

Assignment Two: The Arab Israeli Conflict

Question One:

What are the main differences between the beliefs of the Palestinians and the Israelis?

(5 marks)

The complexity of the problem that exists between the Palestinians and Israelis is far greater than the simple fact that one group is Muslim, the other Jewish. Claims to the holy land date back thousands of years on both parts and each opposing group has strong religious, historical and cultural links to the area.

Palestine was the Jewish homeland from as early as 1500 years before the birth of Christ. In the tenth century BC, the Jewish people reached the height of their power under the rule of the proud kings David and Solomon, however, once the reign of their kings ended, they became divided and as other more powerful forces moved into Palestine, the Jews became under the control of their Roman conquerors. In the 193 years of Roman reign in Palestine, the Jewish people were exiled to Europe as the two rebellions carried out in protest against Roman rule were suffocated.

It has been said that the Jews maintained the belief that Palestine was their home despite this and centuries later, it was to become the obvious location for Theodor Herzl's Zionist dream of "a people without land with a land without people". Adding to the Zionist belief that Palestine is rightfully theirs, is a passage in the bible that states God chose the Jews as his special people and gave to them the land of Palestine in which to forever reside.

However, many orthodox Jews believe that Theodor Herzl and his comrades were people with very weak religious belief; they saw "jewishness" as a race rather than a religious community. They see Zionism as a revolt against Judaism, an enemy of the Jewish faith that called not to religion, but to nationalism, colonialism and even racism. The existence of Israel and what they see to be as Israeli terrorism is strongly opposed by them. They believe the passages of the bible and Torah that "support" Zionism have been interpreted incorrectly and distorted to fulfil Zionist needs.

The emergence of a new religion – Islam, heralded a new era in the history of Palestine. In the 7th century AD Palestine was conquered by the Muslims. Muslims, (and a minority of) Jews and Christians lived there in peace till in the late 18th century when the mass immigration of the Jewish people began. The Muslims claim that Palestine has been there home since the 7th century and so the Jews have no concrete claim to it, they fought with the armies of the Romans and the Turks to have it as there own and so it was rightfully theirs.

Jerusalem is holy city to both the Muslims and the Jews. The Jewish people call it the “heart and soul” of Israel, and believe it to be home to Judaism’s holiest shrine: the Temple of Solomon. It was built in the 10th century BC to replace the Tabernacle of Moses and was largely used by the Jewish people to worship and offer sacrifices known as the korbanot. The temple was built on Jerusalem’s Temple Mount, in 70 AD, the Roman invaders destroyed it.

The Dome of the Rock (Haram al Sheik in Arabic), was built between 687 and 691 by the 9th Caliph of the Umayyad Empire. Muslims believe that the rock in the domes centre is where Muhammad ascended through the heavens to God; where he spoke with and was consulted by Moses and where the obligatory prayers were prescribed. For this reason it is a very holy and special site to the Muslim people. Jews believe the same rock to be where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac and where the inner most chamber of the Jewish Temple was situated. For these reasons, Jerusalem is very important to both the Jews and the Muslims. Under the UN partition plan, the city of Jerusalem was to be an international zone. Today, though it is not internationally recognized as such, Jerusalem is the Israeli capital.

In order for Palestine to become the Jewish homeland, the problem of the 1.5 million Arab’s that presently lived in Palestine had to be addressed. In 1967 Israeli General Dayan expressed how the Jewish people viewed the situation of the Palestinian refugees “We want to have a Jewish state. We can absorb the Arabs, but then it won’t be the same country.” Whilst promoting the ideal of a Jewish haven, a land of peace, prosperity and contentment, the Israeli government had been executing laws bordering on neo-fascism. The Israeli “Law of Return” forbid the Palestinian people from entering into Palestine, whilst welcoming Jewish people from all corners of the world to come and live in an atmosphere of peace and security. It can be said that Israel’s attitude towards non-Jewish people- or more specifically the Arabian Palestinians, is extremely right wing- neo-Nazi even. Although they didn’t go as far as death camps and gas chambers, their treatment of the Palestinian people did result in death, disease, and desperation. The elimination of the Palestinian people from their own homes was and still is an example of ethnic cleansing. The Jews of Israel became the very right- wing oppressor that they so desperately fled.

Since the formation of the Zionist state, millions of Palestinian people have been forced by the dangers of war and the threat of the Israeli army to flee their homes. To help ease the suffering of the Palestinian refugees, The United Nations set up the UN Relief Works Agency that would supply food, clothing, shelter and education.

The Palestinian people were forced to live in congested tents without adequate sanitation, food or clothing. Jonathan Dimpleby, a British observer said in “The Palestinians”: “When it rained, the narrow paths along each row were churned into mud which oozed into the tents. They lived in sodden clothes and slept in wet blankets.”

Below, is a view of the barracks erected by the UN in Jordan. They show the extent of the poverty suffered by the Palestinian people.



According to a report carried out by the UNRWA in 2003, today the number of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is 4136 449. Most of the refugees are forced to remain in these camps as the Arab countries do not welcome them.

As well as opposing each other, the Palestinians and the Israelis have separate factions within their own parties that contest one another.

In 1993, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin shook hands to the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Agreement that called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from areas in the West Bank and the election of a Palestinian authority. Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist who disagreed with any agreement that involved losing part of Israel. Whilst hundreds of Israeli's and Palestinians celebrated this opportunity for peace, it is quite clear that others saw it as a betrayal of the Zionist Israel that was promised to them.

There are also differences within the Palestinian people. Whilst some groups refuse to recognise Israel's right to exist and call incessantly for its destruction, others realise that Israel and the Jewish people have become part of Palestine whether they like it or not and if peace is to ensue, compromises must be made. An example of this is the PLO, who under Arafat became known as an anti-terrorist group that wanted to work with Israel to achieve peace. Hamas on the other hand, an extremist group who have carried out over fifty attacks on the Israeli nation in the last five years see Fatah or the PLO as traitors of the Palestinian cause.

The problem is indeed far more complicated than one group being Muslim the other Jewish. The differences between the Palestinians and the Israelis are complicated and deeply rooted. If peace is to achieved, both sides must come to a compromise and understand that they're not so different from each other.

Question 2