1

The history of Palestine

The arrival of Zionism

Historical Palestine – meaning all the land now forming Israel and the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but not the Golan Heights (which are part of Syria) – was a very small area, less than four hundred kilometres from north to south, and one hundred kilometres from east to west at its widest point. From the beginning of history it was settled and ruled by a number of different peoples. The name Palestine derives from one group of early inhabitants of the coastal plain, the Philistines. Among their neighbours were the Jews, who lived and ruled with varying fortunes in the hills inland from the tenth century BC until the beginning of the Roman period. By 638 AD Palestine had been swept up in the rapid expansion of Islam; the majority of its people soon adopted the new faith and the Arabic language. In 1517 Palestine became part of the Turkish Ottoman empire, and it remained so until its capture by the British in 1917.

During most of this history, over 80 per cent of Palestinians have been Muslims belonging to the Sunni sect (which is the largest and the 'mainstream' sect in Islam world-wide). Of the many minority communities in Palestine (who have lived among the majority without the sectarian conflict endemic in modern Lebanon) the Christians were the most significant, constituting around 10 per cent of the population at the end of the Ottoman period. There was a small Jewish community continuously present from Roman times which was swelled in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by religious immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Under Ottoman rule, Palestine was a relatively obscure region of

K. Warnock, *Land before Honour*

the empire. It was poor in natural resources, with large areas of desert and arid rocky hillside; 80 per cent of its population were peasant farmers. Villages were to a great extent socially, culturally and economically self-sufficient, their contact with the government limited to tax payments through local clan heads. In the second half of the nineteenth century this picture began to change as the empire, under military and economic pressure from expansionist industrial Europe, strove to modernise itself. New land tenure laws encouraged the concentration of small farms into large estates, often owned by wealthy absentee landowners, which were farmed for profit. Peasant insecurity increased and many men left the land to find work in industries and the growing coastal port towns. At the outbreak of the First World War, a combination of high taxation, conscription, drought and locust plagues had caused severe rural poverty. Over the same period the country, which had never been politically cohesive, had become more fragmented as a result of the government's policy of concentrating power in the hands of urban notable families. The urban power-holders had little common interest or contact with their rural tenants.

Into this scenario came Zionism, the doctrine that Jews, like other nations, should have a national home for themselves. Zionism was born in the last decades of the nineteenth century in northern and eastern Europe, where Jews were facing deep-rooted anti-semitism and barbarous pogroms. In the context of the two dominant political ideas of the time, the nation-state and colonialism, the creation of their own national home seemed to some Jews an obvious response. They felt it was the only sure way Jews could protect themselves from continued persecution and discrimination. Zionism was a secular, political movement, not a religious one (and indeed was opposed for many years by much of the Judaic religious establishment), and in accordance with its pragmatic logic, various countries were proposed for the location of the 'national home'. Gradually the movement focused on Palestine, because of the unique place Palestine held in Jewish history and cultural tradition. By the time the first Zionist congress in Basle in 1897 committed itself to 'the establishment for the Jewish people of a home in Palestine secured by Public Law', nationalist-inspired Jews, mostly from Russia, had already been emigrating to Palestine for over a decade.

The new immigrants did not wish to integrate into the Palestinian

population. On the contrary, their goal of transforming the land into a Jewish homeland entailed the building of a separate Jewish community with its own institutions and economic enterprises, ideally employing no Arabs and buying no Arab goods. Zionism dismissed Palestinians as primitive and unimportant. In their public pronouncements the Zionist leaders denied their ambition to establish a state and claimed that Jewish immigration would have only beneficial results for the local population; in private, however, they recognised that a national home was incompatible with the presence of a large settled population of Palestinians. The father of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, confided to his diary that Zionist settlers should 'try to spirit the penniless population across the border by procuring employment for it in the transit countries, while denying it any employment in our own (sic) country'. It quickly became clear to Palestinians that Zionism posed a danger to them, and by 1914 it was a major issue in Palestinian politics.

