

January 2014

Obituaries, Subjectivities, and Perceptions of Ariel Sharon

Sean Switzer
CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making>



Part of the [Islamic World and Near East History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Switzer, Sean (2014) "Obituaries, Subjectivities, and Perceptions of Ariel Sharon," *History in the Making*: Vol. 7 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol7/iss1/14>

This In Memoriam is brought to you for free and open access by the History at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in History in the Making by an authorized editor of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

In Memoriam

Obituaries, Subjectivities, and Perceptions of Ariel Sharon

By Sean Switzer

Introduction

The day after his brother's death in April, 1888, Alfred Nobel opened a Parisian newspaper only to discover his own obituary. The erroneous obituary, which confused Alfred for his late brother, Ludvig, disheartened him as he realized the gloomy state of his legacy. The article's headline read, "*Le Marchand de la Mort est Mort!*" ("The Merchant of Death is Dead!"). Nobel was dumbfounded. His invention of dynamite had backfired on him. He had never intended for dynamite to kill human beings; yet, brutal assertions such as, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people, faster than ever before, died yesterday," highlighted this obituary. Those words condemned Nobel by proclaiming him to be the liaison between dynamite and its victims. The blood spilled by the victims of dynamite was on his hands.¹

Nobel was grateful for this mix-up because he was then inspired to create a new, positive legacy for himself. Though the world currently deemed him as an avaricious scientist, Nobel yearned to give the world a chance to look back at his life with positive memories. Thus in, 1895, Nobel uniquely and unconventionally drafted his own obituary through his Last Will and Testament. He left a majority of his wealth to create a prize bearing his name. The Nobel Prize reshaped Nobel's fame. No longer named "the Merchant of Death," Nobel is now considered to be the father of a prize that commemorates outstanding contributions to science and peace.²

The above narrative illustrates the power of an obituary. Unlike a biography or memoir, it packs an immediate punch aimed at direct accessibility to a broader audience. It can shatter or celebrate the memory of an individual's life. Its force lies in the fact that it is an epilogue, a last

¹ Ken Makovsky, "Nobel: How He Built His Reputation," *Forbes*, November 7, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenmakovsky/2011/11/07/nobel-how-he-built-his-reputation>. (Accessed April 10, 2014).

² Ibid.

summary of a person's life remembered. When the remembered person is a historical figure, obituaries written from opposing viewpoints can serve as valuable tools in uncovering greater historical insight and understanding.

When presented with two conflicting obituaries, the reader views historical events and people from different angles, which allows one to see the validity of both perspectives. This exposure, therefore, discourages the skewing of the reader's perception of history and encourages the development of a critical eye in analyzing historical leaders and events. Different perspectives challenge readers to question their own biases, and by doing so, gain a fuller grasp of various concepts that are instrumental in solving on-going conflicts.

Though the above statement is true, it makes history too simplistic. It trivializes the fact that humans are amazingly complex and consequently, so is history. This is where the obituary holds its actual power. The writer can reshape history because an obituary is physically short, limiting the writer to choose what content to include in their summation. Negation of negative complexities surrounding a person's life is an easy way for the writer to expound on a deceased person's positives throughout their life. This is commonly done by way of omitting abysmal details from the narrative, or scapegoating the negative, which in turn, sanctifies the person of topic. In quite the other way, the writer can demonize their subject by emphasizing the negative, or diving deep into the closet of a person's past and pulling out every bone from every skeleton in existence. In addition, using certain terminology and phrases can also shape the reader's perspective on the topics presented in an obituary; the well rounded complexity of an individual's history is rarely, if ever, presented in obituaries. In either case, both positive and negative narratives are ostensibly true and appear, to the reader, to be objective in nature. Quite frankly, this is not reality, and unfortunately, rarely would one read a multitude of obituaries in order to see the hidden biases and subjectivity.

