as Palestinians, as parties to and believers in a just peace between Israel and the Palestinian people, is to insert that fact into the peace process, from which over the past several years it has gradually been forced out. But it will do no good merely to say this — unless the saying is part of a general strategy both of negotiating and in fact *winning* the peace that we desire.

Simply to speak about East Jerusalem mechanically as Arab is not enough. I myself do not at all believe it is in our interests as a people to introduce another division in a city that has remained ethnically separated albeit municipally glued together in the manner that Israel has done it; I think it would be much better to set an example, and provide an alternative to such methods as Israel's by projecting an image of the whole of Jerusalem that is truer to its complex mixture of religions, histories and cultures, than the one of Jerusalem as something that we would like to slice back into two parts.

Of course East Jerusalem is part of the occupied West Bank, and this point needs to be made over and over again; as such therefore it has to be re-connected with the whole issue of liberating Palestinians from the burdens of being under Israeli occupation. But beyond that Jerusalem is the one place, which, for the reasons I gave earlier, really can be a site of co-existence and sharing between us and the Israelis, and so we should insist on that, i.e. speak of Jerusalem as a city with joint sovereignty, joint and cooperative vision, which we do based on the principle of our self-determination and independence as a people and as a society.

The realities are of course much less simple and ennobling than that. Israel and the United States between them now in effect control the peace process and for twenty-eight years Israel has been adding to, plus implanting new, settlements. Jerusalem is part of the same policy, except that the pernicious slogan – Judaizing Jerusalem – has been openly put to service in the city as well as internationally. This has to be dealt with frontally, in my opinion, both by a coordinated, well-planned information campaign stating the facts, bringing it to the attention of Jerusalem's enormous world-wide constituency, as well as by a firm policy of re-connecting Israeli land-grabs, illegal building, and the like with the ongoing peace negotiations. A huge amount of time has been wasted. Israel began trying to change the character of Jerusalem from the moment it entered the city: its shameful record must be placed before the Arab, Muslim and Christian worlds who after all do have a stake in this business. Above all, we need to disprove the fraudulent claim that Jerusalem is, and always was, an essentially Jewish city. This simply flies in the face of the facts but, as no one needs to be reminded, the facts do not ever speak for themselves. They must be articulated, they must be disseminated, they must be reiterated and re-circulated.

The present Palestine Authority is not only incapable of ever doing this, it cannot grasp the meaning of such ideas because it has become the prisoner, if not also the dutiful enforcer, of the Israeli occupation regime. It was by design that Jerusalem was excluded from the interim phase discussions; we now know without any doubt at all that Israel wanted the breathing space (granted to it by the Palestinians no less) in order to proceed with its settlement plans all through the Occupied Territories and Jerusalem. Arafat is caught in a trap: whenever he wants a little more leeway to be given him by the Israelis, say on the matter of elections, he gives up a little more somewhere else. Last January, for instance, he was trying to convince Rabin that he was able to discipline Hamas and Islamic Jihad and met for that purpose at the Erez checkpoint outside Gaza; later, according to *Yediot Aharonot*, January 27, 1995, Arafat conceded in a press conference that Jerusalem was an internal Israeli matter. Now I submit that such a strategy (if it is one) of slipping and sliding all over the place is not consonant with a policy of retrieving Palestinian and other rights in Jerusalem.

I therefore want to say categorically that diaspora Palestinians, who now constitute the majority of Palestinians in the world, must take the initiative on Jerusalem and on the other occupied territories. In the diaspora, there is plenty of opposition to what is now going on in the name of autonomy and peace process, though very little of this opposition is coordinated or channeled productively into

useful activities. Yet no group or association has been formed whose *raison d'être* is to reverse the disastrous course of concession and loss inflicted on Palestinians as a whole people by the current peace process.