The Ottoman empire was defeated during the First World War, and Great Britain and France divided up its territories between them. In doing this Britain was ignoring a promise made to Arab leaders to grant them independence in exchange for assistance in the war. Meanwhile Britain had committed itself to supporting Zionism. The strategic consideration that it would be advantageous to instal a client state near the Suez Canal (to protect the vital route to India) was reinforced by ignorance of the Palestinian reality and by the presence in London of persuasive pleaders for Zionism. In the Balfour Declaration of 1917, Britain stated its readiness to help establish a national home for the Jews without prejudice to the 'rights of the existing non-Jewish communities'. To establish a Jewish home in the already fully populated land of Palestine without harming the Palestinians living there was, of course, an impossible task, as would become clear in the succeeding decades; but when Britain accepted the mandate from the League of Nations in 1922 to rule Palestine and prepare it for independence, it was with apparent disregard for the implications of the Zionist programme.

The mandatory administration was not at first unwelcome to Palestinians, and it brought them some benefits: improved health provision, road-building, agricultural training, service jobs. But although many mandate officials and some politicians in London sympathised with the Palestinian case and regularly pleaded the injustice of Zionist ambitions, the mandate was biased in favour of

Zionism. Jewish economic and institutional development was supported, but not Palestinian. Even after it had become clear that Jewish immigration was detrimental to Palestinian interests, policies to limit it were not consistently implemented. As tension built up, Jewish arms imports and military training were increasingly winked at if not officially sanctioned, whereas Palestinians were systematically deprived of arms. The imbalance was increased by the behaviour of the two communities. Whereas the growing Jewish population was determined, enterprising and highly organised, and lost no opportunity to increase its power, the Palestinians' disunity and their tactics of non-cooperation with the administration and economic boycott brought them no positive results. The British, trying to impose stability on an impossibly unstable situation, used force to punish and control both sides.

Palestinian responses and the growth of nationalism

Nationalism had been discouraged by the Ottomans, and though Arab nationalism developed in Beirut and Damascus in the late nineteenth century, this was a cultural and linguistic nationalism in response to Western cultural influence, rather than a political programme. A specifically Palestinian nationalism grew up within the boundaries determined by the mandate and in response to the threat of Zionism.

The political heritage of Palestine was not conducive to the development of a strong and well-organised national movement. The rural population was separated from the urban elite who might have led them by exploitative economic relationships, the absence of social ties, and an educational and cultural gulf. From the beginning of Zionist immigration there were popular protests against its economic results, particularly land purchase and refusal to give jobs to Arabs, but these did not develop into an organised movement until the mid 1930s. Meanwhile the urban notables were more concerned with inter-family rivalries and self-advancement than national responsibility and leadership.

In the 1930s the flood of Jewish immigrants increased dramatically as Nazism spread over Europe. The Palestinian people, driven to desperation and disillusioned with the inaction of their supposed leaders, broke into armed revolt against the British.

The first guerrilla uprising in 1935 was followed in 1936 by a general strike and further fighting in rural areas. By the time the revolt was finally suppressed in 1939, as many as five thousand Palestinians had died. The population had been thoroughly disarmed and their capacity for further resistance crushed.

The violence, however, had forced the British administration to acknowledge that the contradictions of their position were impossible to sustain and that some drastic solution had to be found. In 1937, a proposal was put forward to partition the country into two separate states, one Jewish and one Arab. When this was rejected by the leaders of the Arab community, a new suggestion was made, for a secular binational state with guaranteed Palestinian dominance. Discussions on this proposal were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War. The events of the next few years, especially the holocaust, made it even more unlikely than before that Zionists would accept anything less than the national state they had been working for.