In the recent passing of Ariel Sharon, a slew of obituaries flooded the newsstands as well as the internet. Each obituary was not all that unique, as many covered the same events throughout his life. The main difference that actually stood out was the writer's subjectivity in terminology and omission or insertion of a few carefully chosen key events. Authors often portrayed Sharon's life from a single side of the conflict, negative or positive, without any gray zone. Some painted a bleak picture of Sharon where he was a villain and war criminal.³ Others

³ "The World Reacts to Ariel Sharon's Death," *Aljazeera*, January 12, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/world-reacts-ariel-sharon-death-2014111133236765101.html>. (Accessed April 10, 2014).

made him out to be a war hero and saint.⁴ Few obituaries, however, made some attempt on taking a purely neutral stance where Sharon was both a war hero and a murderer, depending on the event discussed.⁵ In writing on such a controversial figure, the authors of Sharon's obituaries look as though they are neutral, but in reality, either read up on Sharon prior to writing the obituary and formulated their own opinion, or were previously educated on the Arab-Israeli conflict and grasped the opportunity to create a last standing memory of his life through their own preconceived notions of Sharon. These obituaries were historically correct and seemed to be neutral, but the subtle phrasing that creates a positive or negative memory of Sharon is evident.

In the following two obituaries, the picture of Ariel Sharon's life is framed quite differently. Both obituaries are doggedly subjective and use a certain language that is commonly used in examination of Sharon among scholars of the Arab Israeli conflict. In one obituary, he is perceived as a criminal and war-monger; in the other one, he is viewed as a savior and war hero. After reading both obituaries, a cognitive dissonance sets in and one is forced to answer the question: which one holds the greater truth? At this point, the validity is seen in both perceptions; an unbiased analysis can then take place with a clearer understanding of history.

Israel Mourns the Passing of Beloved War Hero and Political Leader: Ariel Sharon, 1928-2014

Ariel Sharon, the former Prime Minister of Israel, died Saturday, January 11, 2014, at the age of 85. Sharon was in a coma for eight years following a severe stroke. Present-day Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, expressed his "deep sorrow" following Sharon's death.⁶ United States President Barack Obama sent his "deepest condolences," while the United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron commemorated Sharon for his stalwart leadership and dedicated pursuit for peace.⁷

Sharon fought for Israel's right to exist as an independent Jewish state from the front lines as a soldier in 1948, until his incapacitating stroke while Prime Minister. Though met with criticism, Sharon always

⁴ Tovah Lazaroff, "Obituary: Ariel Sharon-A Bulldozer in War and Peace," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 11, 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Ariel-Sharon-A-Bulldozer-in-War-and-Peace-337663>. (Accessed April 10, 2014).

⁵ Jonathan Lis, "Ariel Sharon, Former Israeli Prime Minister, dies at 85," *Haaretz*, January 11, 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.546747>. (Accessed April 10, 2014).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

had a complete intolerance for acts of terrorism. Sharon's disgust for terrorists often led to topics of controversy. He was a man of decisive action, with an incredible stalwart passion for Israel's security. Sharon's masculine charisma, matched with his assertive confidence, led many Israelis to admiringly dub him the "bulldozer."⁸ Additionally, he is remembered for his quick judgment while in the midst of chaos during battle. With a goal in mind, Sharon would occasionally refuse direct orders, trivializing his disregard for authority with an astonishing success in combat. It is indisputable that Ariel Sharon greatly influenced Israel, molding the country into the political and geographic landscape that the world observes today.

Ariel (Arik) Sheinerman, who later replaced his surname with Sharon, was born March 1, 1928, to Jewish-Russian emigrants, Deborah and Samuel, who were part of the Third Aliyah (wave of immigration to Eretz Israel), in the town of Kfar Malal, Palestine.⁹ As a young man, Sharon joined a Jewish militia group known as the Haganah, sparking his career in the military. Despite his brute physical appearance and warrior like attitude, Sharon spent time educating himself in the arts of history and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University located in Jerusalem. He soon returned from leave and continued to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

A plethora of raids plagued Israel during the 1950s. Attacks by one group, either Israeli or Palestinian, were quickly answered by the other. The young state of Israel yearned for retaliation in order to maintain its legitimacy as a country in the region. The answer was the creation of a retaliatory force. Ariel Sharon had a huge hand in establishing this force; he gained command of the small Israeli Special Forces group known as Unit 101. Their goal was to respond to acts of terrorism through strategic and covert operations.

