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WE WELCOME

Papers, articles and comments on any issue relating to Palestine and the Middle East conflict. We especially encourage writings relating to the History, Politics, Architecture, Religion, International Law and Human Rights violations. The word count should not exceed 2,000 words. Reviews of Books relating to the issue of Palestine are also welcome and should not exceed 1,000 words. Letters on any related topics can also be sent and the Editor reserves the right to edit letters for the purpose of clarity. All contributions should be in Word format, Times New Roman font size 12 and sent to the Editor via email at the above address. It must include the author's full name, address and a brief curriculum vitae.

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And Allah does increase in guidance those who seek guidance. May Allah's blessings be upon all His Prophets from Adam to His final Messenger Muhammad (saw).

It is difficult not to feel overwhelmed by a sense of hopelessness when faced with the reality of life in Gaza. As the inhabitants of that densely populated strip of land cry out in pain and anguish at the injustices being visited upon them, their cries seem to be drowned out by an ever deafening international silence.

What will it take for the global community to stand up to Israel and its inhumane policies in Gaza? Israel continues to deny that it has created a humanitarian catastrophe despite the overwhelming evidence confirming that the conditions have never been this bad since the occupation began. The situation is so horrendous, that the UN has issued a number of statements condemning the on-going siege and the deteriorating conditions.

The damage that Gaza as a society has suffered is colossal. For every employed Palestinian in Gaza, there are 8.6 dependents. The damage to the economy by the siege is irreversible, and the people of Gaza will spend years trying to recover from the total collapse of their society brought about by deliberate Israeli measures. The strict refusal to allow entry of adequate basic necessities such as fuel and medicines has impacted on every sector and every facet of life. From industry, schools, hospitals, and farms, to the power plant and sewage works, nothing has been allowed to function normally.

The lack of fuel has meant that sewage treatment plants are only able to treat about 20-40% of the raw sewage. The remainder is being pumped into the sea every day or allowed to gather in open cesspits which are a danger to all those living around. The environmental consequences of this are grave, and already, Gazan children swimming in the sea are contracting diseases and the sea life is diminishing.

The effects of Israel's siege in Gaza will be felt for generations to come, unless there is an effort to stop it, now. Children face stunted growth from lack of key nutrients, while across the border in Israel the lifestyle is a paradox. Israel's proposed reasons for the siege – to stop Kassam rockets – does not bear mentioning, as it represents a clear and grossly disproportionate, appalling and inhumane tactic of warfare.

While Gaza rots, the West Bank fares little better, with Israeli settlements expanding rapidly around Jerusalem in order to complete the process of ethnic cleansing Jerusalem of all of its Palestinian inhabitants. Further into the West Bank, although there are no Kassam rockets, Israel continues incursions and killings. And Palestinians remain terrorised by violent Israeli settlers.

At this dark hour, the Palestinians can be sure that there are millions of people around the world sharing their pain, working for justice and praying for an end to the conflict. Israel's brutality will finally awaken the world and then the day when Palestine is free will not be far away.

Beyond donating aid and making prayers, each of us shares the responsibility for standing up against this injustice. Our democracy allows us to voice dissent against government policies that allow Israel this free reign of misery in Gaza and terror in the West Bank. We must exercise that right and put pressure on our politicians to stand up for human rights in the Palestinian territories. Each year, there is a lobby of Parliament in November to coincide with the UN Palestine day. This year, the lobby will take place on 19 November 2008. Parliament is open for all British citizens to visit their MPs and bring fresh attention to the plight of Palestinians.

This opportunity should not be missed and in previous years, the lobby day has brought together people of all religions and backgrounds who share one common belief – that the occupation must come to an end. This must continue in order to convince the government that peace in Palestine is a priority for all of Britain. The theme of 'Justice for Palestinians' means calling for an end to the Israeli occupation; the siege on Gaza; Israeli settlements; and the EU-Israel trade agreement, and supporting Palestinian self-determination.

