

DIASPORA. EXPLORING A LIFE MODEL

The Bruno Kreisky Forum for International Dialogue

kindly invites to the lecture of

SARI NUSSEIBEH

President of Al Quds University Jerusalem

ONCE UPON A COUNTRY A PALESTINIAN LIFE

Moderator:

ISOLDE CHARIM

Aus dem Buch "Es war einmal ein Land" liest

ROBERT REINAGL (Burgtheater)

Tuesday | June 10, 2008 | 19.00 h

Sari Nusseibeh, President of Al Quds University Jerusalem.

Ph.D. (Harvard), Islamic Philosophy (1978), B.A. (M. A. Oxon), Politics, Philosophy, Economics (1971). President, Al-Quds University (1995-Present), Professor of Philosophy, Al-Quds University, UNESCO Chair of "Freedom of Expression"; Co-Chairman, Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization (IPSO); Fellow, Baker Institute for Public Policy, Rice University – 2006; Fellow, The Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University (2004-2005); Visiting Lectureship, Balliol College, Oxford, U.K, (Fall Term, 2003); Fellow, The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C. (1994-1995); Chairman, Technical and Advisory Committees to the Peace Talks (1991-1993); Assistant Professor, Philosophy Cultural Studies, Birzeit University (1978-1990); Visiting Lecturer, Islamic Philosophy, The Hebrew University (1979-1980).

Sari Nusseibeh is author of numerous books and articles: *Final Status: Jerusalem and Return* for James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy of Rice University (October, 2007), *Is God Part of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict of Rights, and should He Remain so?, Does Human Rights Need God?* Ed. Barbra Barnett (Eerdman, Chicago) 2005, *A Formula for Narrative Selection: A Commentary on Writing the Arab- Israeli Conflict*, Perspectives on Politics, Vol 3/No1 (March, 2005), *The Limit Of Reason (or Why Dignity is not Negotiable)*, APA Newsletters, (Vol. 04, Number 1), 2004, *Personal and National Identity: A Tale of Two Wills. Philosophical Perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Tomas Kapitan, (Armonk, N.Y., and London: Sharpe, N.E.) 1997, *Epistemology*, The Routledge History of Islamic Philosophy, ed. Oliver Leaman. (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul), 1995, *Can Wars be Just? in But Was It Just? Reflections on the Morality of the Gulf War*, with Jean Elshtaine, et al. (New York: Doubleday) 1992; *Jerusalem: Points of Friction and Beyond*. Ed. Sari Nusseibeh and Moshe Maoz (Kluwer Law International; *No Trumpets No Drums: A Two-State Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, with Mark Heller, (New York, Hill and Wang), 1991. Paperback 3rd. edition 1993; *Palestine: A State is Born*. (The Hague: Palestine Information Office) 1990, *The Palestinian Case*, in *The Elusive Search for Peace: South Africa, Israel, Northern Ireland*, ed. H. Giliomee and Jannie Gagiano (London: OUP), 1990, *The Intifada: A Personal Perspective*, American Arab Affairs, Winter 1988-1989.

Robert Reinagl: Schauspieler am Wiener Burgtheater seit 2000.

The book ***Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life*** (with Anthony David) has been published with Farrar, Straus and Giroux in March 2007). German edition: Kunstmann Verlag, Munich, March 2008: ***Es war einmal ein Land*** "Ein feinsinniges, trauriges und humorvolles Erinnerungsbuch, das neues Licht auf die Tragödie des Israel-Palästina Konflikts wirft, und zugleich ein lebendiges Bild der palästinensischen Gesellschaft." Amos Oz

The lecture series **DIASPORA: EXPLORING A LIFE MODEL. NEITHER INTEGRATION NOR PARALLEL SOCIETY** is curated by **ISOLDE CHARIM** (born 1959, Vienna, Austria), philosopher and free lance writer:

Contrary to the dictum that economic conditions will bring forth matching types of people, we are currently confronted with a pronounced mismatch. The dynamism of capitalist economics is generating an apparently boundless mobility. Whereas locations follow the pull of flexibilisation, the people attached to them remain tied to fixed, 'grounded' identity concepts. The cultures of our nation states hold no mental resources for the life of modern nomads. In view of this situation, we shall embark on a mental oil-drilling exercise in search of such resources. Our starting point is the concept of DIASPORA: The centuries-old dispersion of diverse peoples will not be perceived as synonymous with plight and displacement, but in its positive sense as a rich source of experience. The present series is an attempt at exploring a variety of ways of tapping this source. There may be national, cultural or economic differences, but what is common to all diaspora groups is the development of a specific form of non-territorial, supra-national network identity avant la lettre, which signifies neither total integration nor parallel society. (Isolde Charim)

Isolde Charim,

Ladies and Gentlemen, I welcome you to a further session of our lecture series *Diaspora. Exploring a Life Model*. A serie means that every evening stands for itself and at the same time fits into the series of evenings that preceded it. This evening tonight stands alone in a specific manner. We have the honor to welcome a guest whose whole person, his thinking as well as his acting is at the center stage. Our topic tonight is the biography of the philosopher Sari Nusseibeh, President of the Al Quds University in Jerusalem. That is why our proceeding is somehow different from our usual one. First of all Robert Reinagl from the Burgtheater will read the prologue from *Once Upon A Country. A Palestinian Life*. Afterwards I will have a talk with Sari Nusseibeh and then you are invited to take part.