On the night of October 12-13, 1953, a terrorist group crossed the Jordanian-Israeli border and infiltrated a small Jewish settlement in the West Bank.¹⁰ There, the assailants lobbed grenades into a Jewish home, murdering an innocent sleeping mother and two of her children, while injuring a third.¹¹

Sharon bolstered his men and orchestrated a retaliatory raid on the Jordanian village of Qibya where the suspected terrorists harbored

⁸ Lazaroff.

⁹ "Ariel Sharon dies at 85, Eight Years after Stroke that Felled him," *Ynet News*, January 11, 2014, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4472203,00.html>. (Accessed April 10, 2014).

¹⁰ Benny Morris, "The Israeli Press and the Qibya Operation, 1953," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

themselves.¹² Though Unit 101 inflicted substantial collateral damage and innocent lives were lost in the raid, they demonstrated that violent acts of terror against Israeli civilians would not be tolerated, and that any terrorist plot would be met with military intervention by the IDF.

Sharon was promoted to major-general in 1966, at the age of 38, due to his strong leadership skills and relentless dedication to the state of Israel; he served in many conflicts with the Palestinians and neighboring Arab nations.¹³ Though Sharon frequently neglected direct orders from his commanding officers, he only did so because he lacked faith in the IDF leadership. He felt that many military promotions were conducted on the basis of political motives rather than on empirical military merit.¹⁴ For this reason, Sharon took onus for the men he commanded. With occasional negation of orders, he made firm decisions to ensure Israeli victory.

When the Six Day War broke out in June, 1967, Sharon proved his intuition and talents as a leader through brilliant combat strategies. Forced to take a defensive stance on the Southern Front, Sharon seized an opportunity to crush the opposing Egyptian enemy forces at Um-Katef and Abu-Ageila.¹⁵ He rounded up his men and formulated a complex maneuver that required the use of tanks, infantry, paratroopers, helicopters, and planes.¹⁶ He crushed his foes with flawless precision in the offensive attack, which greatly contributed to the swift success of the war. The victory was not only big for Israel, but also for Sharon; as it earned him popularity and spurred him on to gain political momentum. Sharon's success also allowed him to maintain a consistent level of command in the IDF until well after the Yom Kippur War.

In the 1973 War, also known as the Yom Kippur War, Sharon again proved his strength as a combat tactician. On October 17th, Egyptians launched an attack on the Israeli Army near Alligator's Lake and Great Bitter Lake.¹⁷ The Israeli's took surprisingly heavy losses in the heat of combat. While other IDF generals pulled back from the frontlines, Sharon stood firm, vehemently opposing the order to

¹² Charles D. Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 8th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 227.

¹³ "Prime Minister and Defense Minister, General Ariel (Arik) Sharon (Scheinermann) (02.26.1928-01.12.2014) Commander, Statesman and Leader," IDF Archive, <http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/Exhibitions.asp>. (Accessed April 10, 2014).

¹⁴ Eric Rouleau, "The War of the Generals," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 3 (1974): 175.

¹⁵ Lis.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Riad Ashkar, "The Syrian and Egyptian Campaigns," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 2 (1974): 27.

withdraw his troops from their positions.¹⁸ His decision to hold onto the position, despite what seemed like eminent defeat, enabled a successful crossing of the Suez Canal. Sharon's valor earned him a new nickname given by his men, "'Malech Israel' (King of Israel)."¹⁹ Sharon unquestionably emerged from the Yom Kippur War as a hero. He then turned to politics, and eventually became Israeli Defense Minister in 1981.²⁰