I do not want to be misunderstood here. I am not arguing against peace. I have been speaking up for peace and real reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis for over twenty years. But I do not think there can be real peace except between equals, between two peoples who together decide consciously and deliberately to share the land among themselves decently and humanely. Israel in my opinion has used the peace process as a subterfuge only to go on holding the land as if it were its sole proprietor. Its vision of the future is expressed perfectly by the Bantustan-like “separation” and cantonization it is now trying to impose through its Rainbow Plan on what to it is a lesser race of human beings. Palestinians have accepted Israel as a sovereign state entitled to peace and security, and have demonstrated this willingness *ad nauseam*, with no comparable undertaking from Israel. Is the Palestinian position necessarily and irreducibly only that of a defeated party whose role now is simply to capitulate and accept the dictates of the strong?

I cannot accept such logic. We must, I believe, in our own minds take that very important first step, which is to say that our goals are realizable and can, indeed must, be worked for. The only alternative is not the impoverishing one now offered us by Israel and the US, with the international community obediently in tow. After all Resolutions 242 and 338, the supposed basis of peace between Arabs and Israelis, are being contravened every day by Israel: can these resolutions not ever again be mentioned? In addition, we need some fair and reasonable assessment of our assets, which are not confined to the 19,000 policemen who serve Arafat in Gaza and Jericho. As I said, there is still a considerable Palestinian rump in the diaspora: it is this group that produced the PLO in the first place, and it is also this group that has produced much that today's Palestinians possess, materially and morally. We constitute a formidable non-governmental resource, and this must now be turned at last to the idea that the Occupied Territories are the part of Palestine that is rightfully ours to work for.

I return to the matter of information. Unless Jerusalem is re-projected and re-presented as a jointly held capital, not as an exclusively Jewish capital, it will continue to be hostage to Israel's deeply offensive designs. Why have plans for the festival celebrating Jerusalem's 3,000 years as a Jewish capital gone without a serious organized response from Palestinians and others, for whom Jerusalem is also our capital? To suggest that there has been an unbroken 3,000 years of Jewish sovereignty or claim is without basis in historical fact. It is a projection foisted on minds who are assumed to be ignorant and gullible. Our claims, no less important – perhaps even more so – have to be heard, and for this a powerful strategy must be devised outside Palestine, which is where it counts the most. This is something that, for reasons that I find completely mysterious, Palestinian leaders have always misunderstood, particularly at times like this, when Israel depends so heavily on the virtual absence of Palestinian voices, counter-representations, and strategies. We have a gigantic Islamic and Arab constituency, a Western constituency, a Christian one. Other constituencies

too, must be forged and seriously touched.

Such a strategy necessarily includes the support of resistance by Palestinians inside Jerusalem. For years, individual Palestinians have tried to stand up to Israel's attempts to take over their lands and homes. Ten years ago with outside Palestinian help a committee was set up to protect homes inside the Old City; this included help for legal proceedings, women's education and training, the establishment of an early warning system against marauding settlers. I do not know where these efforts have arrived today, or whether even they continue. My sense of urgency, however, underscores the danger of dispossession that exists in every square inch of Palestinian life and property in the metropolitan Jerusalem area. For that is now the front line in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination: therefore it must be subsidized, dramatized, campaigned for unstintingly, and *collectively*.

Speaking the truth is the *sine qua non* in all this. Why are we silent when Morocco, which heads the Arab League Jerusalem committee, has made its total and unquestioning peace with Israel? Why do we accept that the Arab League, which says that it has put itself on the front line for Palestine generally and Jerusalem in particular, simply dissolves what could have been a crucial summit, just because Israel and the US wanted the meeting canceled? Both Israel and the US have prevaricated and cynically exploited Palestinian and Arab weakness in order to go on getting their own way in the Middle East. Is there no way honestly and clearly to say that this is intolerable?

As you can see I have more questions than answers, and in any case it is for diplomats and strategists to come up with a proper plan for dealing with the case of Jerusalem. It remains for me, however, to return again to the matter of ignorance, or partial knowledge, of the kind that Israel has been able to manipulate and exploit to its advantage, just as it has exploited to its advantage every change in the international system, from the Cold War to after the end of the Cold War. So substandard has been the Arab policy on information, on getting out the truth of the Palestinian, Arab, Muslim case for Jerusalem, that one is justified in wondering whether there is a collective Arab mind or will at all. Be that as it may, it is, I think, useful to note that it is not only that we have not taken seriously the enormous impact of preparing minds and hearts with facts and figures, with information that counteracts the pernicious falsifications about Palestinians and Jerusalem that Israel, in its own remarkably partial and short-sighted way has put about, but we have even spared ourselves the trouble of knowing what our own actualities are, and what the truth about Israel's policies really is.