Let me just mention two or three biographic moments of our guest. The first one has a special relationship with this evening. I am very happy but also astonished that so many people came here tonight. Tonight Bob Dylan gives a concert in Vienna. And that touches a chord of Sari Nusseibeh's life, namely his socialization in the swinging London in the late 1960's where Dylan's music was all over the place. This episode shows us that this evening is also connected to other evenings of our serie, especially the one of Homi Bhabha who had a similar cultural experience also in his encounter with the West that lead him to his notion of hybridity. Sari Nusseibeh does not represent the Palestinian diaspora or the Palestinian refugees. But in his person and in his actings he represents something that is namely to a Western public a blind spot. What do we know from Palestinians? We see Palestinians mainly as victims or as suicide bombers. We see pictures of pain or pictures of hate. But Sari Nusseibeh, however, confronts us with something else, with a positive Palestinian identity. In this way his personal life story turns out to be an important political statement. Let me just mention a last biographic element. In 1992 Yassir Arafat called him in the morning and said, I want you to come to the airport, you should come with to an official visit to Vienna and provide you with a decent suit. In that sense it is no coincidence that Sari Nusseibeh speaks tonight in the villa of Bruno Kreisky. Welcome to the Kreisky Forum, Sari Nusseibeh.

Robert Reinagl

Lesung

Isolde Charim

Isn't this a beautiful metaphor to listen to one's own story without understanding a word? Is this ending of the story not really just the ending of a fairy tale? While these three were occupied to plant this tree what would the rest of the society do? Cut the tree?

Sari Nusseibeh

I haven't yet managed to publish the story. So I am not going to tell you exactly what the secret is or how it will work. But the point is, if the three together plant this tree the idea is that the sweet scent that the tree will give off will influence the rest of society into peace making, into a culture of peace making.

Isolde Charim

Let's come back to your own story. Was your peace agreement with Amir Ayalon in 2003 not such a kind of planting a tree?

Sari Nusseibeh

In 2003 Amir Ayalon who used to be the head of the Israeli Shin Beth, security service, and prior to that he was the head of the Israeli Navy. After having finished his job he came to me with an idea. The idea was at the time that we should try to build up pressure from the grassroots in order to encourage or to push the leaders at the top into making a peace agreement between them. Two or three years before that I had tried something similar with people in Israel from Peace Now. At one stage we even signed a statement with Israeli members of Peace Now calling for an end to violence and hoping that a grassroots movement would contain a swelling of violence between Israelis and Palestinians. That didn't work. So when Amir Ayalon came to me and said, let's do this, it seemed to me to be a wonderful idea because of his not been in any sense associated in his past life with the Israeli left or the peace movement, but having been associated instead with the security establishment. We began a process. The process was hard. But we managed to collect half a million signatures which is actually unprecedented in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, half a million on both sides, divided more or less

equally. It was easier for him and his organization to collect the signatures because of the existence of internet in Israel. On our side I had to do most of the work by legwork. I had to go to places, to villages, to communities to convince people, persuade them, argue with them in order to get the signatures. But in the end we had this number of people. Unfortunately it didn't transform into the kind of political result we wished it to perform. On the one hand Yassir Arafat passed away and on the other hand also Sharon disappeared from view. But the idea was that the majorities on both sides want a settlement, a two-state settlement. We thought that it should be done and the people should just express their wish that it should be done.

Isolde Charim

Do you think that the contents of this Nusseibeh-Ayalon paper, two states and the border of 1967, and especially the renunciation to the right of return, still has a majority appeal among the Palestinians?

Sari Nusseibeh

I think so. But it needs a couple of things. One is that if ever there is going to be a two-state solution then such a solution will be based upon more or less those six principles that we put down together on half a page. So it is not really difficult to read. On the other hand I would claim that if such a solution, such a framework were to be presented to the people I think people on both sides will go for it. If you ask people at the moment, will you go for it, maybe they will show hesitation. But they will do because neither side trusts that the other side will go for it. Let's assume for example that Olmert and Abbas were to sign such an agreement or initial it, let's assume that Abbas and Olmert were to go inside a room and initial such an agreement, and let's assume then they come out and say to their respective publics, we have signed this, we have initialed this, we know we are not supposed to have signed something like this and therefore we want to hold elections to find out whether you will support us to translate such an agreement, I believe that in elections that will follow both leaders will be voted back in because the majorities of both communities will want peace on the basis of such an agreement.

Isolde Charim

But it still sounds like a fairy tale. Six points, two men signing it. So why doesn't it happen?

