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Hanging Security on Thin Air

When President Sadat in his speech in the Knesset last November reiterated the Arabs' abiding determination not to give up a single centimeter of "Arab land" he emphasized that there was simply no room for discussion on the subject. "The nation's land", he said, is sacred — "as sacred as the valley in which God spoke to Moses". Indeed the idea of sanctity recurs time after time in Sadat's utterances. He does not omit even the "sacred land" of Sinai.

These assertions have no foundation in fact. They are, simply, absurd. Neither Sinai, nor even Palestine, was sacred to the Arabs or to the Moslems in general. The Holy Land, in which Jesus lived and worked, was the cradle of the Christian religion, but the country played no role in Islam.

Even in the hundreds of years in which the land was ruled by Moslem empires no myth of sanctity was woven round it. It was not accorded a special political status, nor was such a status developed in it. In the various Moslem empires it did not even constitute a separate administrative unit.

All of them treated it as an unimportant and unconsidered province. The most noteworthy effect on Eretz Yisrael of Moslem rule — by Arabs, by Turks and all the rest — was its gradual destruction. Even the two mosques on the Temple Mount (which are legitimately Holy Places) were, in the final analysis built as a function of the Arabs' recognition of the sanctity of the place to the Jews.

The Arab propagandists, however, in their fight against Zionism and the Jewish State, discovered soon enough that a major distortion of history was essential to their claim of ownership of Palestine and to their effort to oust the Jews from it. They recognized the importance of a historic connection, even a mystic connection with the country. As no such connection existed, they manufactured one. In a continuous, comprehensive, unconscionable and uncompromising campaign they laboured to implant it in the world's mind. They understood, and they believe, that if they can convince the peoples of the world, that Eretz Yisrael has belonged to the Arabs from the beginning of time and that its land is sacred to them, this conviction alone will make it plain to the world that the Arabs "simply cannot" agree to even the slightest concession of territory for the benefit of the Jews.

Simultaneously, with similar intensity and perseverance, the Arabs are conducting a propaganda war to disseminate the complementary idea that the Jewish people has no historic association with Eretz Yisrael or any historic right in it. At first glance it would seem that this fabrication is so absurd, so abysmal that the Arabs would be too stupid to use it. The connection of the Jewish people with the Land of Israel is built into the foundations of Western culture, it is entwined in the warp and the woof of the West's thinking and its experience for two thousand years.

But the Arabs persisted and persist with their effort in a thousand and one ways. They have learnt that it is possible to instill any lie, however nonsensical and ridiculous, if it is repeated tirelessly

and is presented forcefully, with assurance and with plausible emotion. In all their propaganda texts they take care to include the two aspects of their basic claim: that “Falastin” (they have no Arabic name for this Holy Land) belongs to them and that the Jewish people has no right to the country.

Before our very eyes they have built up a complete mythology. They do not bat an eyelid when they depict “Falastin” as the national possession not merely of the Arabs but of “the Palestinian people” for 1300 years (and sometimes they expand it to 2000 years — who can prevent them?). Respectable newspapers in the West, even journals with intellectual and scientific pretensions, repeatedly publish these fairy-tales. Their theme is that in this country there existed for hundreds of years some kind of flourishing Arab State — until the Zionists came and robbed it from its masters. Hence Zionism — an artificial creation of the 20th century — is by its nature fundamentally an act of continuing aggression; and consequently all the attempts of the Arabs to destroy the Zionist State are no more than acts of legitimate defence.

Apart from a handful of uninfluential Arabs, there does not exist in our generation a single Arab spokesman, even among those described as moderate, who will give expression to the notion that the Jews have any right to Eretz Yisrael. It was not always so. Not only Prince Feisal who after the first World War signed the agreement with Chaim Weizmann based on mutual recognition — by the Jews of Arab sovereignty in the Arab State due to arise and, by the Arabs, of Jewish sovereignty over Palestine — but also his father, Hussein, the Shariff of Mecca, the founder of the Hashemite dynasty, wrote in praise of the “original sons” of Palestine returning from exile to their homeland. Even those Arabs who today create the impression that they are prepared to accept the reality of a Jewish State (albeit grotesquely attenuated) do not give even the slightest hint that they are thereby according recognition to Jewish historic right even to the coastal strip. The falsehood in Arab propaganda is total.

