

The Gatekeepers: Reviewing, Reflecting and Reframing In the Light of Missing Data

by Al-Nakba Awareness Project

Reflecting on the six Shin Bet gatekeepers after watching the Israeli documentary film of that name, the title of Nicolai Gogol's mid-19th century Russian novel came to mind, "Dead Souls." In his novel, Gogol explores *poshlust*, the bizarre pretensions of entitlement and self-importance that smother and substitute for real humanity.

The intended subject of the film - the ambivalent musings of former chiefs of Israel's internal security service - was emotionally eclipsed by scenes of the intifadas with hundreds within thousands more impassioned Palestinians bearing their dead aloft in coffins, hurling rocks at Israeli tanks and soldiers, making resolutely clear their refusal to be obliterated, their refusal to be extinguished, their refusal to be driven from their land, and their refusal to be ignored - which has been the policy of most Israeli political leaders described by the chiefs who have been consequently left without "strategic" direction or a vision of purpose beyond preventing tomorrow's terrorism by perfecting their own.

The Arabic word "intifada" means "shaking off." But we think the Israeli intrusion into Palestine is much more profound. Israel is not confined to the surface of Palestinian society from which it could be "shaken off," but penetrates Palestine continuously through invasion and incursions, military occupation, house demolitions, uprooting of their olive groves, household break-ins by soldiers, mass arrests and incarcerations, tanks in their streets, checkpoints on their roads, sniper killings of their children, sonic booms from F-16 overflights awakening them nightly, public strip-searches, surveillance drones and menacing attack helicopters overhead, bombings and missile strikes, assassinations of community leaders, electronic surveillance, agent infiltration, and permission and protection of settler violence against them on their own land. Israel forces itself down the Palestinian throat, a toxic, deadly poisonous, indigestible presence in their community body. What we saw was a massive, convulsive collective vomiting.

Of whom? Of Jews? No. Only of Jews forcing themselves uninvited into their land, in uniforms carrying guns, hiding in tanks and armored bulldozers, fencing them in, forcing them out, with arrogance and pretensions of entitlement, as bullies, destroyers, killers, expellers and degraders of their people. In contrast, we know many Jews who have visited Palestine with attitudes of respect and humility who have been uniformly welcomed and treated with the warm hospitality for which Palestinians are legendary. Both attitudes reap what they sow.

But respect and humility have never been the attitudes or intentions of the Zionist movement. Zionism did not arrive in Palestine with the wish to become good neighbors integrating itself into the long and richly established Palestinian culture. And consequently, as the Shin Bet chiefs recognized at least unconsciously, and which few Israelis self-isolated from Palestinians understand, Zionism is a social and political toxin that must and will be vomited out.

But simultaneously, Jews with respect, humility and remorse, and offering restitution for their crimes, will be invited to stay and live among the native population they have tried so arrogantly to displace. This would be the one-state solution, which Zionist supremacists perceive as their greatest "existential threat." But other than relinquishing their Jewish majority and privilege, the threat is illusory. Some 50% of the Israeli population are Mizrahim transplanted from Arab countries (who were not Holocaust victims) whose native cultures, some have said, are more closely compatible with Palestinians than with the 30% Ashkenazim from Europe and North America who founded the Zionist movement. The integration of this 70% into a common,

democratic, egalitarian state would not be difficult, since these populations lived for many centuries together in relative harmony. This is the solution toward which *The Gatekeepers* potentially, however inadvertently, points.

But what was the intended message of the film-makers? Having been approved for international distribution by Israel which closely regulates such releases for acceptable messaging, their intention was assuredly something quite different.

First, a little historical and legal context is needed.

IDF General Matti Peled recommended the 1967 attacks on Egypt, Jordan and Syria since these states were unprepared for war and could be easily defeated. Nasser had provided them a convenient *casus belli*. Following Israel's quick victory, Peled advised establishing a state for the Palestinians, with whom they could now deal directly. Otherwise, he warned, Israel would become a brutal colonial occupier, degrading any hope of real democracy. However, after briefly flirting with this idea and discarding it - as one chief recounted - the word "Palestinian" became replaced with the word "terrorist" to describe the inevitable resistance that occupation produces. The Shin Bet now acquired a job description. The words "terrorist" or "terrorism" were used 48 times in the film, with one token admission that Shin Bet could also be so labeled.