Sari Nusseibeh

It's true, it sounds like a fairy tale. I am a person who believes in magic. Because I believe in magic I also believe in political magic. What is political magic? Political magic is people believing that people have the power within themselves to make a difference. To believe in magic is to believe that individuals can make a difference, that life, that history is not written somewhere else by someone else, that life, that history is written by individuals. When I say this to people, that Olmert and Abbas can go into a room and sign an agreement, of course, especially theorists and politicians will tell me that I am crazy. They will give me lots of reasons to prove that I am crazy. But if you think about it there is actually nothing to stop them. There is no metaphysical obstacle. There are no walls of steel preventing those two people to walk inside a room. All they need is a piece of paper and all they need is one pen. And they can initial an agreement such as this. Having done it they can come out and tell the people, Abbas can come out to us and tell us, I believe that this is in the best interest of my country, of your country, I believe that this is in the best interest of the people, and so I have initialed it, but I realize that this is my vision and I want to put it to the test, so I want to hold elections, I want to dissolve the legislative council, I am going to run in the next elections, my political program is going to be this agreement I have just initialed with the Israeli counterpart, and I want to make also this political program the political program of the party that I lead, namely Fatah, and I want you, the people, to tell me whether you support me or not by voting. I believe personally if President Abbas were to do this, if he were to take the agreement round to places in Gaza, in the Westbank, to talk to people, to tell them why he thinks this is a good thing, I think the majority of the people will tell him, fine, we will vote for you, and we will send you back. Because after all what the majority of the people want on both sides is peace, an equitable peace. We all know deep down that we cannot achieve an absolute peace, an absolute peace with absolute justice, with absolute demands. We know that we have to make compromises on both sides. The Israelis have to compromise and we have to compromise. But we also know that if by compromising we can create a new life then we should do it. And I think therefore people will vote back Abbas and on the Israeli side Olmert or whoever is on the Israeli side to achieve this.

Isolde Charim

Why does this not happen then?

Sari Nusseibeh

There are two reasons. One reason is that there is not necessarily a convergence of views on both sides. In other words, Abu Mazen and Olmert may not have come to an agreement between them. They do not see eye to eye on the terms of reference for an agreement, a two-state solution. And indeed on the Israeli side there may be conditions that are not acceptable. On the Palestinians side there may be conditions that are not acceptable. So the first conditions for this to happen is that the two leaders have a convergence of opinion or of views. They have to see eye to eye on the statement. And the second important reason, I believe, is that on both sides those individuals have to believe that they can do it. They have to have the faith in the ability of human beings to act. Very often, unfortunately, when we look at ourselves, let alone at our leaders, very often we find individuals who do not have the confidence, who do not have the faith in themselves, in their abilities that they can make things happen. So these are two conditions. One, they should see eye to eye on an agreement. And two, then they should have full confidence in themselves that human beings write history.

Isolde Charim

Doesn't it need also a third condition? To believe that the solution is a nonviolent solution, that you have to resign from violence? Looking from outside one has the impression that this credo of nonviolence was maybe a mainstream credo on the Palestinian side maybe in the first Intifada where you took part.

Sari Nusseibeh

Let's face it. People in general, whether we are talking about Arabs or talking about Europeans or Americans, naturally tend to prefer or to assume that it is through violence that you can bring about your desired ends. Unfortunately, this is a general human attitude. Within that context Palestinians have also tended to use violence, but so have the Israelis. The occupation, the existence of the occupation is a state of violence. But the point is, can we look beyond this, can we create a state of peace, of coexistence between the Israelis and the Palestinians based upon a mutual convergence of views about what our interests are? At the moment there are ten, twelve million Israelis and Palestinians living on a very compressed piece of land. We live at each other's doorsteps. At the end of the day it only stands to reason for the two communities, the two peoples, the two nations, to decide that it makes more sense for them to live at peace with each other in a stable and safe environment than to live in an environment where people live in fear, where they shoot at each other. Therefore the time will come when the two sides will decide that they have the same interest which is a peculiar thing to say. It is peculiar for you to hear me say that the Israelis and the Palestinians have a shared interest. But we do. The Israelis and the Palestinians have a shared objective, mutual interest which is their future. And they share this interest with each other much more than either the Israelis share it with the United States or the Palestinians share it with anybody else. Objectively speaking we are living at each other's doorstep. And sooner or later both sides are going to realize that therefore it is in our shared, joint interest to create a life that is acceptable for the two sides.

Isolde Charim

I would like to believe you.

Sari Nusseibeh

So why don't you?

Isolde Charim

I think that your credo, your beliefs, your opinions and the historical situation had a time when they were very close together, around the first Intifada. I think that today after the beginning of the second Intifada they somehow drifted apart. That is my impression. Is this right?

Sari Nusseibeh

In a sense you are right, of course. But in a sense also you are not right. If you, for example, ask yourself the question, how close or far away are the two sides from each other in terms of arriving or trying to draw up a common agreement between them, you will come up with the answer that they are much closer today to each other than they were 50, or 40, or 30 years ago, or 20 years ago. Today they are much closer to each other. Why

are the closer to each other? Because there has been a process of rational consciousness on both sides, of realization that we have to make space for each other, that our future is one so that we have to make the best of such a future for both sides. I think slowly people are coming to the realization that we have to come to an agreement. The Israelis in spite of their power, including their nuclear power, in spite of the force they have used, in spite of everything are coming to realize that they are not capable of breaking the will of the Palestinian people. It is impossible to get rid of the Palestinian people or to make the Palestinian people disappear or suddenly forget their rights. Likewise on the Palestinian side, also the Palestinians have also come to the conclusion that you cannot also break the will of the Israeli people by whatever use of force. Here you have a stalemate. Here you have a situation where both sides have come to the conclusion, have to the realization that force does not work. The only thing that works is a negotiated settlement. The only thing that works is to create a system of coexistence where all sides are giving equal weight in terms of human value where you cannot expect to have a life or a stability in your life if in that context you are giving more worth to yourself than you are giving to the other side. This is the balance, a balance of human respect, a balance of human dignity, of worth, and of therefore recognition. We are slowly getting there. It is taking us a long time. We are enduring a lot of suffering in the meantime, deaths, human suffering, bloodshed on both sides. But if you look ahead, 10 years, 50 years, 100 years down the path of history I am sure you will find one day just as peaceful a relationship existing between Jews and Arabs, between Israelis and Palestinians, as you today find in Europe between countries that were warring each other. It will happen. Our challenge in the Middle East is to make it happen as quickly as possible. And our challenge is to make it happen with as least suffering for the two sides as possible.