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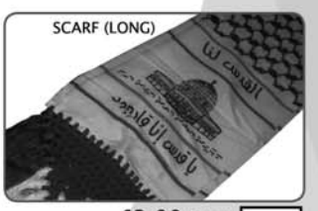

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Anti-Arab Racism and Incitement in Israel

Ali Abunimah*

A prominent strategy of Israeli *hasbara*, or official propaganda, is to deflect criticism of its actions in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip by stressing that within the country's 1948 boundaries, it is a model democracy comparable to the societies in Western Europe and North America with which it identifies and on whose diplomatic support it relies to maintain a favorable *status quo*. In fact, Israeli society is in the grip of a wave of unchecked racism and incitement that seriously threatens Israel's Palestinian community and the long-term prospects for regional peace. This paper examines societal and institutional racism and incitement by public figures against Israel's Arab population and considers some policy implications.

Background and context

When Israel was established in 1948, most of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants were driven out or fled from the area that became Israel. Approximately 150,000 Palestinians remained behind. Until 1966, these Palestinians lived under martial law. Today, having increased in number to approximately 1.3 million or about one fifth of Israel's population (not including the Palestinian population of occupied East Jerusalem), they are citizens of the state of Israel and can vote in elections for the Knesset. Despite this, most view themselves as second-class citizens. As indigenous non-Jews in a self-described Jewish state, they face a host of systematic social, legal, economic and educational barriers to equality. Israel lacks a constitution and has no other basic law guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or national origin.

One measure of the cumulative impact of these discriminatory policies is socioeconomic: while just 16 percent of Jewish citizens in Israel fall below the official poverty line, the figure for non-Jews is 50 percent, according to the Israeli Democracy Institute's index.

Israeli society is in the grip of a wave of un-checked racism and incitement that seriously threatens Israel's Palestinian community

In October 2000, Israeli police used live ammunition against unarmed civilians demonstrating their solidarity with Palestinians in the occupied territories. Thirteen Palestinians, of whom twelve were Israeli citizens, were shot dead. An official commission, headed by Judge Theodor Or, was appointed to look into the events which came to mark a dramatic deterioration in Arab-Jewish relations inside the country. In 2003, the Or Commission confirmed that the police used "excessive" and unjustifiable force, reported that the police viewed the country's Arab citizens as "enemies" and documented a pattern of "prejudice and neglect" towards them by Israel's establishment.

While the Or Commission recommended a number of measures to redress the sharp disparities between Jews and Arabs in the country, families of the victims regarded the report as a whitewash. The Commission failed to examine the forensic evidence in each of the killings, and none of the killers, nor any responsible official, were ever brought to justice. By 2007, according to Elie Rekhess of the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, there remained "yawning" gaps between Jews and Arabs in Israel and "the bottom line" is "that the conclusions and recommendations of the 2003 Or Commission remain conspicuously unimplemented."

while just 16 percent of Jewish citizens in Israel fall below the official poverty line, the figure for non-Jews is 50 percent

* Ali Abunimah is an American Journalist and co-founder of Electronic Intifada. His mother became a refugee in the 1948 Palestinian exodus. Ali Abunimah graduated from Princeton University and the University of Chicago, and is a frequent speaker and commentator on the Middle East, contributing regularly to the Chicago Tribune and the Los Angeles Times among other publications. This article first appeared in this version on *Electronic Intifada*

Amidst the increasingly precarious situation of Palestinian citizens of Israel, prominent and broadly representative leaders of that community published in 2007 a series of documents setting out visions for Israel as a state of all its citizens with equality for all.[1] The response of the Israeli body politic was overwhelmingly to view these initiatives as an unwelcome threat to the "Jewish character" of the state. Israel's Shin Bet (secret police), responsible among other things for many "targeted killings" in the occupied territories, went so far as to warn that it would "disrupt the activities of any groups that seek to change the Jewish or democratic character of Israel, even if they use democratic means," the Israeli daily *Haaretz* reported in April 2007.