During the Lebanese Civil War, Sharon, as Israeli Defense Minister, aided the Phalangists (a group that largely consisted of Maronite Christians), in rooting out suspected terrorists in retaliation for the assassination of their leader, Bashir Gemayel.²¹ The targets were the Palestinian refugee camps, known as Sabra and Shatilla. Sharon did not permit Israeli soldiers to enter Sabra and Shatila; instead, he required them to support the Phalangists from outside the villages. On September 16, 1982, the IDF lit up the sky over West Beirut with flares while the Phalangists spearheaded an assault into the Sabra and Shatila camps in an attempt to cleanse the area of any suspected Palestinian terrorists.²² The Phalangists were unforeseeably ruthless in combat and killed many innocent people.²³ Sharon took the brunt of the blame for what happened in Sabra and Shatila, and after taking responsibility, eventually resigned from his position as Defense Minister following the massive condemnation by domestically, as well as internationally; especially with the Kahan Commission.²⁴ This unfortunate event, however, did not hinder Sharon from still involving himself in politics. He continued to serve his country and climb the political ladder until he was elected Israeli Prime Minister in 2001.

In September 2000, Sharon announced that he intended to exercise his legal right as an Israeli citizen to visit the holiest site in Judaism, The Temple Mount. The Palestinian's used his visit as an excuse for violence. Sharon's Jewish heritage was deeply rooted at the site where the last Jewish temple once stood during the Herodian era. With the progressive breakdown of the Oslo Accords (which were set up to eliminate the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis), Palestinians took umbrage in Sharon's visit. They picked up rocks and began hurling them at Sharon and his fellow spectators in defiance of his valid visitation of the Temple Mount.²⁵ On that day, 362 Israelis were injured

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rouleau, 176.

²⁰ "Prime Minister and Defense Minister, General Ariel (Arik) Sharon (Scheinermann) (02.26.1928-01.12.2014) Commander, Statesman and Leader."

²¹ Lis.

²² Smith, 373.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lis.

²⁵ Smith, 469.

along with many Palestinians.²⁶ Sharon concluded his visit by stating that he visited the Temple Mount “with a message of peace. I do believe we can live together...I was more affected by the hatred than anything else.”²⁷ Foreign Minister at the time, Shlomo Ben-Ami, insisted that if Sharon had known that there was going to be violence, he would have refrained from going.²⁸ The conflict subsequently escalated exponentially, and the Palestinians’ hostile response threatened the security of Israel. Consequently, the Israelis needed a leader with a military background who would ensure the safety of the Israeli people amidst the egregious fighting. Thus, Israel elected Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister that following year.

As Prime Minister, Sharon took advantage of forming an unlikely coalition to address the Second Intifada that afflicted Israel. He joined forces with the Labor Party and appointed Shimon Peres as Foreign Minister and Benjamin Ben-Eliezer as Defense Minister. One of the first decisions he made was to target suspected terrorists who orchestrated the intifada.²⁹ Amongst those ousted by Sharon’s hard line of defense was Hamas leader, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.³⁰ As tensions receded, Sharon’s militaristic side took a U-turn as his attitude towards Palestinians softened. Sharon announced in 2003 that all settlements in Gaza would be removed, and that four settlements in the West Bank would also be removed.³¹ A total of nearly 7,000 settlements existed in Gaza.³²

In December, 2005, at the height of his career, Sharon suffered a debilitating stroke. He received a treatment of blood thinners, but was soon rendered comatose on January 4, 2006 when he suffered a crippling brain hemorrhage.³³ After spending time in the hospital, doctors eventually allowed the enervated Sharon to return home. He received treatment for a short time before having to be moved back to the hospital where he spent the remainder of his life.³⁴ He is survived by his two sons, Omri and Gilad.³⁵

²⁶Ibid., 498.

²⁷ Correspondent, Mathew McAllester, Middle East, 2000, Clash at Temple Mount/Violent Reaction to Visit by Likud Leader Ariel Sharon, *Newsday*, 04.

²⁸ Greer Fay Cahsman, “Sharon Says His Temple Mount Visit Was an Excuse for Violence,” *Jerusalem Post*, 2000.

²⁹ Lis.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Lazarof.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Ariel Sharon dies at 85, Eight Years after Stroke that Felled him."