Isolde Charim

I was very astonished that you said that there is a kind of rationalization of the conflict. What we can see is rather a changing of the nature of the conflict. Before we were speaking about land or oil. Now we are speaking about religion, about identities. This is a whole different discourse. In theory we distinguish between divisible and indivisible conflicts, conflicts that can be resolved by transforming from identity questions into quantitatively negotiable topics. What we saw in the last 10, 15 years was the other way round, a charging of the conflict with this identity and religious items.

Sari Nusseibeh

In a sense you are right. You look at the surface of the political map and what you see on both sides is radicalization of views, is a religionization of attitudes. You have far more religious factors dominating people's lives, decisions, descriptions of the political situation than you had before. But I still maintain that this is a surface change. I would also claim that perhaps in a sense it is a good thing, in a twisted sense, because after all you do have a problem which one has to solve. And the problem is to deal with the three faiths, what we call the Abrahamic religions. After all you have a Jewish, and a Muslim, and a Christian religion or aspects of religion. And perhaps the time has come for us to deal with the differences. The time has come for us to deal with the following question and to deal with it openly. Was it more important as a message for people who follow the faith to believe that Abraham was about to offer his son Isaac in sacrifice, or is it more important to have to believe that he was about to offer his son Ishmael in sacrifice, or is it more important to believe simply that Abraham was about to offer his son regardless of whether it was Isaac or Ishmael in sacrifice? We have to come to a conclusion. We have to come to a conclusion concerning questions about Jerusalem and its relationship. How religious, how worldly is it? What value does it have? What does it mean to have such a value? As I understand it God's message to Abraham as he came to sacrifice his son, the idea being that he came to sacrifice his son in the Jewish tradition on the rock itself where the Haram is built, and then God produces an alternative so that Abraham doesn't have to do that. My interpretation of this is that God is telling Abraham, and therefore also Abraham's children, do not spill human blood over this rock on my behalf. This is what God tells Abraham, this is God's message. And what do we do, the children of Abraham? We are spilling blood exactly on that spot. We are fighting and spilling blood over that spot. I believe maybe the time has come for people who do take on a religious identity to address this question of what does religion mean and especially in connection with a spot like this. What value do we place on a rock and what on human life? It is an important question to address.

Isolde Charim

In the epilogue of your book you write: "On a deep metaphysical level Jews and Arabs are allies. Every attempt separating them as Sharon's wall is the product of a modern European myth of a pure nation." When we come

back to your political engagement you were always fighting for a national state for the Palestinians. How would you define your nationalism and what is the difference to the one that you mention here?

Sari Nusseibeh

It is not true that I always wanted a two-state solution. My natural inborn political naïve desire was always for one state. I have always thought this was a better solution because I am not a born nationalist. I have come to the conclusion that a two-state solution is better not because I personally find it as an ideal human solution, but because I have come to see that the people in general would prefer such a solution. So it is the most practical solution. That is why I support this solution. The first idea that came to my mind when I came back home from abroad and started working was simply to ask Israel to give all the Palestinians equal rights, citizenship. That was my personal point of view. It seemed to me that this was the best kind of solution. It would make people live together as equals regardless of race, religion, nation. But the point is this. I grew up thinking like this, especially with regard to how different or not different I was from Jews and Christians and other people. I grew up also in a family where my attitude towards other religions was very open. Maybe not all Arab families were like that, maybe because of the fact that we are associated specifically with the Christians that I was openminded to other religions right from the very beginning. But I grew up really looking at human beings as equals. I never looked upon myself as being a Palestinian or a Muslim first. I always looked at myself as being a human being first. I think in Europe the situation was different. It was in Europe that you had the Jewish problem initially. And it was in Europe that borders were created between nations, between people that were better and people that were less good. It was in Europe that this happened. This is why I say that as far as I am concerned back home the wall, the barrier between nations, the barrier between cultures, is much more of a European invention than a Middle Eastern or a Levantine invention. The Levantine world perhaps was much more open, borderless, porous between cultures, religions and so on, much more than it ever was the case in Europe.

Isolde Charim

Didn't your own idea of an own national state for the Palestinians also rely on this European concept of nation?

Sari Nusseibeh

It did to a great extent. I went back 1978. I started teaching at Bir Zeit University. Immediately after I got back I began to intermingle with students, with political activists and discovered that what people wanted there was their own national state. So I began supporting a Palestinian state. So for me nationalism is an acquired ideology.

Isolde Charim

But you still believe that this is a solution?

Sari Nusseibeh

I believe it is much better to have a two-state solution because it is the easiest, the most direct, and the most acceptable for people on both sides. That is why it is the best.

Isolde Charim

In your book you give a very strong example of a nonviolent resistance at your own university in Jerusalem. For 34 days a nonviolent protest has come to change the pathway of the wall. It is a very strong picture, those young people fighting for their football field. But it didn't change the fact of the wall.