In what *Haaretz* termed an "organized, synchronized pogrom," the mob threw stones at Palestinian homes smashing windows and destroying water tanks, damaged cars and chanted "Death to the Arabs"

Unlearned lessons: the Jabal al-Mukkabir "pogrom"

On 10 March 2008, a week after a Palestinian opened fire in the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem killing eight students, apparently in revenge for Israel's killing of dozens of civilians in Gaza, a mob of hundreds of Israeli Jews converged on the Jabal al-Mukkabir neighborhood in occupied East Jerusalem where the gunman's family lived. In what *Haaretz* termed an "organized, synchronized pogrom," the mob threw stones at Palestinian homes smashing windows and destroying water tanks, damaged cars and chanted "Death to the Arabs" while police did little to stop them. *Haaretz* observed that such an attack "could never take place in a Jewish neighborhood," and noted that while "Israel and the Jewish world raise a huge cry over every suspicion of an attack on Jews because of their ethnicity, it is intolerable that residents of the capital [sic] are attacked solely because of their nationality."

Although the mob action had been planned and advertised days in advance, the Israeli police had done nothing to prepare for it. "The district police didn't need to be surprised," former Jerusalem district police commander Mickey Levy told *Haaretz*. "There was no need to collect intelligence, it was right there in their hand. Appropriate preparation was called for in order to prevent the violent demonstration."

This event indicates that Israel's official institutions have failed to learn any lessons from the Or Commission report but also serves as a warning sign of worse to come, against a backdrop of highly tolerated public incitement and widespread racist attitudes towards Arabs.

Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Lieberman repeated the ethnic cleansing threat in the Knesset, telling Arab members, "You are temporary here," and "One day we will take care of you."

Racist statements and incitement

One of the most blatant examples of public incitement in the days before the attack on Jabal al-Mukkabir was a circular widely distributed and posted around Jerusalem and in West Bank settlements. Signed by a long list of rabbis, it called for acts of revenge on Palestinians in retribution for the Mercaz HaRav shooting: "Each and everyone is required to imagine what the enemy is plotting to do to us and match it measure for measure."

Among the signatories was Rabbi Ya'acov Yosef, son of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the former Sephardic chief rabbi of Israel and spiritual leader of Shas, a party in Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's coalition government. The younger Yosef is himself a former Knesset member representing Shas. Another signatory, Rabbi Uzi Sharbav, was one of a group of extremists who murdered three Palestinian students at a school in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron and set off bombs that maimed the mayors of Nablus and Ramallah in the early 1980s. Sharbav served a short prison sentence for the murders but was pardoned and freed along with other extremists by Israel's president in 1990.

Other statements have been aimed at delegitimizing, intimidating and threatening with expulsion Palestinian, citizens of Israel exercising their democratic rights. In early March 2008, thousands of Palestinian citizens of Israel staged a peaceful rally, attended by several Arab members of the Knesset to protest Israel's military attacks in the Gaza Strip. In the Knesset, former cabinet minister Effie Eitam accused the Arab legislators of "treason" for participating in the rally, adding, "We have to drive you out, as well as everyone else who took part" in the demonstration. Days later, Olmert's former Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Lieberman repeated the ethnic cleansing threat in the Knesset, telling Arab members, "You are temporary here," and "One day we will take care of you."

Israeli extremists appear to be getting the message. Representatives of three Arab parties have reported that their Knesset members have been receiving death threats in the mail daily. A spokesman for one Knesset member told *The Jerusalem Post*, "We have always received threats but they have recently escalated to the point where we are growing truly concerned."