International law was occasionally mentioned suggesting that Shin Bet adheres thereto, but specifics of these laws were conveniently omitted. Since aggressive war is prohibited by the UN Charter and Israel was a UN member state, the 6-day war brought Israel under increased scrutiny of international law. Israel had not been a UN member in 1948 when Palestine was ethnically cleansed by Zionist terrorism - The *Nakba* or "catastrophe" (see "Zionist terrorism" at www.al-nakba-history.com) - and UN Resolution 194 established the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and homeland under Articles 13 and 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Nevertheless, Israel pledged as a condition of its 1949 admission to the UN to allow the refugees to return and to internationalize Jerusalem under UN administration as specified in the UN partition plan (UNGA 181) of 1947.

Thus, Israel had been non-compliant with international law and their own agreement since 1949, and their 1967 occupation exacerbated this further. It is impermissible to acquire land by force and UN Resolution 242 directed Israel to withdraw, another directive they have steadfastly disregarded. Their occupation additionally brought them under the 4th Geneva Convention to which they are obligated as a UN member state, which among other duties of an occupying power, prohibits transfer of an occupier's population onto occupied land, prohibits collective punishment, arbitrary imprisonment and torture, and requires legal due process for anyone under occupation who is arrested. The legitimacy of IDF and Shin Bet actions was further challenged in 1974 by UNGA Resolution 3246 that "*Reaffirms* the legitimacy of the peoples' struggle for liberation from colonial and foreign domination and alien subjugation by all available means, including armed struggle...notably the peoples of Africa and the Palestinian people."

(The other Israeli Best Documentary Film nominee this year, *5 Broken Cameras*, similarly sidesteps international law, focusing its story simply on the contested route of its Separation Wall through Bi'llin, not the illegality of the wall itself as ruled by the International Court of Justice or the illegality of the entire occupation, a legal opinion universally held outside Israel that the Palestinian protagonist and his Israeli scriptwriter discretely fail to ever mention.)

The Gatekeepers central theme is a familiar one known as *Yorim U'vochim* ("Shoot and Cry") seen also in the 2008 animated Israeli film, *Waltz With Bashir*, which focused entirely on the PTSD suffering of a former IDF soldier over the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre of helpless Palestinian refugees in Lebanon following negotiated withdrawal of PLO forces that had

protected them, with the horror itself only shown in very brief flashes of recall with no focus on the victims, the historical context, or the culpability of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon who was found “personally responsible” by an investigative commission but without criminal prosecution.

The gatekeepers similarly conveyed moral misgivings and ostensibly dutiful efforts to confine their mayhem to surgically targeted individual assassinations with care to avoid collateral casualties. Telescopic camera targeting of individual “terrorists” was shown with perhaps two or three inadvertent deaths at most, visually juxtaposed against scenes of the wreckage and bloody victims of a suicide bus bombing, implying that Palestinians have no such scruples and that Shin Bet violence is both justified and less morally reprehensible than their opponents. Palestinians were kept anonymous using public proxemics, were invariably identified as “terrorists,” and were mostly seen swarming in angry mobs. Thus was audience apprehension and outrage evoked and empathy discouraged toward Palestinians.

However, had the audience recalled Israel’s horrific 2008-09 assault on Gaza launched with a missile attack at exactly the time children were on the streets between home and school, which indiscriminately killed over 1,400 people including over 300 children in three weeks, or had they known of Israel’s deliberate murders of Palestinian children - 1,518 since the beginning of the 2nd intifada compared with 129 deaths of Israeli children (see www.rememberthesechildren.org) - the direction of outrage and empathy might have been reversed.

Language and framing always bear close watching. Occupying soldiers were “murdered” not “killed” just as IDF soldier Gilad Shalit was “kidnapped” not “captured,” as if these were civil infractions rather than military operations, while Israeli atrocities were justified by defining the occupation as a “war.” One chief, for example, refers to their “conquest” of Nablus, a West Bank hotbed of resistance including the Balata refugee camp that Israel brutally attacked in 2002 with artillery shelling, air strikes, missiles and heavy armor that killed some 600 people and obliterated entire sections of the city, including firing upon hospitals and ambulances while holding the residents captive under a 24-hour curfew for 10 days. Amnesty International described the aftermath as “wanton destruction without military necessity.” In the summer of 2002 Israel allowed only 50 hours without curfew in Nablus over a 2-month period, a flagrant collective punishment in violation of international law. Quite a heroic “conquest” over largely helpless refugees already under military occupation.