Sari Nusseibeh

Let me say something about the practice of nonviolence among Palestinians in general. I don't think it is correct to say that Palestinians have historically only resorted to the use of violence in their confrontation with Israel or in expression of their resistance to Israel. Throughout the years the Palestinians especially at the level of the community, grassroots level, have expressed themselves in nonviolent ways, including demonstrations, nonviolent demonstrations, strikes, and all kinds of other ways. You will be surprised to know that one of the areas where nonviolent resistance was developed among Palestinians was inside Israeli jails. That was because of the fact that Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli jails in any case did not have weapons, but they had to fight over a number of years in order to achieve certain ends, like getting access to soap, or having access to writing paper, or having access eventually to radios, then to television sets. These were results of concerted nonviolent actions by

the prisoner movement within Israeli jails that eventually, slowly produced the results that were required. This kind of resistance strategy or culture therefore is very much part of the Palestinians. It has not been used successfully in everything. It isn't give priority. And very often it is not regarded by Palestinians as an exclusive weapon. This is a major issue. I would have argued, I would argue still, that the power of nonviolence is not just nonviolence, it is to be an exclusive instrument for change. If you use it side by side with violence then it loses a lot of the power that otherwise it has. In the case of the university we managed to push the wall away. When Israel began planning for the wall and we saw that the wall in our university was going to come right down the middle of the campus, dividing the two parts of the campus from each other, before the bulldozers started the work the people at the university very quickly intervened.

What did we do? We got together, we consulted with each other. We decided that the first thing we do is to go in a march to the football field where the bulldozers were up on the hill and the soldiers were protecting them. And we talked to the students. I remember the discussions with the students because students anywhere are hotblooded. I told the students that it has to be peaceful. If we get down there and one of you or two of you start throwing rocks at the soldiers then they will shoot back at us. Then one of you or two of you would get shot and killed, and the next morning you would have your picture in the newspaper as having been martyred. But then on the next day also we will have an order shutting down the university. So we will no longer be able to come back here. And the day after the university is shut down and you become heroes and martyrs Israel will continue with the work with the bulldozers. So it is necessary that the university will not be shut down, so it is necessary that we do not throw rocks, so it is necessary that we have a peaceful march, and it is necessary that we stay there. We go down to the football field and we stay there. And these are students from all factions, Fatah, Hamas, you name it, they are all part of the student body. They all accepted and we all came down to the football field. As we came down, about 1.000 people, student, faculty, the Israeli soldiers were getting more tense. You could see the tension in their eyes and the tension in the way they were gripping their guns. But as we got into the middle of the pitch and they saw that we weren't doing anything they didn't do anything in return. But in addition to this we had also prepared for our sports team to come into the field with their sports clothes. They came running in at the right moment between the demonstrators and the soldiers. And the minute the Israeli soldiers saw this they were overtaken, they couldn't do anything. They were bringing down their guns and began to walk back. They left the field for us. When they left it for us we stayed there. We did all kinds of things. We produced a powerpoint presentation on the wall. We invited all the diplomats to come and see what was happening, what the Israelis were doing to our football pitch and what is happening at the wall in general. This was at a time when the wall was not such a big thing. It hadn't become a major issue. People were preoccupied with other things at the time. But we caught people's attention. We brought them to the field. And then we had everything what you can imagine happen there. We had our commencement activities there. We had lectures there. We had examinations held there in the whole area. We had staff meetings, departmental meetings. So we were filling out the area in the day time. And in the evenings we brought people to do folklore activities, singing, dancing, and so on. We held a football tournament between all the universities. We had horse riding activities, you name it. And we stayed there and at the same appealed to everybody to come in and help us. We produced through this appeal signatures by thousands of academics from throughout the world, including Israeli academics who came also to support us protesting the path of the wall. Eventually the Israeli people in charge of the Defense Ministry in charge of the path of the wall with all this pressure and the pressure of the Americans had to pull back. By the way this was the only place throughout the path of the wall where we were able to push the wall back. In all the other places they were only able to push it back a little bit through a court order. In our case we pushed it back with no court order. It was just an agreement between us and the Israelis with American supervision.

Your point is, okay, you pushed it back, but the wall is still there. It is true. But we did shows that nonviolence can work, it can produce results like it produced a small result there. We never asked for anything more at the time, but also in terms of a peace agreement between Israelis and the Palestinians also nonviolence works.

Isolde Charim

In our audience today there are many members of the Jewish community. I told you this before and you said, no wonder, it is always like this. Why? How do you explain this success among Jews? What about the reaction of the Palestinians to your book, to your ideas?

Sari Nusseibeh

I think the Jewish communities abroad when they hear about me like to double check because they don't trust Palestinians. I come to give a lecture, they want to come and double check to see if this is the genuine article or this is a fake. There is that part. The Arabs, the Palestinians are a divided community. What I say is not necessarily very popular among my own people. I am very open, I am very honest, I say exactly what I think. I tell people I do this because I am not running for office. But I do have to face myself every night I go to bed. So I have to know that I am at ease with myself. So what I say doesn't necessarily appeal to many people. I say for example that we have to have a two-state solution. I say that for example we have to make compromises on basic issues. These things are painful to listen to. I tell people on my side that we have to think about the future, not about the past. We have to create a new life. And it is not always nice because people are yearning to be recognized. They are yearning to have their pain recognized. Psychologically it is necessary. But I think that also one has to think about how to create new conditions where more pain will not be created. That is what I focus on.