Several rabbis have used the excuse of "security" in the wake of the Mercaz HaRav shooting to issue racist *halakhic* (religious) rulings against Arabs. *Haaretz* reports Rabbi Dov Lior, chairman of the rabbinical council for settlers in "Judea and Samaria" (the West Bank), decreed that "It is completely forbidden to employ [Arabs] and rent houses to them in Israel. Their employment is forbidden, not only at yeshivas, but at factories, hotels and everywhere."

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, considered a world-wide Orthodox authority on Jewish law, held "that it is completely forbidden to hire Arabs, especially in yeshivas; there is a concern for endangering lives." Indicating that security might not be the only motivation for this ruling, Kanievsky added that Jews should refrain from hiring any non-Jews, "unless there exists a huge disparity between the costs of the labor," in which case non-Jews could be hired.

While these are recent examples, Mossawa, an Arab civil rights advocacy group in Israel, documented dozens of instances of racist declarations by public figures and thousands of examples of incitement on the Internet in 2007 alone.[2]

Silence is consent

Leaders in the Palestinian community in Israel worry that the escalating incitement will provoke further violence against them. A spokesman for Muhammad Barakeh, an Arab member of parliament, told *The Jerusalem Post* that the recent upsurge in death threats had been reported to Knesset security, "But we have seen nothing happen. I do not feel they are taking this threat very seriously." Another Arab Knesset member urged Israel's two chief rabbis to condemn the rabbinical calls for revenge, fearing that these statements might incite the assassination of community leaders. There are no reports that the chief rabbis responded to this plea. Indeed, while a handful of Israeli Jewish voices have been raised in protest, it was most often to decry the deafening silence.

A spokesman for the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism condemned an "ever growing phenomenon of racist incitement that distorts Judaism and is also illegal." As *Haaretz* reports, the group called on Israel's attorney general to "shake off his apathy" and begin to enforce anti-incitement laws. An editorial in the same publication complained that "the continued inactivity in the face of acts of incitement and violence by the extreme right is shared by all the law-enforcement authorities-the police, Shin Bet, State Prosecutor's Office and the courts." A *Haaretz* reporter noted "the dizzying increase in incitement, curses and insults leveled" at Arab Knesset members, "a spike that has gone almost without protest or the involvement of the Knesset Ethics Committee." Another commentator in the same newspaper observed that "as long as no one demonstrates whenever a Knesset member curses Arabs; and as long as the number of people who rent apartments to or hire Arabs can be counted on one hand, Israeli society cannot be absolved of the sin of racism."

It is completely forbidden to employ [Arabs] and rent houses to them in Israel. Their employment is forbidden, not only at yeshivas, but at factories, hotels and everywhere."

A society in crisis

"Israeli society is reaching new heights of racism," Sami Michael, one of the country's most celebrated equality advocates and president of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, told *Haaretz*. A growing body of research indicates that racist sentiments are not the preserve of the right-wing fringe but increasingly prevalent across Israeli Jewish society.

One particularly disturbing indicator is that the chant "Death to the Arabs" is voiced not just by mobs of right-wingers angered by this or that Palestinian attack. Rather, "in the late 1990s and onwards," writes Amir Ben-Porat, a professor in the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Ben Gurion University, " 'Death to the Arabs' became a common chant in almost every football [soccer] stadium in Israel." Ben-Porat, who authored a study on the use of the chant, says that because of the importance of soccer in Israeli society and its high profile in the media, "This chant is heard far beyond the stadium."[3]

In its 2007 Israeli Democracy Index, the Israel Democracy Institute found that 87 percent of all Israeli citizens rated Jewish-Arab relations in the country as being "poor" or "very poor."

In addition:

- Seventy-eight percent of Israeli Jews opposed having Arab parties or ministers join Israel's government. Just 56 percent of Israeli Jews support full equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel and an identical

'Death to the Arabs' became a common chant in almost every football [soccer] stadium in Israel."

number agreed that "Arabs cannot attain the Jews' level of cultural development."