Figure 1: Separation Barrier, which protects Israeli citizens.

The World Observes the Passing of the “Butcher of Beirut”: Ariel Sharon, 1928-2014

Ariel Sharon, the former Prime Minister of Israel, passed away Saturday, January 11, 2014, at the age of 85. A severe stroke had placed Sharon in a coma for over eight years. Present-day Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, expressed his “deep sorrow” following Sharon’s death.³⁶ United States President Barack Obama sent his “deepest condolences,” and the United Kingdom’s Prime Minister, David Cameron, commemorated Sharon for his stalwart leadership and dedicated pursuit for peace.³⁷

Contrarily, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas abstained from sharing his sentiments directly following Sharon’s death, but Jibril Rajub a prominent Palestinian figure head, announced his disappointment of Sharon’s death, claiming that he had hoped to one day see Sharon tried in International Court for the war crimes that he had committed.³⁸ Gaza’s Hamas leader, Khalil al-Hayya, described Sharon as having his hands covered in Palestinian blood, and stated that “we will remember Ariel Sharon as the man who killed, destroyed and caused the suffering for several Palestinian generations.”³⁹ Both loathed and loved by many, few would disagree that the history of Ariel Sharon’s life was synonymous with controversy.

Ariel Sheinerman, who later changed his last name to Sharon, was born March 1, 1928, to Jewish Russian emigrants, in the town of

³⁶ “The World Reacts to Ariel Sharon's Death.”

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Kfar Malal, Palestine.⁴⁰ Beginning as a young man, Ariel Sharon gradually made his climb to power when he joined a Jewish militia group known as the Haganah in the early 1940s.⁴¹ With a Zionist *weltanschauung*, he helped lead Israel to an independent state in 1948. He quickly proved to be a strong, yet reckless military leader, reveling in contentious combat situations. As he gained popularity, Sharon transitioned out of the military and into politics where he took a firm stance against “terrorism” by way of ethnic cleansing.

On October 12-13, 1953, armed Palestinians from Jordan snuck across the Israeli border and infiltrated an illegal settlement where they killed an Israeli mother and her two children.⁴² Soon after the raid on the settlement, Ariel Sharon received orders to retaliate. Thus, Sharon orchestrated a “retaliatory raid” that took place on the night of October 14-15, 1953.⁴³ Sharon’s Special Forces group, which he dubbed Unit 101, combined forces with the Paratroop Battalion 890 and launched a surprise attack on a small Jordanian Village known as Qibya, along with the surrounding villages.⁴⁴ Unit 101 cleared the houses of its inhabitants, either by using gunfire after kicking down doors, or by lobbing grenades through windows.⁴⁵ Those innocent people found fleeing their homes were quickly shot on sight in the alleyways of Qibya.⁴⁶ These houses were then demolished with dynamite.

In the eyes of many Israelis, his valor in the raid was indubitable; however, the success of the Qibya raid is debatable and was quickly scrutinized. The news later announced that Sharon’s devastating raid on Qibya led to the slaughter of sixty innocent Jordanian women and children, in addition to the destruction of fifty houses at the hands of Unit 101.⁴⁷ The raid meant better stability in the region for the Jewish state, as Israel finally flexed its military muscle; Jordanians and Palestinians, however, considered the raid unnecessary collective punishment and a war crime due to the deaths of innocent civilians. Unit 101 eventually merged with the 890 Airborne Battalion, and Sharon continued his military career by serving in the 202 Paratroopers Brigade.⁴⁸

In the 1960s Sharon served his country as a major-general in the Israel Defense Forces. In both the 1967 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom

⁴⁰ "Ariel Sharon dies at 85, Eight Years after Stroke that Felled him."

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Morris, 40.

⁴³ Smith, 227.

⁴⁴ Morris, 41.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ian J. Bickerton, and Carla L. Klausner, *A History of the Arab Israeli Conflict*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Prentice Hall), 114.

⁴⁸ "Prime Minister and Defense Minister, General Ariel (Arik) Sharon (Scheinermann) (02.26.1928-01.12.2014) Commander, Statesman and Leader."

