

Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, by Sara Roy. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007. xxiii + 332 pages. Notes to p. 368. Index to p. 379. \$29.95 paper.

Reviewed by Bruce B. Lawrence¹

Harvard political economist Sara Roy is the leading researcher and most widely respected academic authority on Gaza today. Her monographs include *The Gaza Strip Survey* (1986), *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development* (1995, 2001), and the forthcoming *Between Extremism and Civism: Political Islam in Palestine* (2008). The present volume consists of previously published essays, arranged thematically, with a new preface, overall introduction, and two-chapter conclusion. There are four parts, each providing a fresh introduction that updates and contextualizes Roy's arguments.

A child of Holocaust survivors, Roy has a keen eye for injustice, discrimination, and degradation. She charts how Gaza epitomizes the fault lines of Israeli occupation, detailing the de-development—the reversal of what was intended to be development—that resulted from the 1967 war and also from the 1993 Oslo agreement. Oslo, she writes, left Gazans with “a pervasive sense of loss, of a past diminished and a future marred, of achievements undermined and destroyed, of a society teetering between submission and revolt, a moving backward in time and thought” (p. 87).

Two chapters from the fourteen principal chapters encapsulate Roy's major arguments. In chapter 11, written after the Oslo agreement and titled “Civil Society in the Gaza Strip: Obstacles to Social Reconstruction,” Roy reviews Marxist and liberal pluralist models of civil society. Siding with the latter, she attempts to find what would count as the good and what would lead most residents of Gaza to “live a normal, ordinary life” (p. 125). Alas, there is no unitary society in Gaza to which civil society models can apply. Instead, there exists a contest between two authoritarian agents, the Israeli state and the Palestinian Authority surrogate state (now replaced by Hamas).

If there is no consensus between Gazans and West Bankers, there is also none between indigenous and refugee Gazans. Political structures have scant precedent and little traction as forums for open debate or public decision making. For children especially, the only normal life is trauma, and this in a territory 1/15th the size of the West Bank with nine times its population density. “Tragically for Gaza,” observes Roy, “the possibility of civil unrest appears greater than the capacity of civil society to address it” (p. 159).

That dire prediction, made in 1995, has been confirmed—even accelerated—by the horrific cycle of destruction that followed Sharon's visit to the Haram-al-Sharif (to which Israelis refer as the Temple Mount) and the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000. It is Roy's contention that the cycle can be broken only through comprehensive political initiatives rather than piecemeal economic ones. It is not poverty alone that stokes depression, fuels rage, and leads to terrorist reprisals, she argues in chapter 16, “Ending the Palestinian Economy,” an essay first published in 2002. The crux of the problem for Palestinians remains the occupation, and so, concludes Roy, “in the end the only solution to the conflict lies in restoring what has been lost to both peoples—human dignity. And the only way to do that is to end the occupation and recreate the ordinary so that both Palestinians and Israelis can lead a normal life” (p. 332).

Those who have previously read Roy's articles will find the new ordering and framing of topics in the present volume enlightening. As for those who have not read her penetrating analysis or have read it only in patches, they will extract from *Failing Peace* a salutary reminder that Gaza can neither be ignored nor walled off from Israel. Instead, its problems become more intractable with each failed initiative to find an overarching political solution and not merely another economic bandage. Roy's affirmation of a common humanity—Jewish and Arab, Israeli and Palestinian—is as resilient as her scholarship on all facets of the Gaza Strip is thorough and searing. She dedicates the book to Edward Said and projects herself as the kind of intellectual who, in Said's words, “is perhaps a kind of counter-memory, with its own counter-discourse that will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep” (p. xxi).

No one will fall asleep reading this compelling book, and one can dare to hope that the appeal to conscience it evokes will not go unheard.

¹ **Bruce B. Lawrence**, professor of Islamic studies at Duke University, is the author most recently of *The Qur'an—A Biography* (2007) and, with Aisha Karim, editor of *On Violence—An Anthology* (2008).