I shall not try to explain why it is that for the quarter-century during which Israel has illegally annexed and tried to change the facts in Jerusalem, not a single workable, collective Palestinian enterprise resisting those measures has ever been announced and implemented. Nor can I possibly tell anyone why it is that after years and years of an unremitting Israeli-Zionist onslaught against Palestinian interests, the Palestinian and Arab leadership have simply decided that all that never really mattered, since the agenda now is about peace, albeit peace on Israeli and American terms. Why must

we forget our history of sacrifice? Why must we remain silent about reparations and restitution during negotiations that virtually require us to give up our own identity, just to satisfy the paranoid demands of Israel's security obsession? So let us leave aside all those matters and focus instead on one factor that remains crucial and will play a major role in determining the future of the peace process, and of Jerusalem. That is the role of interpreting Israeli actions, which in my opinion remain guided by a very concentrated ideological imperative.

I am opposed to the notion foisted on us by so-called pragmatists and realists that we should deal only with the realities, realities being defined only as those that present themselves as "facts" on the ground. That is a narrow and inadequate definition of reality, which to the contrary does include intentions, ideologies and the record of past performance and practice. To my way of thinking there is irrefutable evidence that according to its Rainbow Plan Israel plans to withdraw in stages, here and there, on the West Bank but never willingly to relinquish control of the Territories; this of course contradicts the Declaration of Principles, but that is not the only such violation, to none of which Israel has never been held to account. The reasons for Rabin's amazingly blind policy – which assures Palestinian enmity not just to Israel but to the peace process – are, as Shahak has recently argued, ideological. The land of Israel is believed by Rabin and his supporters across the political spectrum to be a perpetual trust held by Israel for the Jewish people. At the core is something I learned about Israel years and years ago, namely, the rigorous distinction between Jew and non-Jew. Many anomalies, unique to Israel and uncommon elsewhere, flow from this: the notion that Israel is not the state of its citizens but of the whole Jewish people, the statutory discrimination against all Palestinians (including those who are Israeli citizens) as a lesser, less privileged people, and so on. What Rabin and Peres intend, no matter what they say abroad, is the maintenance of a policy for the Territories that gives autonomy to the Palestinians, but never to the land. Re-deployment means leaving the cities, but increasing the number of by-pass roads that connect the settlements to each other and secure the land. It means, in short, never giving up the apartheid notion that Jews and non-Jews live separate existences, with the Jews always in a dominant, more privileged position, the Palestinians crowded into narrow enclaves that are encircled by Jewish roads and settlements.

If you keep that in mind, then you will notice that the genius of the Declaration of Principles as well as every subsequent and ongoing negotiating instrument has curtailed off from discussion that amazingly durable component of Israeli-Zionist ideology. The pity of it is that the Palestinian leadership has acquiesced, just as it has acquiesced to all the land confiscations that have occurred since the Oslo Declaration has been signed. These two ultimately impossible and unrealistic views of reality have converged in the peace process, with the result of course that the situation of Palestinian residents of the West Bank and Gaza has deteriorated, and the ideas and strategies pursued by Israel have obtained a misleadingly successful result. But these are very short-run matters, and are unlikely to go on in this way for much longer. The Palestinians are in a state of confusion and despair, caught as they are between

the dictatorial whims of their leader on the one hand, and the merciless policies of occupation and humiliation by which Israel maintains its hold on their lives and land.

Diaspora Palestinians are, speaking relatively, outside this dreadful little circle. True they have been abandoned by their leadership in places like Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, but – as I said earlier – they are overall a well-endowed and far from negligible community. An initiative to convene a conference on Jerusalem could only have come from diaspora Palestinians. We cannot of course simply go back and seize the land, but we can make all sorts of interventions and create all kinds of initiatives outside the well-worn paths and the cliché-strewn places. Jerusalem is the hub of all our efforts, since it is so central to the land itself, and central also to the ideological struggle. I am against leaving it to the end just because, as the banal saying has it, it is the most difficult issue to settle. Whatever else it may be, Jerusalem has the merit of dramatizing the difference between an exclusivist, narrowly ideological perception of history and society, and one we need to formulate and work for, a vision that is catholic, inclusive and liberating. And it is also the place where the Israelis have staked their most determined, most uncompromising efforts.