During the war, the Zionists' feeling grew that Britain was not doing enough to help them. Their demands for unlimited immigration of Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution were intensified by the fact that no country in the world was willing to accept Jews in significant numbers. (The United States has been particularly accused in this respect.) The Zionist demand for a state was backed up by an escalating campaign of terrorism against the mandatory authorities. In 1947, exhausted by the war, Britain finally admitted that the situation in Palestine was uncontrollable, and announced that it would withdraw, leaving the problem to the United Nations. Under strong pressure from the United States, which had been giving wholehearted support to the Zionists for some years, the UN General Assembly voted for partition, to come into effect when Britain withdrew in May 1948.

As might have been expected, the proposed partition was not acceptable to the Palestinians or to Arab governments. Jews, who formed only 30 per cent of the population, were to be given 54 per cent of the land, of which they owned at the time only 6 per cent. The Zionist leaders accepted the plan, but it is doubtful whether they intended to accept it in the long term. The area allotted to them fell far short of their demands, and they continued to plan, train and arm themselves for seizing as much more of the land as possible. Although Israel has since claimed that it began to fight only in

self-defence when Arab armies invaded after the British withdrawal in May 1948, in fact the expulsion of Palestinians began in December 1947. The first phase of the 'War of Independence' was a series of operations aimed at occupying desirable areas outside the proposed state and expelling as many Palestinians as possible. Attacks on important towns by the Zionist official army, the Haganah, were supplemented by atrocities such as the massacre by commando groups of 254 villagers at Deir Yasin in April 1948, and by other actions designed to spread terror among the population. By the time the state of Israel was declared on 15 May 1948, the day after British withdrawal, 300,000 Palestinians had already been forced to flee from their homes.

Arab resistance to the Zionist onslaught was pitiful. While Zionists had been smuggling in arms and training at least 100,000 men to fight, the Palestinian leaders and Arab governments had remained smugly blind to the danger. No serious effort was made to arm the Palestinians and prepare them to defend themselves, weakened as they were by the defeat of the 1936 revolt. The armies that the Arab states eventually sent in to try to repel the Zionist expansion were too late, too small and lacking in leadership and strategy. They were in some cases more of a hindrance than a help.

Isolated from each other, and demoralised by the impossibility of resisting without weapons, expelled villagers and townspeople started the long trek away. They carried their house-keys, expecting to return after a few weeks. With no means of transport, most could not carry any supplies to help them survive the bitter rains of winter or the heat of summer. As they left, the Zionist forces occupied or demolished their villages, and sometimes shot people who were caught returning to collect possessions from their houses or crops from their fields.

The Palestinian people scattered

When armistices were agreed in 1949, the 160,000 Palestinians who had not fled found they had become second-class and unwanted citizens of the new state of Israel, although at first they formed 25 per cent of the population. Their history will not be touched on here. Nearly five times that number, around three quarters of a million people, had been driven from their homes and sought

refuge, some in the remnants of Palestine that were not under Israel's control, some in neighbouring countries. The Gaza Strip, only 45 kilometres long and 6–10 kilometres wide, with a native population of 80,000, received 190,000 refugees, becoming one of the most densely populated regions of the world and a byword for deprivation and overcrowding. Some 280,000 refugees stopped in the West Bank, where today they and their descendants form around 20 per cent of the total population. A further 100,000 fled north to Lebanon, 75,000 to Syria, and 70,000 to Jordan.[1]

The United Nations had accepted partition and recognised the new state of Israel, but did not endorse the expulsion of the Palestinian population. General Assembly resolution 194, passed in December 1948 and confirmed repeatedly since, stated that refugees must be allowed to return to their homes. But until this happened, the UN recognised its responsibility and in 1950 established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to organise camps and supply the destitute refugees' basic needs: tents, food, health care and education. As years went by, the reality of the refugees' quasi-permanent status became clear, and tents were replaced by concrete or mud-brick two-room houses. The number receiving food rations diminished as more were able to find work and support themselves, but economic possibilities for refugees have remained limited. The host countries' undeveloped economies, hardly able to support their own people, were far from having the capacity to integrate large refugee populations. (Even if it were possible, integration would have been rejected for political reasons, implying as it does the acceptance of Palestinians' permanent displacement.)