Isolde Charim

I can tell you about the Jews. It is not only that they have this doubt, but it is also that you are presenting another face of Palestinians and that is the face of this hybridization, of this contact to the West. And what you offer to the Jews is a face they can identify with.

Sari Nusseibeh

I disagree with you on this. This is something that is mentioned in the book. This is something that happened to me in real life. I picked up a book to read which was to do with Wittgenstein and Popper. They are both from Vienna. The book I picked up to read on these two gentlemen had nothing to do with the Jewish problem, had nothing to do with the Palestinians. I was interested in them as philosophers and I was interested to find out about a quarrel they had. As I read this book I saw a lot about the Jewish suffering and the anti-Semitism that was leading up eventually to the holocaust. This was an early period. But you already could tell the pain and the suffering the Jews were going through in Europe. Because I wasn't reading this as a history book, because I wasn't reading this as a book about the Jews I immediately somehow sympathized with the Jewish position in this country. When I did that I went to my mother. My mother is not from the West, my mother is a refugee from Ramleh, and my mother is someone who suffered a lot in her life at the hands of the Israelis. Unlike my father who was more Westernized and who constantly held talks with Israelis. My mother always stayed away. Of course she respected my father and his doings. She never trusted the Israelis. I went to her one evening having read the book and told her, I want to ask you something. Had somebody come to your father from Europe, a rabbi, and knocked on his door and told him, dear Mr. so and so, I have come on behalf of a consortium of the Jewish people from Europe, we have been studying our condition, our situation, and we can foresee a major catastrophe that is going to befall our people, and we have decided to create an exit, an escape for ourselves, and we therefore thought and thought and decided that the best place for us to escape to is this country which is the country of our forefathers, but we realize, we know that you are here, and we want to tell you would you allow us, would you welcome us back to this country in order to safe us. My mother is not Westernized. My mother is a refugee. Her father was expelled from Palestine. His property was burned by the British. She had a terrible time. It didn't take a single second for my mother to tell me, what kind of people do you think we are. Of course my father, she told me, would have opened this door and welcomed them. And that is a purely Arab, Muslim, Semitic attitude, totally free of politics, nothing to do with national politics. As it turned out, my mother who is very anti-Israeli and went out in demonstrations all her life since 1967 against Israel, she didn't participate in any dialogues with Israelis, she is not with Women in Black, she is not with Women in White, she is not in anything to do with anything, she didn't sign my thing, every time she sees me she tells me son, you are too naive. She tells me they will not do it. But I think we can do it and we can do it because of that spirit that exists in my mother. I know that deep down in every Palestinian there is this openness. That is why I think our future is good. It will take time.

Question

The Israeli government has got a very real, immediate problem. The Jews ignored Hitler, didn't take Hitler too seriously for a very long time which did cost millions of dead. The President of Iran, Ahmadinejad, has threatened to wipe out Israel and has threatened with nuclear weapons. The problem of the Israeli government is, do they wait for that to happen or do they do something about it. Would you give them any advice on that? And if you had any advice to give what would your advice be?

Sari Nusseibeh

Just to make peace with the Palestinians. It will stop the Iranian danger. The best way to contain any threat from the outside to Jews is to make the life of the Jew in that country inextricably tied up with the life of the non-Jew, of the Palestinian in that country. No one can then come and attack the Jew.

Question

Thank you very much for your statement. It was very impressive. I just wonder and am afraid that there are not so many people thinking like you. I wanted to ask you, why did the Oslo process fail? I remember in the 1990's it was a big euphoria in Israel. They had the dream of being the Hongkong of the Middle East.

Sari Nusseibeh

There are different reasons. If you will not mind me using this expression, I think of the Oslo process as a child that was born to two parents, to a father and to a mother. I believe that when a child eventually dies maybe one reason for its death is the fact that the parents have not given it sufficient care that the child should be given in order for the child to grow. I think what happened with Oslo was this. The two sides signed an agreement and then they assumed that the child or the agreement will simply grow and become a reality by itself. They did not give it the attention it needed. I personally believe that the most important item on the agenda of either the Israeli government or the Palestinian government should be a) to make a peace agreement, and b) to keep looking after this peace agreement minute by minute, day by day until it grows up. Unfortunately we did not do this with Oslo. We signed and then we turned our backs and started doing other things, and Oslo died. This is poetic way of looking at it, but that is how I believe.

Question

In the discussion on the podium there was a discrepancy between your vision and the skepticism of Isolde Charim. You seem to believe in the rationality of men and in particular of the leaderships and in the common sense in the sensibility in the desire for peace, of normal lives for the people, whereas Dr. Charim sees a radicalization in the leaderships in particular, but also in the masses, also a re-religionization. The underlying fear is that those leaders who might realize that the path you indicated has to be one day taken also may fear that there will be civil war within their own ranks. What do answer to this? Do you really believe that with the passing of time one can educate all the people? Do you really think that the two sides together can mature in the sense that they find a path to meet or is it necessary to have strong mediation from outside? Do you think that there have been enough efforts and determination by those who can mediate?

