

STORY OF A PALESTINIAN UNDER OCCUPATION

Salih Baransi is a Palestinian who was born and raised within the part of Palestine occupied in 1948. He was one of the founders of the nationalist Al Ard movement, and an important struggler for Palestinian rights. Imprisoned numerous times, he was last released after serving ten years, from 1969 to 1979. At the current time he is living under town arrest in 'Israel'.

The Journal of Palestine Studies published a long interview – virtually a life history – with Salih Baransi in their Autumn 1981 issue. Here we are reprinting excerpts that deal with his remembrances of the surrender of Al Tayyiba village to the Zionists in 1949 and a section on the conditions faced by Palestinians who have been under occupation since 1948.

I was born in al-Tayyiba, which is my village, in 1928. I had three brothers and three sisters. My three brothers are married but I am not. I never had the chance to marry, as I was always being arrested, and now I have grown too old...

The surrender of al-Tayyiba

A few days before al-Tayyiba was handed over to Israel in 1949, Mr. Ahmed Khalil, whom the Jordanian government had appointed as *mutassarif* governor of the district, came to the village, which the government had taken over from the Iraqi forces that had been stationed there since they entered Palestine on May 15, 1948. At a public meeting held in the courtyard of the village school, Mr. Khalil talked of the Rhodes Agreement in which it was agreed to hand over to Israel the Triangle sector, comprising Kafr Qasim, Kafr Barra, Khunish, Jaljuliya, al-Tira, al-Tayyiba, Qalan-sawa, Bir al-Sikka, Abtan, Jatt, Baqa al-Gharbiya, Maisara, Kafr Qar', Barta'a, 'Arah, 'Arara, Umm al-Fahm and all the surrounding small villages as far as Sandala and Maqabala. Having made it clear that the Agreement included articles stipulating that the inhabitants of these areas should be well treated and that their property and security should be protected, he called on the people to stay in their villages and to hold out in them, whatever the circumstances.

This came as no surprise to me, as the news had already been reported in the press and by radio broadcasts. But as soon as I heard him calling on the people to hold out I

said to myself, "Nothing has changed. They want our people to do something they have not prepared them for. What weapons have they given them to hold out, and what equipment have they provided them with?" Casting my mind back, I passed in review what I knew of our people's experience in the struggle, and the examples of their heroism and nobility that were indelibly engraved in my memory.

I recalled the 1936 strike that went on for months, during which the people endured without a murmur and gave without wearying or complaining, while the leaderships showed such weakness and squandered all the fruits of the people's self-sacrifice.

I recalled the revolt of 1936-1939 and the role played by the peasants – their ungrudging sacrifices and generosity, with the men fighting and the women welcoming the bodies of their martyrs with chants and acclamation.

I recalled how, when the rebels stayed in their villages the inhabitants would club together to help them, every single house in the village contributing all it could afford.

I recalled my village, all of whose inhabitants without exception moved to the neighbouring villages to avoid paying a fine imposed on the village by the mandate authorities for sheltering a group of rebels, until the fine was rescinded, whereupon they returned.

I recalled the vociferous demonstrations of students in Jerusalem, and the bloody clashes with the mandate troops that took place there. I thought at length of a demonstration that took place in 1945 in the course of which many stirring incidents took place. I remembered how, inside the Damascus Gate, the demonstrators met with Jamal al-Husseini, who wanted to make a speech to them, and when the leaders of the demonstration decided to allow this, he stood at the door of a shop and said: "My sons, let those of you who are Christians go to their churches and those who are Muslims to their mosques and let us beseech God to grant us victory over the oppressors. Almighty God has said...." Whereupon the students raised loud cries of "We want arms, we want arms," making it impossible for him to finish his speech.

At the Damascus Gate, the students clashed with the security forces which were lined up in front of the gate to prevent the

demonstrators coming out; in this clash there were a number of wounded on both sides. When the security forces realized that they were not strong enough to prevent the demonstration moving on again, they concentrated their attack on the flag. But the students, realizing what the security forces were trying to do, spontaneously encircled the flag-bearer, forming ring after ring around him while others climbed onto their shoulders until they concealed the flag with their bodies to protect it, and the security men could not get at it.

I recalled these spontaneous moves by the people. I also recalled how the fruits of the people's gallantry and sacrifice were wasted. How did it come about that, in spite of all their readiness for sacrifice, our people were led to their ruin?