Kippur War, Sharon proved his skill at command, as well as his reckless insubordination. First, in the 1967 Six-Day War, he became annoyed by his assignment to a defensive position on the Southern Front and intervened, blatantly against direct orders. He quickly bolstered his brigade with tanks, infantry and paratroopers carrying an all-out offensive maneuver that was successful in trouncing Egyptian forces in the region.⁴⁹ Ariel Sharon contributed to the victory of the Six Day War, yet his insubordination should not be swept under the rug, because of this fact.

In 1973, the Yom Kippur War broke out, and Sharon experienced a repeat of the Six Day War. Again his commanding officer placed him on the Southern Front. As the Israelis were crossing the Suez, they began to take heavy fire from Egyptian forces. Sharon was ordered to abandon his position and fall back, but he declined; he held his position and eventually broke through the canal.⁵⁰ Many critics suggest that Sharon disobeyed the command because General Gonen received his promotion just a few months before the outbreak of the war. Sharon showed umbrage in the fact that Gonen was promoted over him. Sharon even went as far as to ignore his phone calls in the midst of the battle which led, unfortunately, to the decimation of a score of tanks including all their crew members.⁵¹ General Gonen described Sharon as boastful about his successes in the war.⁵² Sharon arrogantly claimed that his breakthrough across the Suez Canal "was the only brilliant operation in the whole Yom Kippur war."⁵³

Regarding his political career, Sharon believed that his superiors were trying to undermine his chance in the general election.⁵⁴ Sharon did win his fame, however, and eventually became Defense Minister in 1981, after serving as an adviser to a few prime ministers. He also filled the position of Minister of Agriculture for a short time.⁵⁵

As Israeli Defense Minister, Sharon faced war and controversy yet again. In September of 1982, Sharon took the initiative in forming a joint operation against two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The operation was called Operation Peace in the Galilee.⁵⁶ Sharon intended to remove 2,000 PLO "militants" from within the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps following the assassination of Israel's Maronite Christian ally in Lebanon, Bashir Gemayel. The assassination was suspected to have been

⁴⁹ Lis.

⁵⁰ Ashkar, 27.

⁵¹ Rouleau, 177.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁵⁵ "(Prime Minister and Defense Minister, General Ariel (Arik) Sharon (Scheinermann) (02.26.1928-01.12.2014) Commander, Statesman and Leader."

⁵⁶ Lis.

perpetrated by the Palestinians.⁵⁷ Without consulting the Israeli cabinet, Sharon severed a truce by ordering Israeli forces to invade Beirut.⁵⁸ On September 16, 1982, Israeli troops shot flares, illuminating the Lebanese sky over Sabra and Shatila. Maronite Christian militants, also known as Phalangists, safely marched into the camps and butchered its inhabitants, earning Sharon the infamous title, “the Butcher of Beirut.” The death toll was an estimated 800 non-PLO members; many of them were women and children.⁵⁹ Nearly 400,000 protesters subsequently flooded the streets of Tel Aviv hurling insults and calling Sharon a “Murderer!”⁶⁰ The Kahan Commission was sent in to investigate, finding that Sharon should have tried to hinder the Phalangists from murdering innocent people, and thus Ariel Sharon was indirectly held liable for the carnage.⁶¹ Following the harsh scrutiny, Sharon resigned as Defense Minister, but maintained an active hand in politics.

The early 1990s showed a glimmer of hope for a peace process through the Oslo Accords of 1993. Both states finally recognized the legitimacy for one another’s existence in what is known as the Declaration of Principles (DOP). This glimmer was eventually snuffed out nearly seven years later. The derailment of the peace process was gradual and grim. Former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who signed the DOP in the Oslo Accords, was assassinated, and settlements, internationally recognized as illegal, grew and prospered. As tensions continued to rise, Sharon buried the nail into Oslo’s coffin by visiting what Jews consider to be the “Temple Mount,” and what Muslims consider to be the “Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary).