There are currently 19 refugee camps in the West Bank housing some 200,000 Palestinians. The entire West Bank was locked down, economically suffocated and collectively punished during the summer of 2002. Near-daily incursions, raids, detentions, home intrusions, home demolitions, degrading harassment, and prolonged arbitrary curfews continued in Nablus for many years thereafter.

It was impressive but disturbing to see a room with row upon row of cabinets holding thousands of files on individual Palestinians detailing their activities, associations and relationships, recalling the IBM files on Jews maintained by the Nazis. This sociometric practice began well before the establishment of Israel in preparation for Plan Dalet during 1947-48, with infiltrators reporting relationship patterns in targeted villages and identifying leaders to be eliminated when the time arrived to launch their ethnic cleansing operations.

The chiefs acknowledge arrests but how many, how often and for how long Palestinians are imprisoned for political resistance were facts left unclear. Addameer, the Palestinian prisoner support and human rights association, provides clarity. Israel has maintained a political prisoner population near 5,000 in recent years, including hundreds of children kept separated from their families. “Administrative detainees” can be held indefinitely without charges or trial.

Some 40% of all Palestinian men have been imprisoned at some time by Israel. All are routinely tortured. The chiefs acknowledge this but report restraints and limits imposed by law. "We cannot just do anything. There is a legal system above us." Addameer paints a rather different picture (see www.addameer.org), the truth of which was suggested by the faintly satisfied smiles of some of the chiefs when describing their sadistic achievements such as the cell phone assassination of Yahya Ayyash whose "weakness" was longing for his wife and child.

In this light the Palestinian psychiatrist's statement that their victory was "to see you suffer" is understandable. It also reflects the reported invisibility of Palestinians to the Israeli leadership. When once asked why Hamas continues shooting their largely impotent homemade, fertilizer-powered rockets, a Hamas leader responded, "just to remind them that we're here."

It is ironic that Palestinian attacks are decried as "terrorism" while the chiefs fail to mention in their comments about Israeli prime ministers Menachim Begin & Yitzhak Shamir that these men led the violent Irgun and Lehi underground militias in a relentless reign of terror for several years that bombed Jerusalem's King David Hotel housing the British Mandatory Authority in 1946, assassinated UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte and ethnically cleansed some 3/4 million helpless, virtually unarmed Palestinians while committing 33 massacres to stampede everyone in their path into flight in 1948. Little wonder that they don't care. They never did.

So what was the film's intended takeaway? What with violent ideological settlers, fanatic Orthodox Jews, and Palestinians in violent and non-violent but troublesome defiance of the occupation, all of whom must be policed to prevent any and all potential disasters, the situation is impossible, chaotic, unsustainable, and both threatening and degrading to Israeli society - even resembling, as one chief admitted, WWII Nazi occupations of captured lands.

Audiences exiting the theater are left thinking, "This madness has to end, this mess has to be solved, and fast." And what "solution" is relentlessly discussed by the US, the UN, and the "peace process" advocates? The so-called "two-state solution." The Palestinians simply must have their own state. Just get these people separated and be done with it.

But not so fast. What "Palestinian state" has actually been discussed and tentatively agreed to by Israel? After 1967, Palestinians outside Israel had only 22% of their original land. Area C, both secured and administered by Israel since Oslo, is 60% of the West Bank into which a half million Jewish settlers have been planted, with 95% of West Bank Palestinians in the remaining 40%. Including tiny Gaza, Palestinians are now confined to 10% of their original land with a population, including refugees who would choose to exercise their right to return, substantially larger than the Jewish population in the other 90%. As one Israeli official said, Palestinians can have whatever Israel decides to leave them and "they can call it a state or call it fried chicken."

Moreover, this mini-state would be surrounded by Israel, without a military, control of their own airspace, borders or water supplies, subjected to Israeli surveillance, intrusions, troop presence and effective control (see "Geneva Initiative" at www.al-nakba-history.com), a "weaponless sheep pen Palestinian Bantustan" in the words of Jewish historian Lenni Brenner.

So what alternative does this leave? The only model that would satisfy international law and UN-recognized Palestinian rights would be a unified democratic state with constitutionally protected equality and right of return for all Palestinian refugees to their own homes (rebuilt by Israel if necessary) and communities. Israel must give up the Zionist dream of a "Jewish" state with Jewish majority, supremacy and privilege, and accept instead a normal country with freedom, justice and equality for all its citizens - still a Jewish homeland but also a homeland for those whose homeland it was long before Zionism violently intruded upon their lives, land and culture (www.jfpror.wordpress.com).