This was bound to happen because our masses were not sufficiently politically conscious to take part in the discussion of their problems and to take decisions on them. They were not organized. They were accustomed not to think for themselves, but to let others think for them.

All these incidents returned to my memory when I heard the *mutassarif* call on the people to hold out and stay where they were. I believed that the people would, indeed, stay and hold out, but not because they had been asked to do so, nor because they were conscious of the importance of their doing so to their people's cause, but because they were peasants and it is the nature of the peasant to be stubbornly attached to his land.

Then came May 7, 1949, the day when the Israeli forces entered the area and were received in al-Tayyiba by a delegation of notables with words of welcome – all of it blatant flattery and abject hypocrisy.

The people were like someone who is perplexed and cannot take in what is going on around him. With anxious faces and stricken eyes their looks expressed only loss, perplexity, fearful expectation and bewilderment. Behind all this was a bitterness tempered only by an inability to take in what was happening and an unexpressed but obstinate hope that this totally unforeseen situation, however real it seemed, would soon pass away and that Palestine would soon return to its legitimate owners.

This hope required no rational justification. These people were accustomed to

thinking with their emotions. Moreover, a simple person, if he has no real ground for hopes, tends to create delusive and imaginary ones and then tries to convince himself with them to the extent that, if anyone admits to harbouring such hopes, he is applauded, praised and hailed as a hero.

Palestinians in the Zionist State

The overwhelming majority of the Arabs who stayed in Israel in 1948 have stronger patriotic and nationalist feelings than others. I am convinced of this. It is not because they are different from other people, but because their objective circumstances have created such feelings.

Take, for example, the policy that has been pursued against them because they are Arabs. My land is confiscated because I am an Arab. I am humiliated and despised because I am an Arab. This policy has strengthened their feelings of nationalism and Arabism and their attachment to these sentiments. If you are beaten, tortured, humiliated and imprisoned because you are an Arab, your feelings of Arab nationalism

Palestinian women in front of their Nazareth home.



Most Palestinians in the Zionist state live without the social benefits accorded to Jewish citizens.

will certainly be increased. An Arab child is taught that Israel is democratic, but sees that his father, his brother or his relative is humiliated and hit in the street. When he grows up he also becomes aware of this fraud through the distinction and discrimination between Jews and Arabs. Therefore, his rejection of the occupation, of its shortcomings and its attempts to appear to be the opposite of what it really is, becomes increasingly strong, as do his nationalist sentiments — more than other people's because an educated person is capable of distinguishing between what is true and what

is false, and because he lives within the framework of this system.

Colonialist experience has shown that all attempts to distort local culture through a culture based on racial discrimination are doomed to failure. Take, for example, Britain in India: it was those who received their schooling from the British who led the revolt against her; take France in North Africa; and Portugal, Belgium and Spain in Africa.

Those who are most vehement and obstinate in their defence of the Palestinian identity are the young men who went to

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE ISRAELI POLICE

After our village had been handed over, I was at home when someone knocked at the door. When I opened it to see who was knocking, I found a policeman standing at the door and asking me if I was Salih Baransi. When I said "Yes", I was told to accompany him to the police station, and when I asked why, he said, "You can find out when you get there."

The police station consisted of three rooms side by side, with a cement bench in front, beneath which was a place for chickens and rabbits, and in front of it a large courtyard, a high wall and a gate. No sooner had I passed through the gate than they

started raining blows on me until I fainted.

When I came to myself I tried to get up, but could not. Looking around me I found that I was in the place for chickens and rabbits, and because the roof was so low I could neither stand nor sit up: all I could do was to lie on my side. Of course I could not stay lying on one side — I had to turn over. But every time I tried to turn on to my other side, I was wounded by the roof which, as I said, was very low and made of rough cement, which cut like a knife, and when I turned back the first wounds got cut again. I stayed there for three weeks; it was summer.

They put my food, which was a plate of lentils, through the narrow entrance and I had to eat lying on my face or my back. I

had to answer the calls of nature in my clothes, in the same place. I contracted a severe fever; my temperature rose and I asked for a doctor, but they refused my request. When I reached the stage where I could no longer move or speak, they were obliged to let me out. They took me to another place, which consisted of a small wooden shed — a sort of hutch made of mud and roofed with wood and straw, and I stayed there for a time until the fever abated. They used to send a boy to me to tell me to clean the lavatories. The idea being that I would refuse, so that they might beat me. After a month and a half they let me go, and to this day I do not know why they arrested me and did what they did to me.