Nearly everyone viewed Sharon’s visit to the Haram al-Sharif or Temple Mount on September 28, 2000, as a way of provoking violence. Sharon denied these claims by vocalizing that “every Jew has the right to ascend onto the temple Mount.”⁶² A majority of Muslims viewed Sharon’s visit as a desecration of al-Haram al-Sharif, an Islamic holy site, as well as a Jewish one. Many Israelis and Palestinians, including then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, believed that Sharon’s presence could spark quarreling and maybe even shed innocent blood.⁶³ Controversies portrayed in headlines indicated that Sharon, without any plausible deniability, knew prior to his visit that he would be provoking

⁵⁷ Smith, 373.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Lis.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Norma Percy, *Elusive Peace*, directed by Dan Edge, (2005; Alexandria, VA: PBS Home Video), DVD and *Nightline: True Believers*, directed by ABC News, (1999), Film.

violence.⁶⁴ Jabril Rajoub, who is in charge of preventing terror within the Palestinian Authority (PA), claimed in a 2000 article that Palestinians saw Sharon's planned visit as a "political provocation."⁶⁵ Marwan Barghouti, a leader of Fatah, who is now a political prisoner in Israel for his involvement in the first and second Intifadas, claimed that Sharon's visit was "at such a sensitive time in the peace process."⁶⁶ The visit "may spoil everything" in terms of furthering the peace process.⁶⁷ Sharon's visit was inevitably followed by an escalation in protests that quickly evolved into a long period of violence known as the al-Aqsa, or Second Intifada.

In February 2001, Sharon won the prime minister elections over Ehud Barak with 62 percent of the votes.⁶⁸ Instead of negotiating with the Palestinians, Sharon took a firm militaristic approach to the escalating violence, and formed an unlikely coalition with the Labor Party to aid in defending Israel from Palestinian attacks.⁶⁹ His method inevitably led to the re-occupation of Palestinian cities within the West Bank by the IDF, as well as the isolation of his arch nemesis, Yasser Arafat, in his Muqata compound in Ramallah.⁷⁰ In 2005, Sharon pulled nearly 7,000 settlers out of Gaza.⁷¹ At first, this action seemed to be a U-turn in Sharon's policies that were often backed by comments such as, "Grab more hills, expand the territory. Everything that's grabbed will be in our hands, everything that we don't grab will be in [Palestinian] hands." He then showed his true motives when he placed more settlements, numbering in the thousands, in the Israeli occupied West Bank.⁷² Furthermore, he began the implementation of walls throughout the country. This essentially turned Gaza into an open air prison and established a cathartic foothold in ethnically cleansing the West Bank; widening the gap in the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians.

⁶⁴ Etgar Leftkovits, *Sharon's Planned Visit to Temple Mount*, 2000.

⁶⁵ "Moslem Demo Against Sharon's Planned Visit to Temple Mount," 2000, *Mideast Mirror*, 1.

⁶⁶ Lamia Laoud and AP, Etgar Leftkovits and Nina Gilbert Contributed to this report, 2000, Rajoub Warns.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Lazarof.

⁷² *Ibid.*



Figure 2: Checkpoint at Separation Wall. It encloses the Palestinians and infringes on their land. It also makes life difficult for those on the West Bank.

Later that year, in December, Ariel Sharon suffered a stroke. He was treated with blood thinners, but was rendered comatose on January 4, 2006, when he suffered a crippling brain hemorrhage.⁷³ He was eventually allowed to return home where he received treatment for a short time, but was eventually moved back to the hospital where he eventually passed away. His two children survive him.

The Power of Perception

If Ariel Sharon were to read his own obituary, what would his reaction be? What would he attempt to change, if anything? Will he be remembered for the good he did, or for the bad he committed? An obituary is the epitome to a person's life; it holds the remembrance of who that person once was, what they valued most, and the legacy that that individual will leave after their death. Alfred Nobel's legacy illustrates the power of perception. In quite the same way, digging into Ariel Sharon's life unleashes torrents of antipathy from one side, yet simultaneously gives forth a surge of legitimacy for Jewish nationhood and the struggle that enveloped Sharon to maintain Israel's existence. For Sharon, there is a dichotomy to his legacy, based upon one's perception of the events throughout his life. Indeed, many Israelis perceive Sharon as a hero and warrior, who fought for Israel's right to exist after nearly two millennia of persecution and Diaspora. On the other hand, most if

⁷³ Ibid.