Sari Nusseibeh

Thank you for your very perceptive remarks. If I may something on behalf of my interviewer here, Isolde. I think deep down she shares my faith in humanity. I think she was playing the role of being a skeptic. Let me address the question of international intervention. Not enough has been done. More can be done. Today I suggested that Europe which is paying a lot of money to us Palestinians maybe should think about conditioning the payments of money to us on real progress in the peace talks. As it is today the continued payment by the European Union to the Palestinians – I am not saying something that is very popular either, especially with Palestinians. But what's happening is this that the payments by the funders to the Palestinians is subsidizing the continuation of the occupation. This is what is happening. If Europe were to suddenly say, we are reconsidering, we are beginning to think that we should perhaps stop doing this, maybe the two sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians, will be less complacent about getting more serious to trying and work out a deal between each other. This is one way of doing things. Another way of doing things is for the international community to come forward and say to the Palestinians and the Israelis, here is a framework, Clinton almost did this in his last days in office. So if there is a concerted effort by the quartet saying, this is what we think as an international community, this is what we think is a good agreement that we will support and that we want you to sign, maybe the Palestinians and Israelis will feel that there is pressure on them to go ahead and do this.

Radicalization. In our case the radicalization, the religionization, is in my opinion really a function of the lack of progress in the peace talks. We are not offering people an alternative, a paradise on earth. We are not making them believe in life after the conflict. So what do they go for? For life after death. People go there because there

is nothing here, down here. But if we give them something down here, a life down here, then they will go for it, and they will become more rational as far as the religious beliefs go, and they will not allow their religious beliefs to be interpreted in such ways as to subdue their humanity or subdue their belief in universal human values.

Question

I think it was in the beginning of the 1990's, you mentioned it when you proposed to Palestinians to demand the Israeli citizenship.

Sari Nusseibeh

It was in 1984/85.

Question

You were attacked physically by Palestinian students because of that. I don't want to enter into the abstract and somewhat sterile debate, one-state, two-state solution. But just looking at the facts on the ground which under any aspect makes a viable Palestinian state less and less probable every day. We should deal with the question what if a viable Palestinian state cannot be created. Do you have any option in such a situation?

Sari Nusseibeh

It is going to be a miserable life for both sides, Israelis and Palestinians, if we can't find, if we can't come to a solution soon. There will be more human suffering, more pain. But eventually, ten, twenty, thirty, forty years down the road having gone through this suffering and extra pain we will come back and then determine what best works as a model for coexistence. I don't know what model will at the time be acceptable, will be workable, maybe by default a one state, maybe a confederation of city states, of states of regions, maybe ideas that we have not yet thought about. Today we are very much imprisoned by the concepts we are working with, one state, two states. But all kinds of options are possible. If we find ourselves twenty years down the road unable to do two states, unable to do one state, well, maybe there are different options. A confederation, for instance, of city states, not just in Palestine/Israel to begin with, maybe a bit wider. We should never lose faith in the creative ability of the human mind. We can always find solutions. What we need is to have the right attitude that we want to live at peace with our neighbors, that we want to live in a framework that will give as much respect to the other as I need to have respect for myself. We need a framework in which we give as much love to the life of the other as we give to our own life. Everything else is footnote.

Question

Just to reassure that you have many Palestinian fans, not only do we wish that there were more of you amongst the Palestinians, but also more of you amongst the Israelis. When both sides realize that neither has a monopoly on rights and/or on wrongs we will be a lot closer to the day that we all dream of and living side by side in peace and prosperity. The other aspect which I have to comment on with regard to the question regarding Ahmadinejad is not just for the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians. Our survival is intertwined and therefore peace is an essential for our continuity and our respect of identity. For Ahmadinejad to be as evil enough to say what he is alleged to have said, he is not stupid enough to do what he has said because in order to wipe out Israel he'd have to wipe out Palestinians and half the Arabs in the region at the same time. I say that by way of assurance and nothing else. My question to you, however, at the risk of sounding even more naïve and more optimistic than you are, is that the right of return has become an obstacle. Many pointed to the impossibility of peace between Israelis and Palestinians and the insurmountability of that issue given that it is alleged that many Palestinians will not give up that "inalienable right" under international law. However, reality is different. Where the principle must be enshrined, however, the exercise of that right may be diminished by choice. But as an alternative, would it be possible to envision a situation where resident permits issued by the state of Israel to Palestinians who wish to reside, not to become citizens, but to reside in their original homes, could be issued and vice versa on the Palestinian side to those Israelis who want to live in their beloved lands of Judea and Samaria. And those residents would not ever have the right to become citizens, would have to recognize the legitimacy and sovereignty of their respective states hosting them and would, of course, be subject of necessary security and background checks to ensure that this is not seen as a subliminal way of resisting or revolting against the states in question. Could that be possibly a solution to the legitimate fears and concerns of the Israeli people and state with regard to the demographic consequences of the right of return?

Sari Nusseibeh

This is a very interesting idea. It just shows that we are lacking ideas in the future and that if the will there, yes indeed, a solution can be found. You are Palestinian? Yes. I feel good because it means that people in my generation can begin to take a rest and the new generation will continue in this direction which is a great message for me to hear. Thank you.

Question

How many Palestinians on the Westbank would agree with your truly peaceful idealistic hope? After 1948 about 600.000 Jews had to leave Arab countries to come to Israel, and the Israelis integrated them with great difficulties. Do you blame the Arab countries with their enormous amount of money for not integrating the app. same number of Palestinians into the Arab countries?

Sari Nusseibeh

I am not sure how useful it will be to address your second question. I am not a person that likes to look at parties to blame. I much prefer finding ways for parties to work together to create new realities. And I don't like to go too much into history because narratives can conflict and eventually become an obstacle. Historical narratives can be used in different ways. One way they can be used is to stop the wheel of progress towards better understanding. So sometimes it is best not to address the details of history.