One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Palestinian Impasse, by Ali Abunimah. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006. x + 193 pages. Notes to p. 218. Acknowledgements to p. 220. Index to p. 227. \$23.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Oren Ben-Dor²

Ali Abunimah, an activist and founder of the Electronic Intifada, is a Palestinian-American whose father, a former Jordanian ambassador to Belgium, is from the village of Battir (near Bethlehem), and whose mother's family lived in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Rumayma (today "Romema") prior to 1947. Here, in *One Country*, he writes with great sensitivity, guided by a genuine desire—as the title implies—to break the impasse of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The book opens with a historical outline of the various failures to partition Palestine, beginning in the 1930s. Abunimah draws upon this outline to argue persuasively that any form of partition ultimately either legitimizes the nonaddress of past injustices—denying Palestinian refugees and their descendants the freedom to return—or legitimizes the continuation of Arab inequality within the would-be "agreed upon" borders of the Jewish state. The only truly egalitarian, justly restorative, and peaceful alternative, he concludes, is to transcend the discourse of partition and separation, to demolish both concrete and "mental" walls, and to adopt a vision that would enable both people to realize their national aspirations in conditions of justice and equality. Such a solution can be achieved only in one state, the foundation of which would be truth, reconciliation, inclusion, generosity, and—last but not least—equal citizenship for all of its citizens. Only such a state, as opposed to any partition plan, would endure without transforming one group into a "demographic threat."

His outline of the general foundational principles for such a state is inspired by the example of Belgium, which has provided a state for two nations (French-speaking and Flemish), as well as by the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland. First and foremost, however, Abunimah draws analogies to and lessons from the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa. The similarities between the predicament faced by white South Africans and that of the Zionists, as well as the dehumanization of those who engaged in resistance to oppression, are effectively portrayed. Abunimah shows how in both cases victim mentality is efficiently used as a justification for entrenching support for continuity of domination, and with it, structured constitutional discrimination. But Abunimah's tone is not one of incrimination; rather, it is rooted in the belief that any collective denial of injustices committed and the root causes for such injustices, however deep, can be overcome in forgiveness. In building his outline, Abunimah shows us that there exists today a grain of support for the one-state vision even among Israelis, citing papers such as the Olga document (pp. 181–82), which came out of a 2004 gathering of Israeli Jewish intellectuals in Givat Olga to recognize the principle that the country belongs to all its citizens, including those who were expelled in 1948.

But *One Country* is not free of blemishes. The most visible is that Abunimah seems to group into one package the Jewish right of return (*hok hashvut*) and the right of return of the descendants of Palestinian refugees (pp. 118–19). *Hok hashvut*, which grants immigration rights in perpetuity for all Jewish people in the world, is inegalitarian with respect to actual and potential non-Jewish citizens. As such, it should not be put on par with the right of dispossessed people to return to their villages—a claim which is finite and not inherently discriminatory. I take the point that Abunimah is sensitive to Jewish longing for Eretz Israel, but in mentioning these two senses of "return" he could have proceeded with greater care.

In its overall clarity, boldness, and broadness of vision, however, this book truly shines. For Abunimah, thinking about one state must not be viewed negatively, as a "no-choice" solution or an "unhappy necessity," but rather as an opportunity to challenge conventional and needless belligerence. To this end, he beautifully evokes the historic cooperation that existed between Jews and Arabs in Palestine before the Israeli state came into being. Echoes of this affinity continue within Israel even under conditions of occupation, dispossession, and discrimination.

This book, a call directed to Zionists and to Palestinians alike, should be read not as a final detailed proposal for one state, but rather as a document which aims to spark an open and honest

² **Oren Ben-Dor** teaches legal and political philosophy at the School of Law, University of Southampton, U.K. His book *Thinking about Law: In Silence with Heidegger* (Oxford: Hart Publishing) was published in October 2007.

debate. There are many points of contention regarding practical implementation of this vision—such as rights of minority cultures, immigration issues, and redistribution of existing ownership rights—that *One Country* could not have possibly canvassed. Its importance stems from offering a broad, humane vision and an ethos that must be enshrined in order to bring about this vision. National self-determination, Abunimah maintains, can find civic expression outside of either Zionism or Palestinian nationalism. In its transcendence of exclusionary nationalism, this book is a real triumph.

The Selected Writings of Eqbal Ahmad, edited by Carollee Bengelsdorf, Margaret Cerullo, and Yogesh Chandrani. Foreword by Noam Chomsky. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. 637 pages. \$69.50 cloth; \$29.00 paper.