1948–67 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

During the period 1948–67 the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military rule, and the West Bank was annexed by Jordan. In neither case did the ruler have the resources or the interest to make significant investment in the development of the area. Politically the problem of Palestine was generally seen by Palestinians and other Arabs as the responsibility of all the Arab states. The Arab world was in a ferment of new political and economic dynamism, shaking off the heritage of colonialism and striving for a new place in the

world. President Nasser of Egypt in particular adopted the Palestinian cause, hoping to unite the Arab states under his leadership. His championship was largely verbal, but many Palestinians welcomed it. Shattered by the losses and upheavals they had experienced and with all their energies absorbed by the struggle to survive, they had little choice but to wait for someone else to help them. Political activity was not dead, of course. In the Gaza Strip Nasser felt able to give limited encouragement to the growth of Palestinian militancy, but in the West Bank, expressions of Palestinian nationalism or any other destabilising dissent were quashed by the recently created Jordanian monarchy. By the 1960s Palestinians were frustrated that years of talk had brought no improvement in their situation. As a sop to their discontent rather than out of any real desire to see them independent, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was established under the auspices of the Arab League in 1964.

It is not this date that Palestinians celebrate as most significant in their history; more important is the emergence of the guerrilla organisations. The anniversary of Fatah's first operation on 1 January 1965 is a national holiday. Fatah and other groups grew out of the realisation that instead of waiting for someone else to take action on their behalf, Palestinians must take the responsibility themselves. The failure of Nasser and other Arab states to resist Israel's invasion and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 completed Palestinians' disillusionment with Arab promises, and set the stage for the PLO. By the early 1970s an overwhelming majority of Palestinians were acknowledging the PLO as their leaders and representatives.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation

The PLO is an umbrella organisation of several groups with differing ideologies and strategies. Its 'parliament', the Palestine National Council (PNC), aims to be as representative of all sections of the Palestinian people as is possible under the circumstances. Fatah has been the dominant group within the PLO since 1969, its non-ideological nationalist programme having wide appeal. Other important groups are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), committed to armed struggle for revolutionary

change in all Arab states; and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), also Marxist but more willing to accept the existence of Israel. Smaller groups are variously tied to the interests of Syria, Iraq and Libya. Some of them have generally lined up with Fatah, while others have maintained hardline positions, demanding nothing less than the dissolution of the Zionist state and the restitution of the whole of Palestine. The difficulty of uniting these groups has been one reason for the slowness and caution of PLO policy development, which many international observers have found so frustrating and inexplicable.

At first military struggle was seen as the principal road to liberating Palestine: it had a heady romantic fascination for many Palestinians, recovering as they were from years of defeat and humiliation (just as it had for generations of Zionists). In the PLO's bases among the refugees in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, military training and guerrilla operations were an important facet of its activities; so were education, health care, welfare, industrial workshops and the development of mass organisations such as trade unions and women's organisations.

After 1967 the PLO, based in Jordan, grew rapidly in membership, confidence and military strength, even though its lack of a national base and the intractability of the problem it was born to confront gave rise to many internal as well as external difficulties. In 1970–1, some elements within the PLO provoked a confrontation with the Jordanian government which led to a bloody war and the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan. The organisation moved its centre to the refugee camps in Beirut and South Lebanon. There the lack of a strong national government and the fragility of the balance between rival confessional and political groups allowed the PLO to develop considerable autonomy and freedom of action.