But let me address the other question. The other question, I think, is in a sense more important. To what extent, you asked, is someone with views such as those that I hold representative not in a formal sense, but in a natural sense of the Palestinian mood or public? In my view ideas begin maybe with very few people. You can have just one person, or two people, or five people believing in one idea. Depending on the commitment, depending on the faith in that idea, that idea can then gather support. In my own life, in my own view, in my own experience, for example when this guy, Amir Ayalon, came to me he said, 'I've been around. I talked to many Palestinian leaders, people. When I talk to them they all tell me, yes, you are right. But when I asked them, do you want us to sign, they tell me, no, come and see us another time. And they never do it. And then a friend told me, the only person that's crazy enough around us who will sign is Sari Nusseibeh, go and seek him, maybe he will sign.' He came to me and I told him, yes, I am crazy, I will sign. He gave me a piece of paper and told me, do you want to read this. I told him, no, I don't want to read this, you tell me what you have on your mind. So he told me what he had on his mind. At the end I told him that I will sign. He was surprised. He said, what, you don't want to look at the papers? I told him no, I will look at the papers later. I want to look you in the eyes, I want to hear you. I've heard you, I've seen you, and I think you are good and I will sign, I will put my hand in yours and we will work together. So I signed. But when I signed, I was the only person who signed. My mother wouldn't sign and nobody else had signed. And people told me, are you crazy, one person to sign. And I said, okay, I am crazy, but let me try. And I tried. Do you think I was met with flowers? No. I went to places where in some instances I was prevented from talking. At one university I went to talk, they prevented me from talking in the main auditorium. So I had to stay in a small room. Some people came to listen. But I talked in that small room. We had television which was televising my talk. And then later in that day in that town of Nablus they televised that speech three times in the same evening because everybody heard, Sari was prevented from speaking in the university, so we want to know what he had to say. So everybody wanted to hear. I am not saying that everybody was of the same mind. But I found people who were prepared to believe in you if they believe that you believe in what you have to say. In one village I was telling people they should do this. These were young people with guns. They told me, when the Israelis tanks come into the village you want us to drop the guns and greet them and tell them let's sign a peace agreement between us? What are you talking about?

In one such meeting I thought up the following story. It is a good story, I used it later in lectures. I am talking to young people in a village and I am trying to convince them, persuade them of meeting the Israeli tanks peacefully.

Let's suppose that two individuals are going to the market place. They don't know each other. Each one is going for a different reason. The market place is full of people, people are shoving, people are sweating. And then one of them hits the other. They lose their temper at each other. Each one of them looks at the other, thinking that the other did this on purpose. They start screaming at each other. In the Arab world we are a bit hot blooded, so

it turns into fighting. And then one person throws the other to the ground. So have a situation in which they don't know why they started fighting anyway, but they found themselves fighting, each person blames the other for having started. The one on the ground is kicking and squealing and biting, if he can, to get out, and the one on top is trying to pin him down. Then I asked these young people, tell me of the two, in that situation that I just portrayed, who do you think has more power? And the immediate reaction is, of course, the guy on top has more power. And I tell them, think again, how do you define power? Then finally I lead them to think that you define power by the number of options that you have. I tell them, that if you think about it, the guy on top has fewer options than the guy below? Why? Because the guy on top has no option but to stay on top because if he decides to let go he is worried that his strategic advantage will be lost. The guy underneath will kick him out and come on top. So he is terrified, he is scared, he needs to stay on top. He has no other option. The guy below has an option. He can do two things. He can kick and squeal, but he can also just as simply sit silently, relax. Even though he is below he can relax. These are two options. Of course, if he relaxes he creates a new dynamic by beginning a process of dialogue with the guy on top. This is a strange situation. If you are on top you will have the fear of losing your strategic advantage and therefore you have fewer options, therefore in a roundabout way you are less powerful. If you are below there is nothing to lose, therefore you are more powerful.

Somebody asked me earlier about a third party mediating between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Now think. Take this example. Suppose Mr. Bush sends a mediator and tells the guy below, please stop kicking and squealing because we will get the guy on top to get off you. Maybe the guy below will stop kicking and squealing, but then the guy on top will have to be convinced. Now can Condoleezza Rice actually persuade the guy on top to stop. No, they can't because you can't. Why? Because what is to guarantee to the guy on top that the minute he takes off his hands that the guy below will not just kick him in the balls. So the guy on top is actually much more in chains than the guy below. This is the power of nonviolent resistance.

Question

I am sixty years old and Israel is now sixty years old. Since sixty years I dream of peace because I like peace, I don't like war. Everybody for me is the same. I like Jews, I like Christians, I like Buddhists, everybody. We have more than 400 declarations from the UNO to make a solution for this conflict, but until now we have nothing. How can I make trust between the Jewish people and the Palestinian people in your region so that we can have peace? Everybody in Palestine is frustrated. We have been in Annapolis and they make agreements with us and Mr. Olmert. After two days Olmert said we continue the bombings. How can I trust him to make peace with us? I don't understand it.

Sari Nusseibeh

I just want to tell you one thing. You should not lose faith in being able to create life after the conflict. Life after the conflict exists. Just work for it.

Isolde Charim

Thank you so much, Sari Nusseibeh.