In Memoriam

not all, Palestinians view Sharon's goal as a way to ultimately annex the whole of Palestine, which they too believe is rightfully theirs. The conflict cost both sides thousands of innocent lives without any resolution being reached, a price that will never be forgotten. To favor Sharon's policies, or to demonize them, hampers historical insight on his life and the events encompassing it. Skewed perceptions perpetuate problems by limiting a reader's understanding of history, but juxtaposing both perspectives (as in the case of Sharon), is enlightening, because it enables one to see all angles of his life, critically analyze his history, and then fully grasp a wide variety of concepts that are instrumental to solving this ongoing conflict.

Critically listening to voices coming from different perspectives can potentially open-up the reader to greater truths and understanding regarding historical events and leaders. Obituaries hold those opposing voices that need to be heard. Alfred Nobel was able to add light to his shadow; however, obituaries are more than negative or positive remembrances. They are harbingers of historical insights.

Bibliography

- “Moslem Demo Against Sharon's Planned Visit to Temple Mount.” *Mideast Mirror* 1 (2000).
- "Ariel Sharon dies at 85, eight years after stroke that felled him." *Ynet News*. Accessed April 10, 2014.
<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4472203,00.html>.
- Ashkar, Riad. "The Syrian and Egyptian Campaigns." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 2 (1974): 15-33.
- Bickerton, Ian J. and Carla L. Klausner. *A History of the Arab Israeli Conflict*. 5th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.:Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.
- Lahoud, Lamia and AP, Etgar Lefkovits, and Nina Gilbert, contributed to this report. 2000.
- Lazaroff, Tovah. "Obituary: Ariel Sharon-A Bulldozer in War and Peace." *The Jerusalem Post*. Accessed April 10, 2014.
<http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Ariel-Sharon-A-Bulldozer-in-War-and-Peace-337663>.
- Lefkovits, Etgar. *Sharon's Planned Visit to Temple Mount Angers Palestinians*. *Jerusalem Post* 03 (2000).
- Lis, Jonathan. "Ariel Sharon, former Israeli prime minister, dies at 85." *Haaretz*. Accessed April 10, 2014.
<http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/1.546747>.
- Makovsky, Ken. “Nobel: How He Built His Reputation.” *Forbes*. November 7, 2011. Accessed April 10, 2014.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kenmakovsky/2011/11/07/nobel-how-he-built-his-reputation/>.
- Morris, Benny. "The Israeli Press and the Qibya Operation, 1953." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 40- 52.
- Nightline: True Believers*. Film. Directed by ABC News. NA: ABC, 1999. Services, Combined News. 2000. Sharon: I Would Visit Temple Mount Again. Newsday. 20.

In Memoriam

- "Obituary: Ariel Sharon." *Aljazeera*. Accessed April 10, 2014.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/obituar-yariel-sharon-201412235836165483.html>.
- Percy, Norma. *Elusive Peace*. Directed by Dan Edge. Alexandria, VA: PBS Home Video. 2005. DVD.
- "(Prime Minister and Defense Minister, General Ariel (Arik) Sharon (Scheinermann) (02.26.1928-01.12.2014) Commander, Statesman and Leader." Archive of the IDF. Accessed March 9, 2014.
<http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/pages/Exhibitions.asp>.
- "Rajoub Warns of Riots if Sharon Visits Temple Mount Today." *Jerusalem Post*. 01.
- Rouleau, Eric. "The War of the Generals." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 3 (1974): 173-181.
- Smith, Charles D. *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. 8th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013.
- "The world reacts to Ariel Sharon's death." *Aljazeera.com*. Accessed April 10, 2014.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/01/world-reacts-ariel-sharon-death2014111133236765101.html>.