In the years following its establishment in Lebanon, the Palestinian movement seemed to be going from strength to strength. The 1973 war showed Israel's military might to be vulnerable, and boosted international efforts to bring the parties to a peace conference in Geneva. In 1974 the Arab League acknowledged the PLO to be the 'sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians'. The PLO leader Yaser Arafat was invited to speak to the United Nations, after which the PLO was granted observer status in the General Assembly. At the same time PLO policy was maturing. Some groups, including Fatah, were coming to believe

that victory could not be achieved by military means and that the ideal goal of a state in the whole land of Palestine in which Jews and Palestinians could live together as equals was, if achievable at all, so distant as to be not worth striving for. The majority of the Palestine National Council therefore resolved to work for the establishment of a Palestinian state on as much of the land as could be liberated from Israeli rule.

The war of 1948–9 had ended with armistice agreements, not with peace, and all the Arab states continued theoretically to be in a state of war with Israel. In 1977 President Sadat reversed Egyptian policy and visited Israel, and by 1979 the Camp David agreements and a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel had been concluded. The Camp David accords were hailed internationally as a bold move which it was hoped would pave the way for peace between Israel and all its other neighbours and the resolution of the Palestinian problem. But although Palestinians in the occupied territories are the principal subject of the Camp David agreement, they were neither consulted when the proposals were drawn up nor invited to give their approval. In fact, the Camp David proposals were and still are fundamentally unacceptable to Palestinians. Far from recognising the Palestinians as a nation with a right like any other to self-determination, the accords propose an ill-defined Palestinian control over a limited range of local affairs in parts of the occupied territories – called 'autonomy' – while leaving Israel with overall power. They make no reference to the PLO as the Palestinians' representative, and very little to wider questions of Palestinian rights.

While the world was hailing the Camp David protagonists Prime Minister Begin, President Sadat and US President Carter as historic peace-makers, from the Palestinians' point of view Camp David was a blow against peace and justice rather than a step towards them. With Egypt prevented by the peace treaty from intervening, Israel was free to deal with other opponents, and began to do so immediately by launching an attack on Lebanon in 1978. This was aimed at destroying the PLO and imposing Israeli control on South Lebanon. It was followed by further attacks culminating in the 1982 invasion, the PLO's expulsion from Beirut, and the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps.

Between 1982 and the beginning of the *intifada* in 1987, the PLO suffered its most difficult and dispiriting period. With no secure

location, and with its military strength, such as it was, destroyed, it struggled to maintain its independence and develop new strategies. It received no real support either from Syria, whose interest was to gain control over it, or from Jordan, which until July 1988 always intended to retain its own sovereignty over any Palestinian entity that might come into existence in the West Bank. Tense relations with the Arab states were reflected in violent splits within the PLO itself, brought to an end largely by the Syrian attacks on the refugee camps in Lebanon in 1987. During this period the USA and Israel remained adamant in their refusal to accept the PLO as a negotiating partner, maintaining that the PLO did not represent the majority of Palestinians and was committed to terrorism and the destruction of Israel.

During these two decades, one and a quarter million Palestinians have been living in the occupied territories, sometimes in the news and sometimes out, sometimes having a significant shaping influence on PLO thinking, sometimes not.

Life under occupation

First-time visitors are sometimes puzzled by the signs of apparent prosperity, especially in the West Bank: lavish new villas lining the roads, televisions and cassette players in the simplest homes. But poverty underlies the occasional glitter. The standard of housing and amenities is very low in villages and camps, and public services are inadequate. Palestinians do not enjoy the protection of welfare services, unemployment benefit, sick pay or insurance. The comforts of urban consumerism where they do exist have often been bought at a high price – work for long hours in humiliating conditions in Israel, or emigration to the Gulf or North or South America. And the villas may have been built because opportunities for investing hard-earned wealth more productively in agriculture or industry are so limited. In any case, material standard of living is not the only criterion of a just and dignified existence. Israeli and US-backed schemes to 'improve the quality of life', touted as a solution to the problem of occupation in the mid-1980s, were a distraction from the real issue, which was Palestinians' lack of freedom and the denial of their rights to control and organise life for themselves.