Jewish schools — not only the universities, but also the secondary schools.

As regards the Arabs of Palestine's feeling of "Palestinian-ness," the establishment of the PLO and the start of the revolution in 1965 fostered Palestinian sentiments and gave them a tangible framework. Therefore the suppression of such feelings is one of the authorities' principal objectives. The consciousness of the Arabs in Israel of being Palestinian Arabs is powerful, committed and mature. Of this I have no doubt.

What is the situation of Arabs in the various major cities?

In Old Acre, the people are leaving because, as you know, some of the buildings are very old and were starting to collapse, and the rest were unsafe. The Israelis

therefore proposed to the inhabitants that they should abandon the Old City and leave. Many people did leave Old Acre and went to live in the neighbouring villages, while the Israelis also put pressure on the remainder to sell their houses. Very few of them bought or rented houses in modern Acre, and the greater part of the people moved to the village of al-Makar.

In Jerusalem the life of the Arabs is wretched. Israel is at present making every effort to effect a radical change in the character of the Old City from Arab to Jewish. She is not worried by world public opinion or any other opinion.

The situation in Haifa is slightly different, and better than in the other towns. The Arab population numbers 30,000 and their

economic situation is good. Most of them are educated.

In Jaffa, the Arabs have gone on living in the old dilapidated buildings of the old town, in the old streets like Faisal Street, now Street 60, and in the Ajami quarter. The oriental Jews live close to the Arab area.

As you know, Tel Aviv and Jaffa have now become a single town. But if you go into the areas where the Arabs live, you will find them unchanged. You can see the vast difference between the Arab and Jewish quarters. The Arab areas are infested with narcotics and hashish and a low standard of living. The most wretched types of Arab are those who have remained as minorities in towns such as Acre, Lydda and Jaffa, though Haifa is an exception, for reasons I have mentioned.

Most of those who stayed after the Jewish attacks in 1948-1949 were peasants, and their attachment to traditions and customs has contributed greatly to their rejection of the situation imposed on them. But it must be pointed out that these traditions are a two-edged weapon: We need them as a means of ensuring steadfastness and defiance but at the same time there is a pressing need to develop them, for they are sometimes an obstacle to development and civilization. Therefore, we as leaders were faced with the problem of dealing with our people on the basis of maintaining these traditions, so as to increase the feeling of belonging and refusal to be absorbed in an alien situation, and also of trying to develop these traditions. It was a difficult problem, but we overcame it — not through our own skill only because an important factor was the Israeli policy of occupation, repression and pressure.

The departure of the traditional leadership in 1948 left the people like a flock

1981 Day of the Land demonstration in Taiyiba.



without a shepherd. That really was a period of demoralization, but it was also of great potential benefit, for it gave an opportunity for a new leadership to appear and grow. It is to be observed that the new leadership was, for the first time, non-traditional — i.e., it did not derive from the families to which leadership used to come by inheritance. On the contrary, the leaders came from the common people, and this was a great change in our society.

One of the most difficult problems that faced us was the Israeli policy of destroying the socio-economic base of the Palestinian community. An economic base is very important — there can be no national struggle without an economic base — and we were deprived of any economic aid from any source whatever.

Israel destroyed the economic base of our peasant society by confiscating land and making it impossible for the Arab to rely on land for a living. Eighty percent of peasants' land has been confiscated since 1948 and the process is still going on. Israel is at present also confiscating the land of the Negev — thousands of dunums are being confiscated and its inhabitants are being expelled. We are threatened in the future with further confiscation of land in Galilee and in the occupied Arab territories (the West Bank and Gaza).

I am not being pessimistic when I say in 1985 or 1990 there will be no more land owned by Arabs in Palestine if Israel is permitted to continue her present policy of confiscation and Judaization.

For example, in 1945, the village of Umm al-Fahm had 5,000 inhabitants, while they now number 20,000. And in 1945, Umm al-Fahm owned more than 68,000 dunums of land but now owns less than 6,000. In 1948, my village, al-Tayyiba, had 4,000 inhabitants. It now has about 18,000. In 1948 it owned about 30,000 dunums, and now only 7,000. I myself had my land confiscated although I did not leave the country. Just think — the Arabs who live in Israel, as citizens of the country, have had the greater part of their land confiscated in the last thirty years — not to mention the lands of the refugees, of course. I am not talking about the West Bank and Gaza, but about the people who are considered citizens of Israel.