This effort by the Arabs to erase the history of the Jewish people dovetails substantively with the important element in Western anti-Semitism which presents the Jewish people as a parasite feeding on the bodies of the nations, rootless wherever they find themselves. By merely adopting the Arab thesis the antisemites of our day provide themselves with the means of camouflaging their incitement against the Jews as being an expression of opposition only to Zionism and to Israel. Though in our day the antisemites’ description of the Jews as “Christ-killers” has been muted, it is being replaced gradually by the charge that they have robbed the “Palestinians” of their homeland.

Interwoven in this grim embroidery is a double sin committed by the Governments of Israel since its birth, and especially since the Six Day War. In the unique history of our renewed independence, in the face of the tireless offensive against its existence and against its right to exist, the governments of Israel did not realize that there was a need to instill and to strengthen in the hearts of people everywhere the consciousness of the exclusive national affinity of the Jewish people with Palestine. They were silent about the uniquely deep roots of our presence in this land; they allowed people to forget this link between a people and its land which has set its stamp upon our history unbroken for four thousand years; they ignored the continuity of that historic chain of association; they allowed ignorance and forgetfulness to obscure the miraculous fact that, for 1800 years after Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael was extinguished, no other people,

of all the inhabitants of various national origins who lived in the country at different times, ever tried, or claimed a right, to take possession of the land and to restore its independent life.

Worse still: Israeli Information services refrained from refuting and fighting back at the horrendous Arab lie. Instead, it exhibited a patchwork of apologetics and defensiveness. It failed to raise the alarm at the fact that the great Arab people was engaged in a tremendous effort to oust the Jewish people from its homeland.

Now we have to contend with the consequences of the gradual victory of the Arab lie, in the minds of many people, over the Jewish truth. It has become common in many quarters to preach at the Government of Israel, at the Jewish people, and at anybody stating the case for Israel's status among the nations, that they must not dare mention the historic right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel.

Not only enemies of Israel but even good friends, even good veteran Zionists — as a result of the Israeli governments' failure in public education, and confused by the pressures of Arab propaganda — urge that in the international debate on the “dispute” Israel should insist only on its security needs. According to these preachings Israel must voluntarily eliminate the factor of history in our presence in Palestine, erase our national story, deny the roots of our nationhood.

Frightening are the implications of this tendency towards a kind of spiritual suicide for the sake of the diplomatic convenience of the present generation.

What is more astonishing, however, is the breakdown of logic in the minds of the protagonists of this tendency, their failure to use their commonsense. Even if a good Israeli Jew becomes convinced that Israel will achieve peace by giving up portions of Eretz Yisrael, what, by any calculation, prevents him from telling the truth as it was told in effect by Chaim Weizmann in 1937 and 1947: “Our exclusive and continuous national relationship with this country is four thousand years old, our unimpeachable right to it was solemnly recognized by the nations of the world in our own generation — but for the sake of peace I am prepared to agree to its partition”.

What is the compulsion, even in the mind of a defeatist, to blot out history, to be silent about a right even as a “pawn” in negotiations?

There is no doubt a psychological explanation for such a moral breakdown among the members of this school of thought. The “self-denying” tendency, however, carries immediate implications far deeper than its impact on the current political situation. Jewish collaboration in blurring or erasing the affinity of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael, dovetails into the sum of Arab claims, into the arguments of Israel's other antagonists, even into the themes of the antisemites. If the vigorous Arab claim to historical-mystical lordship over the Land of Israel is pressed, and Jews refrain from any reference to historic affinity — strong logical assumptions are created in support of Arabs and antisemites alike. These assumptions are simply stated: the Jews themselves do not dare to claim historic rights in Palestine; why then must the Arabs give up their sacred lands in order to ensure the physical security of these rootless, nomadic, parasitic Jews?

Of course there is no such thought in the minds of our non-Jewish friends. They, out of sheer confusion, are merely drawing conclusions from a situation which we ourselves have helped to create. Nor is there any such thought in the minds of the good Jews who cry “Security only”.

They should however take note: whoever declares that our historic right to the Land of Israel must not be mentioned, that only the security of the Jewish community in Israel should be insisted on, and who believes that in this way peace will be brought closer and Israel’s security hastened — is grievously mistaken. He is no less mistaken if he believes that he is merely pruning the tree of Zionism. In fact he is undermining its roots.