Palestinians under occupation have no representation, no freedom of expression or association, no economic activity without permit, no absolute right to move around or even to live in their own country. While these restrictions are felt more by the politically active and in some exposed professions than by isolated farmers or housewives, everyone is affected by the absence of individual dignity and privacy, the harassment and humiliation experienced in every encounter with administrative authority, the military or settlers. Everyone too feels fear – fear of attack by settlers, fear that a member of the family might be arrested and probably ill-treated (it has been said that three-quarters of all families in the occupied territories have lost a family member to prison at some time), fear of the army's arbitrary powers to impose curfew, seal and demolish houses, or close business premises.[2] Rights of appeal exist in theory but in practice are negligible. A fair trial might be held in a purely civil or domestic matter, but in anything which touches the needs of the occupation is out of the question. Women bear the burden of bringing up families and running homes in the absence of state support and services. The restrictions men place on their freedom of movement are often increased as the presence of the Israeli military creates a permanent sense of insecurity, fear and violation.

Law and the administration of occupation

In the immediate aftermath of its victory in June 1967, Israel was not certain what to do with the territories it had occupied. They could have been returned to their previous rulers in exchange for political and military concessions, but there were various arguments for retaining possession of them. Most Israelis felt that Israeli control of the occupied territories was essential for their country's security. There was the religious-expansionist view, also held to some extent by many non-religious Israelis (who formed three-quarters of the population), that God had promised to the Jewish people the whole of the land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. The desire to control vital water resources, located in the hills of the West Bank and Golan Heights, was also a consideration, and soon the economic benefits of continuing occupation began to play a significant role. The territories offered a pool of cheap labour for Israeli industries and a sizeable captive market for Israeli goods.

The moment for an early political settlement passed, and most Israelis grew accustomed to the idea that the occupied territories were rightfully part of Israel, although it was not clear what their legal status should be. International law exists to regulate temporary military occupation during war, but it does not countenance prolonged or permanent occupation. Annexation – full incorporation of the occupied land legally and politically into the occupying power – is specifically illegal. Israel did nonetheless annex East Jerusalem, to which it felt its cultural and historical ties were irrefutable. For most Israelis annexation of the rest of the territories was not an option. The *raison d'être* of Israel is that it is a Jewish state, and annexation would force a choice between two equally unacceptable courses. Either Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would be given full citizenship rights, in which case the total population of the enlarged state would be nearly half Palestinian; or they would be given less than full citizenship under an *apartheid*-like system, which would be incompatible with Israel's commitment to democracy.

In the absence of a permanent answer, the illegal prolongation of military occupation – rule by force – emerged as the most advantageous solution. The ambiguous situation of the territories remained as a moral and political problem for Israel that would have to solved. By virtue of its superior force and good international public relations, Israel was able to shelve the question for twenty years, but the *intifada* forced the future of the territories into the forefront of the political agenda. Israelis had to face the truth: force is not a viable long-term method of ruling an unwilling population of two million, and compromises the moral and democratic claims of the Jewish state.

Many of the institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip such as schools and hospitals, and the machinery of administration and law, were inherited from previous rulers. Palestinians form the bulk of employees and pay for these institutions themselves through taxation, but the appearance of self-rule is specious, as each sphere is under the direct authority of the military government. Pre-existing law has been adapted by well over a thousand military orders, almost every activity is subject to specific permit, and all adults have to carry identity cards which are a much-used tool of control and harassment. Security arguments and 'emergency' powers enable the authorities on many occasions to by-pass legal

processes and rule through direct military intervention. They have powers of search, arrest and detention, deportation, collective punishments such as curfews, travel bans and house demolitions, confiscation of land and property, censorship and closure of organisations. As was tragically clear during the *intifada*, accepted methods of crowd control include heavy use of tear-gas and shooting to kill. Palestinians for most of the period of the occupation have had no political rights at all, and membership of the PLO is illegal and severely punished.