If this vast amount of land is confiscated, the peasant class is bound to disappear. The ordinary peasant can no longer live on the revenue from what land is left to him, and if he is left with a few dunums, he works on them part of the time and works as a worker elsewhere the rest of the time. Thus he is no

longer a peasant, but he has not become a worker either.

Although the peasant class has been destroyed, the peasants have not become industrial workers. Only 20 percent work in industry — not necessarily as skilled workers, but performing carrying, cleaning and varying services. They thus do not constitute a worker class in the true sense of the word.

The feudal landowners, who used to own large areas of land, have also vanished because their land has been confiscated. Even those who still retain some land can no longer be called feudal because they no longer own sufficient land.

As for the bourgeoisie, there never really existed a class in the true sense of the word inside the Green Line. Most of the merchants are shopkeepers, who account for 90 percent of this "class," while the remaining 10 percent are artisans, who are too small to constitute a bourgeois class.



The Israeli state's refusal to allocate land for Arab housing has forced thousands to build illegally, as this house in Nazareth.

As for engineers and doctors, the number of doctors is very low. Architects are very badly treated; building permits are very few or non-existent, and it is difficult for architects to find work. The professional people who do find work are the teachers and civil servants.

Israel knows that she cannot deport all the Palestinians from their land. Therefore what interests and concerns her is the size of the population — to ensure that there should not be a large number of Palestinians

remaining in the land. She therefore puts great pressure on them to make them leave. The small numbers she allows to stay are useful to her, as she needs cheap labour. Now, Israel has a plan to bring in Egyptian labourers in the future, which is both economically advantageous to her and does not represent a threat to her security in the form of the planting of bombs or explosives. It also deprives the Palestinian workers of their livelihood, so that they are obliged to leave the country, while the world will assume that they have left of their own free will and not under pressure.

This is a very important point. If a householder and his family in the West Bank are hungry, who has the right to say to them, You should hold out and not leave?

This also applies to intellectuals and educated people of whom there are many in the West Bank. If they are unable to find work or employment, and are obliged to emigrate to Kuwait or the Emirates, who has the right to say to them, you should hold out and not leave?

There is no plan to prevent emigration, such as the establishment of cooperative, consumer and production associations as a way of encouraging the workers to stay where they are and preventing them from emigrating. That is the only way to prevent emigration. As the proverb says: "God helps him who helps himself."

Racial discrimination against Arabs is to be found in all fields in Israel. For example, there is not a single Israeli settlement without a nursery school (pre-elementary education). But Arab kindergartens — when they exist at all — lack ventilation, heating, playgrounds or gardens, and at times even water. Sometimes an Arab primary school will be spread all round the village, because there is no building for it — it consists of one rented room here, and another there. There is a lack of audio-visual teaching aids and many subjects cannot be taught. I estimate that 50 percent of teachers are unqualified because there are hardly any Arab training colleges.

If you are an Arab making a journey you will be subjected to all kinds of humiliation. At their airports and frontier posts, you are immediately set apart and made to stand aside, while other people are allowed to complete their arrival or departure formalities. Then they take you and submit you to all sorts of provocation — search, and other kinds of humiliating treatment. In buses, a policeman asks for identity cards, and if he learns you are an Arab, he treats you differently and may make you get out if he does not like your looks.



School in Nazareth – more than half the town's classrooms are unsuitable due to insufficient funding.

Another example: according to the law, Arabic is an official language in Israel. That means that if I write an official petition I should be able to write it in Arabic and receive the reply to it in Arabic. But, in fact, things are different. If I want to consult a ministry, I must write what I want in Hebrew only, and the reply I receive will also be in Hebrew. And when I go to government offices I must understand Hebrew and speak it too. This is an indication of the other face of the democratic character of Israel.

The most common manifestation of Israeli treatment of the Arabs is the confiscation of land. The land is confiscated on the pretext of action in the "common interest," but the common interest always works against the Arabs and in favour of the Jews. The Arabs lose their land on the pretext of the common interest, but they derive no benefit at all from this common interest because according to the Israeli definition, it means Jewish interests.

