



Barrier to Peace

STORY BY CHARMAINE SEITZ · PHOTOS BY BLAIR SEITZ

DRIVING INTO THE WEST BANK from Israel there are no exits to Palestinian villages. Every turnoff is blocked by towering rubble, deposited by Israeli military bulldozers after the outbreak of violence in September 2000. The intent was both security-minded and political: to contain and to force a compromise. Its effect was numbing: Palestinians were physically prohibited from witnessing the cumulative portrait of their shattered landscape.

Months before the second Intifada, then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak asked planners to draw a map for “unilateral separation” in case there was a breakdown in Palestinian-Israeli talks. But even then the plan’s architects understood that implementation would escalate conflict.

Former Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh said building a physical barrier around Palestinian population centers—at that point, annexing 30 percent of the West Bank in the process—would not end attacks on

Israelis but enflame conflict. “All the experts on international law told us that this would bring about a terrible response,” Sneh said.

Now, four years later, Israel’s barrier is one-third complete, and Palestinians have taken their opposition to the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

In the hands of Ariel Sharon’s current right-wing government, Barak’s plan for unilateral separation is realized in a series of barbed wire fences, ditches, patrol roads, electronic sensors, guard towers and con-



Palestinians make their statements on the wall.



Checkpoint between Ramallah and Jerusalem.



Barbed wire stretches along the barrier.

crete walls that will annex an estimated 45 percent of the West Bank and put 80 percent of West Bank Israeli settlers in an expanded Israel. Palestinians are asking the court to provide an advisory opinion to the United Nations that will establish the barrier's illegality based on the 4th Geneva Convention, which obligates an occupying army to protect its charges and maintain the status quo. Israel will not present a defense, dismissing the court's jurisdiction as a purely "political matter." Israel's stance

is backed by the United States and the European Union, which say that Palestinians and Israelis must negotiate their dispute.

Those few Israeli voices of opposition to the barrier usually object to Prime Minister Sharon's expansive and costly routing of it. But most Israelis have united behind the contention that the barrier would have prevented numerous Palestinian suicide bombers from entering Israel.

In Jayyus, one northern Palestinian village of 550 families, the barrier has

turned wealthy farmers into beggars. The village has lost 2,250 acres, and access roads into farms were destroyed. Farmers now must arrange for permission to cross the barrier, as if they were traveling into Israel.

Jayyus engineer Abdel Latif Khaled watches as his community transforms. "What are they doing now? Competing for food baskets," he laments, noting that these farmers now rely on the U.N. World Food Program for their provisions. ■



BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

Passion: Regular or Decaf?

Those who virulently criticized Mel Gibson's *The Passion* even before its release seem unassailable: Are they not justified to worry that the film, made by a fanatic Catholic known for occasional anti-Semitic outbursts, may ignite anti-Semitic sentiments?

More generally, is *The Passion* not a manifesto of our own (Western, Christian) fundamentalists? Is it then not the duty of every Western secularist to reject it, to make it clear that we are not covert racists attacking only the fundamentalism of other (Muslim) cultures?

The Pope's ambiguous reaction to the film is well known: Upon seeing it, deeply moved, he muttered "It is as it was"—a statement quickly withdrawn by the official Vatican speakers. The Pope's spontaneous reaction was thus replaced by an "official" neutrality, corrected so as not to hurt anyone. This shift, with its politically correct fear that anyone's specific religious sensibility may be hurt, exemplifies what is wrong with liberal tolerance: Even if the Bible says that the Jewish mob demanded the death of Christ, one should not stage this scene directly but play it down and contextualize it to make it clear that Jews are collectively not to be blamed for the Crucifixion. The problem of such a stance is that it merely represses aggressive religious passion, which remains smoldering beneath the surface and, finding no release, gets stronger and stronger.

This prohibition against embracing a belief with full passion may explain why, today, religion is only permitted as a particular "culture," or lifestyle phenomenon, not as a substantial way of life. We no longer "really believe," we just follow (some of) the religious rituals and mores out of respect for the "lifestyle" of the community to which we belong. Indeed, what is a "cultural lifestyle" if not that every December in every house there is a Christmas tree—although none of us believes in Santa Claus? Perhaps, then, "culture" is the name for all those things we practice without really believing in them, without "taking them seriously." Isn't this why we dismiss fundamentalist believers as "barbarians," as a threat to culture—they dare to take seriously *their beliefs*? Today, ultimately, we perceive as a threat to culture those who immediately live their culture, those who lack a distance toward it.

Jacques Lacan's definition of love is "giving something one doesn't have." What one often forgets is to add the other half: "... to someone who *doesn't want it*." This is confirmed by our most elementary experience