'Creating facts': trying to make occupation irreversible

Because Israel's aim is somehow to incorporate the occupied territories into Israel, control by force is not enough. Various means have been tried to implant Israeli presence and make it irreversible and acceptable to the Palestinians. One brutally simple tactic is to reduce the number of Palestinians living in the territories. Any Palestinian who was outside at the time of the 1967 invasion was not allowed to return except at the Israeli authorities' discretion after a long and difficult appeal process. Even today, those who leave to work or study have to cope with many restrictions on their right to return. Though 'transfer' of the population out of the country has only emerged into public discussion in the late 1980s, the policy from the beginning has been to make life difficult and uncomfortable so that as many Palestinians as possible decide to leave 'voluntarily'.

The standard of living has been undermined by restrictions on the development of public services and amenities, either by direct control or by under-resourcing. The economic growth of the occupied territories has been deliberately stifled, with military orders and the power of permit-issue being used to control development in agriculture, industry, and house-building. Arbitrary and punitive tax assessments are used to try to force merchants and manufacturers out of business. As well as pushing people to leave in search of work and opportunity, this policy of economic pressure has served a second long-term purpose, creating Palestinian dependence on Israel for jobs and goods – food, industrial and consumer goods.

Another approach to permanent implantation has been the drive

to establish a Jewish population in settlements at strategic points in the occupied territories. This was a central policy from the mid 1970s, and one that has aroused particularly strong feelings in Palestinians and in international opinion. Half the land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been possessed by various means – quasi-legal or illegal according to international law – for the building of settlements. Settlers are supported by a conspicuously superior infrastructure and have many economic and legal privileges, such as the right to bear arms.

Any oppressing power has to try to control political ideas and leadership, and the Israeli authorities have been no exception. Political groups and meetings are illegal in the occupied territories; the censorship and banning of books and newspapers are strict; and most organisations and cultural institutions have suffered interference or temporary or permanent closure. Tight control is exercised over curricula, materials and teachers in schools. Individuals who are active or prominent in public life are threatened, harassed, intimidated, imprisoned and sometimes deported.

Many of Israel's specific policies and measures, as well as its ultimate purpose of making permanent its control over the occupied territories, are contrary to international agreements and laws. The Geneva Conventions on the protection of civilians under occupation forbid in general the intervention of the occupier in non-security matters, so all Israeli interference in economic life, education or control of water use, for instance, violates the Conventions. The confiscation of land, the transfer of population from the occupying power into the occupied territories, and new taxation of the occupied population are specifically forbidden. In security matters, too, Israel violates the minimum rules, for instance in its treatment of prisoners. Israel is a signatory to the Geneva Conventions but argues that they do not apply to the case of the Palestinian territories, because these were not self-governing states before they were occupied. (This argument is not accepted by most of the other signatory states.)

Resistance to occupation

From the first days of occupation in June 1967 until the 1987 *intifada* Palestinians were not able to mount any sustained, concerted

resistance. The possibilities of military resistance under occupation were extremely limited, as the small size of the country and the thoroughness of Israeli surveillance made it impossible to amass arms or train on any significant scale. Only in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip were guerrillas able to pose a real threat to Israeli control, until they were crushed by General Ariel Sharon in 1971. As long as armed struggle was a key part of PLO strategy, all the main PLO factions supplemented their military activities outside by developing military cells in the territories and undertook occasional operations. These were immensely important for Palestinian morale, proving the vulnerability of Israel and the unquenchability of Palestinian spirit, but their practical effects were probably only to increase the vigilance of the Israeli military and the fears and hostility of the Israeli public.

Attachment to the military option, combined with the lack of experienced leaders and organisations and the harshness of Israeli military rule, prevented Palestinians from developing far in the direction of active non-violent resistance. It was not that there was any question, for the vast majority, of accepting the occupation. For some the first choice was to attempt to negotiate with Israel a return of the territories to the previous status quo – government by Jordan and Egypt. When this came to nothing, and as the PLO gained strength outside, more and more Palestinians in the occupied territories chose the course of waiting for the PLO to win their liberation. Their own role was to refuse to legitimate the occupation by accepting it, and to use non-co-operation and non-violent demonstrations to draw world attention to its most blatant violations of legality and acceptability. In some cases, non-violent resistance did succeed in reversing particular policies of the occupation: one example is the refusal of schools in East Jerusalem (the Palestinian side of Jerusalem) to accept the imposition of an Israeli curriculum after the annexation of East Jerusalem.