For instance, there is the case of the Carmiel area that was established in the Galilee district after the confiscation of thousands of dunums of Arab property on the pretext of developing the Galilee district and turning it into an industrial area. When a member of the al-Asad family, a native of the district, applied to build a factory in the area, his application was refused.

The military regulations gave powers to the Military Governor of an area to confiscate land under the pretext that it was needed for security reasons. This resulted in the loss of a lot of land. In one case the Military Governor of the Triangle District went out and started going around the land. He then ordered a furrow to be ploughed in the land and gave orders for the confiscation of all land lying to the west of this furrow, while the land lying to the east of it was not confiscated. This meant that tens of thousands of dunums of land lying to the west of the furrows was confiscated.

There is a very large area of some thousands of dunums, which was later called "Area No. 9." This area was confiscated at the end of the fifties, the authority for the confiscation being no more than a scrap of paper signed by a police officer, a copy of which was sent to Sakhnin and Arraba, and it still exists. On it was written an order to the effect that the land within such and such limits was confiscated and was henceforth to be called Area No. 9.

The Arab is still regarded as an alien in his own land. I recall a statement by Sharon in an interview with *Maariv* in 1977, at that time when he was Minister of Agriculture and responsible for state lands. In the interview, he said: "At a time when Israel is talking of Judaizing Galilee, aliens are still in possession of thousands of dunums of state land." Just think. He calls us aliens after we have coexisted with them for thirty years, a whole generation, and legally we are his fellow-citizens. And the land we inherited from our fathers and grandfathers he says is occupied by us and he wants to liberate it from us! We have owned the land for thousands of years, and we are called "occupiers".

The educational system spreads chauvinism among the Israelis. Take, for example, the subject of history as taught in Jewish secondary schools. Almost 40 percent is devoted to teaching the history of the Jews in Palestine, and about 60 percent to general history, with hardly any reference to the history of the Arabs and no mention at all of the history of the Arabs in Palestine. Thus the rising Israeli generation will never allow the formation of a government in Israel that is prepared to accept any Palestinian in the land of Palestine, and it absolutely refuses to recognize that the Palestinians have a right to even a small part of the land.

There is a similar bias in history as it is taught in the Arab schools in Israel: 60

percent is general history, 21 percent is the history of the Jews in Palestine and 19 percent the history of the Arabs, with absolutely no mention of their history in Palestine. Thus, the Arab pupil studies more Jewish than Arab history. The Arab pupil is also obliged to study selections from the Torah in which are to be found the seeds of the Zionist idea.

In geography, no territory or area in Israel is called by its Arabic name, nor are the mountains, plains, rivers, towns or villages. The Arab pupil learns about his country through Hebrew names. Then there is the hysteria of wars, aggression, victories and military arrogance. All these factors lead the Israeli to treat the Arab with scorn and contempt, in a manner calculated to humiliate him.

As for anti-Semitism, I repeat that we have no feelings of that kind. We do not hate the Jews, we do not bear them a grudge or resent them. We hate Zionism, we resent Zionism and we fight against Zionism. The proof that this is our attitude is provided by the fact that we in Israel cooperate with numerous anti-Zionist Jewish elements, and this cooperation is strong, fruitful and important. We cooperate on behalf of human rights and the rights and freedom of the citizen. Our resentment is not directed against the Jews but against Zionism itself, and we believe that the Jews are its second lot of victims, the first lot being the Palestinian people.

How can the Jews be the victims of Zionism? My answer is: Did not Hitler occupy Europe and nearly dominate the world? But did this prevent Hitler and his philosophy leading to the ruin of Germany?

There are some people in Israel who understand this, but they are still few because the objective circumstances through which Israel has passed since the establishment of the state have not encouraged the rise of liberal and radical movements in the country. On the contrary, they have encouraged and fostered chauvinism and racism. There are anti-Zionist elements in Israel, but they are still weak.

When will it be possible for anti-Zionist ideas to spread, grow and multiply among the Jews of Israel? The answer is: When the Arab world succeeds in constituting an insuperable force in the face of the ambitions of Zionism, and the atmosphere is created for the emergence of objective conditions that assist the spread and increase of anti-Zionist ideas. For today, circumstances assist the spread of Zionism and encourage it rather than weaken it.