Reviewed by Stuart Schaar³

Eqbal Ahmad often said that he was a Palestinian. Despite his privileged position as a professor, this Pakistani—who lived most of his adult life as an exile in the United States—intuitively understood the dilemmas faced by Palestinians: that they suffered colonization at the very moment that the rest of the colonial world found liberation, making the pain of conquest and expulsion ever more repugnant. As a child in India, Ahmad had spent several months in Mohandas Gandhi's *ashram*, where he had come in daily contact with that great mass mobilizer. The lessons learned there stayed with him as he grew. From the 1970s on, the Middle East—and in particular the Palestinian/Israeli conflict—became the “abiding center of his attention” (p. 293), and Ahmad promoted nonviolence as a credo.

Ahmad's closest friend and fellow exile in New York, the Palestinian critic Edward W. Said, claimed him as one of the two most important influences on his intellectual development. In the early 1980s, the two men visited Yasir Arafat, to whom Ahmad recommended that the Palestinians change their approach toward Israel and adopt nonviolent tactics, including such mobilizations as a march on Israel to dramatize the Palestinian plight and to gain international attention and support. In 1982, Ahmad told Arafat that he did not think the Palestinians could win in any war with Israel; he believed the military camps in Lebanon, the bluster of rhetoric, and the preparations for war would come to naught, and he told Arafat that the Palestinians would go down in defeat if Israel attacked Lebanon at that moment. In the introduction to the section of *Selected Works* dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Nubar Hovsepian, a friend to both Ahmad and Said, speaks about Palestinians having finally initiated “a militant nonviolent movement” of the sort that Eqbal advocated (p. 297).

This section, appropriately subtitled “Colonization in the Era of Decolonization,” pulls no punches. Eqbal had the rare ability to honestly criticize the faults of the movements to which he was attached while still being acknowledged as a fervid supporter. He places blame for paralysis in negotiations not only with the United States, but also with Israel, Palestinians, and Arab leaders themselves. He tears apart Henry Kissinger's policies in the Middle East for supporting right-wing regimes and systematically opposing radical nationalism, and also has harsh words for “Arab bankruptcy,” especially as he watched most of the leaders of the oil-rich states kowtow to American imperial interests and facilitate U.S. domination of the region. Likewise, he rejected the Oslo peace process, which from the beginning he denounced as unworkable, and predicted that if applied, it would produce Bantustans similar to those that existed in South Africa under apartheid.

Ahmad died in 1999, but his writings still have resonance in 2007. He wrote on such timely subjects as nationalism, state formation, imperialism, revolution and revolutionary warfare, insurgency, terrorism, Islam, jihad, the partitioning of states, nuclear proliferation, and more. *Selected Writings* contains most of his important work and gives a good sense of his global reach and his emphasis on evaluating events in terms of what they meant for victims. The volume contains sections presenting Ahmad's still pertinent analysis of revolutionary warfare and counterinsurgency; third-world politics, including resistance to power; the cold war, its third-world victims, and the world after the fall of the Soviet Union; and finally, South Asia, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. Throughout, Ahmad is a champion of democracy and demonstrates his repugnance for dictators. His was a rare voice that gave the third-world underclass a place in the sun.

³ **Stuart Schaar** is professor emeritus at Brooklyn College, CUNY, and co-editor of *The Middle East and Islamic World Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2003).

Ahmad, a consummate teacher, used every occasion to educate his audiences, whether in his classes in Hampshire College in Massachusetts, as an invited lecturer throughout the United States and overseas, in scholarly writings, or in syndicated newspaper columns, which four million people read weekly. He rarely wrote for or addressed the powerful, but rather targeted his messages to ordinary citizens in order to educate and help fortify civil societies. He presented material in its complexity, without ever talking down to his audiences.

A vociferous anti-imperialist, Ahmad viewed the world in terms of a dying system that had begun at the end of the fifteenth century as Western Europeans moved into Asia, Africa, and the Americas. In his day he saw a new imperialism emerging, calling it the “Latin Americanization of the world,” as the United States replaced the old powers with an informal system of control—what we now call globalization. He never believed in destiny; he called on progressive people everywhere to help push the process of decolonization along wherever imperial remnants remained; and he exhorted them never to give up hope. The editors of this work have rightfully collected the best writings of Eqbal Ahmad in order to demonstrate his continued relevance in this turbulent world.