The unquestionable achievement of Palestinian resistance is that after twenty years of occupation, Palestinians in the occupied territories have not given up: far from lapsing into despair and accepting the Israeli view of the world, their sense of national identity and strength and their belief in their rights and eventual victory are stronger than before, and shared by more individuals and nations of the world. This is the result of a method of resistance that every individual in the occupied territories has been able to participate in. The proud determination to bear suffering and

humiliation and not be forced into exile or submission is a mode of resistance that the people of the occupied territories, with so few possibilities of positive action, made particularly their own and gave a name to: *sumud* – steadfastness. Since the aim of Israel is to deny and to end the existence of the Palestinians as a people in their own country, it is an act of resistance in itself to continue assertively to exist, to stay put and not to give in.

In the mid 1970s, Palestinians outside and in the occupied territories realised that endurance and occasional bursts of resistance were not enough. If the occupation was to continue for years, it was important to develop the people politically. They must be educated and activated, their unity strengthened beyond a mere shared emotion into organisation, and structures established which could be the basis for self-reliance. Mass organisations came into being with the aims of developing the community socially and politically. These included youth organisations for voluntary work on harvests, road-building and village improvement, as well as cultural and educational activities; professional associations and trade unions to work for improved rights and conditions and to provide services to members; and voluntary medical groups. Educational institutions were expanded, cultural and intellectual life flourished, and long-term national strategies for social and economic development began to be debated. It was in this period that the mass women's organisations were founded which will form the subject of a later chapter in this book.

At the same time, the occupied territories were developing a new political strength and contributing their own voice to the dialogue within the PLO. In the municipal elections which Israel allowed in the West Bank in 1976, candidates who supported the PLO swept the board, giving a new confidence and confirming the emergence of a new leadership in the territories. When the Camp David accords were signed setting out a 'peace process' on Israeli terms, it was the people of the occupied territories, not the PLO leadership outside, who erupted into protest and made it clear to the world that Palestinians were not ready to concede defeat. The occupied territories had become a political force in their own right. It came as no surprise that the dramatic reversals of world opinion towards the PLO in 1988 were sparked off not by the cautious diplomacy of the PLO leadership but by the *intifada* which had begun in the Gaza Strip.

Women

Throughout the history of Palestine in the twentieth century, women have played a much more active part than conventional European images of submissive Arab women would attribute to them. They experienced much suffering and were often helpless victims, and many were no doubt trapped in the silence and domestic preoccupation characteristic of their subordinate social position. On the other hand many individuals gave active support to men in their struggles. Some took up arms themselves. Many groups of women organised to press for social change and political progress and to help victims survive; many women emerged as leaders with new ideas and ambitions for the Palestinian people. In the following chapters women tell how they experienced and contributed to this history. They have dealt with wars and upheavals, personal losses and exile, and with social, educational and economic changes that would have spanned several generations in Europe. My oldest informant was married at the age of seven to protect her from Turkish soldiers during the First World War. As a refugee, she took part in demonstrations against the Jordanian government in the 1950s, and is now proud of her grandchildren, some of whom are in and out of prison for their student political activities, while others are working as doctors and engineers in Eastern Europe and waiting for their opportunity to come home. The youngest woman who appears here is a seventeen-year-old student at a vocational training college, who has chosen Islam as her framework and support in her campaign to liberate the thinking and the social life of women in her village. They are very different women, whose lives and interests hardly overlap, but they represent some of the currents and developments in Palestinian life of the mid 1980s – currents that they hope will be fulfilled in a very different future.