I do not see how anything can be done to change or inhibit or somehow affect Israel's measures in Jerusalem without attending to the informational-ideological framework that has been erected around the city by Israel. For it is in the conceptual framework around Jerusalem that Israel is most vulnerable to debate, information, intellectual and moral mobilization by its opponents. There is a generously eclectic history of Jerusalem to be excavated and inserted into the debate now dominated by Israel; there is also a redoubtable set of other, non-Jewish interests to be made clear; and there is at very least, a truer map to be drawn and clarified and mobilized around. Tacit acceptance or silence in the face of uncontested assertions must be dispelled, and dissolved. This means explicitly advancing a much clearer, more principled Palestinian view of peace and, at the same time, rigorously criticizing the origins as well as the course of Palestinian participation in the negotiations. This does not seem to me to be either a quixotic or an unrealistic strategy to pursue since there is already a considerable, though partly submerged, readiness on the part of Europeans, Americans, some Jews, and others, to listen to an alternative, less unpleasant course by which real peace can be achieved.

It is also the case that many Arabs in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, North Africa, the Gulf and elsewhere are not ready simply to normalize or complacently fall into bed with Israel, no matter what the various autocrats say who somewhat mysteriously run things in a politically ossified Arab world. Obviously there is apprehension about stimulating (or even tolerating) debate on ideology, since that might spill over into criticism of Arab governmental policies on civil life, nationality, and human rights. But a real campaign for Jerusalem cannot, in my opinion, be deterred by such considerations, nor will it be.

For perhaps the time at last approaches when the Arab world can begin to free itself from the miserable, impoverishing and undemocratic life imposed on it by its leaders. A campaign for Jerusalem of the sort I have been speaking about is part of that

process, and it is certainly a strong antidote to the drifting, impossibly unwise course now being undertaken by the Arabs, Israelis, and Americans beneath the tattered banners of the peace process. I do not see that overly praised and defended process as leading to the kind of peace most people can live with for any length of time: the tensions, disequilibrium and dislocations generated by Israel's partially realized designs in Jerusalem prove this, since Jerusalem is not the exception but the real rule of what the ideological imperative dictates. Perhaps Jerusalem, with its thousands of new Jewish residents, its dislodged Arabs, and its illegally acquired spaces is already lost. If it is, then peace in this generation is not at hand. This needs to be clearly understood and acted on with intelligent determination. On the other hand, it is never too late for a vitalized and energized political will to spring into action, and then maybe, just maybe, a better peace can occur, although it may be not for us here ever to see it with our own eyes.

Endnotes

- 1 Copyright Edward W. Said, 1995. Reprinted with permission. This piece was originally a paper delivered at a conference on Jerusalem held in London on 15-16 June, 1995. Introduction by Rashid Khalidi written for this issue.
- 2 Teddy Kollek produced numerous volumes on Jerusalem. The one referred to might possibly be Teddy Kollek and Shulamith Eisner, *My Jerusalem : twelve walks in the world's holiest city*. (New York : Summit Books, 1990).
- 3 Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem: the six days that changed the Middle East* (New York: Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1984).
- 4 The reference is to the "New Historians," a group of Israeli historians who attempted to re-write and reinterpret the events leading up to and including 1948 by studying newly released documents.
- 5 See Benny Morris, "Falsifying the Record: A Fresh Look at Zionist Documentation of 1948," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 24, (Spring 1995): 44-62.
- 6 Details taken from Martha Wenger, "Jerusalem, A Primer," MERIP, May-June 1993.
- 7 Jan de Jong and John Tyler, *Challenge*, Nov. – Dec. (1993): 12.
- 8 Burhan Dajani, "The September 1993 Israeli-PLO Documents: A Textual Analysis," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 23, (Spring 1994):17.
- 9 Hanan Ashrawi, *This Side of Peace: a personal account* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995).