- 75 percent of Israeli Jews agreed with the statement that "Arabs are inclined to violent behavior" (as compared with 54 percent of Palestinian citizens of Israel who had an equivalent view of Israeli Jews).
- 43 percent of Israeli Jews agreed that "Arabs are not intelligent" and 55 percent agreed that "the government should encourage Arab emigration from the country."

75 percent of Israeli Jews surveyed said they would not agree to live in the same building as Arabs.

A recent Haifa University survey found that half of Israeli Jews object to Arabs living in their neighborhoods (56 percent of Arabs supported residential integration with Jews). Similarly, ACRI reported that 75 percent of Israeli Jews surveyed said they would not agree to live in the same building as Arabs. The same survey found that more than half of Israeli Jews felt that Arabs and Jews should have separate recreational facilities.

There are two consistent trends among all these surveys: both Palestinian citizens of Israel and Israeli Jews hold some prejudices towards each other, but on almost every measure, Israeli Jewish views of Arabs are more negative and extreme than Arab views of Jews; second, the negative trends have risen markedly in recent years as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified. The ACRI report found that between 2005 and 2006, there was a 26 percent rise in racist incidents targeting Arabs, and the number of Israeli Jews reporting that they felt "hatred" towards Arabs doubled to 30 percent.

While the conflict is undoubtedly the overarching context for these sentiments, an important contributing factor may be the consistently dehumanizing and denigrating stereotypes of Arabs that have for decades been presented to Israeli Jewish schoolchildren in their textbooks and media.

Israeli Jewish views of Arabs are more negative and extreme than Arab views of Jews

Discrimination against US citizens

An outgrowth of the institutional and societal racism against Arabs in Israel is mistreatment that some US citizens have received at the hands of Israeli authorities.

The US State Department recently warned travelers that "American citizens whom Israeli authorities judge (based on their name or other indicators) may be of Palestinian origin are likely to face additional, and often time consuming questioning by immigration and border authorities." The warning adds that the "United States Government seeks equal treatment for all American citizens regardless of national origin or ethnicity," or as the Associated Press reports how State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack put it, "You have a blue American passport, you should be treated like an American citizen."

Yet, while Arab American civil rights advocates have reported dozens of such cases of discrimination to the US government,[4] American citizens who are considered Jewish by Israel are accorded special treatment, including free Israeli-government sponsored "Birthright Israel" trips and enticements to emigrate to the country. This is a long-standing problem; in 1987, the State Department lodged an official protest over the mistreatment of African Americans and Palestinian Americans traveling to Israel.

Conclusions and implications

Anti-Arab racism and incitement are persistent and growing problems in Israel and symptoms of hyper-nationalism that seeks to consolidate and justify the state's "Jewish character." For decades, the mistreatment of Palestinians in Israel has been virtually ignored by Palestinian national leaders, as well as by international policymakers and organizations under the doctrine of non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.

Yet, the precarious position of Palestinian citizens of Israel is closely linked to the fate of Palestinians under military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and refugees outside the country. It stems from the same set of historical events 60 years ago. All three categories of Palestinians are targets of discriminatory or abusive Israeli policies intended to preserve Israel as a "Jewish state." In the context of a "solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some Israeli politicians increasingly speak of population or territorial "exchanges" that would strip Palestinian citizens of Israel of their citizenship and otherwise violate their fundamental human rights. Palestinian citizens of Israel have raised the alarm about this growing existential threat, but they have received little international solidarity.

Israel's official institutions have failed for decades to demonstrate any willingness

or capacity to treat Palestinian citizens as equal to Israeli Jews either in law or in practice. Israeli police act, in effect, as a uniformed sectarian militia protecting Jewish privilege rather than as an impartial police service for a modern, democratic state.

Although most international actors are not yet ready to do so, it is inevitable that the situation inside Israel will eventually have to be internationalized. A good example of the successful internationalization of an "internal" situation is the role external actors played in overseeing the transformation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary from a uniformed sectarian militia into the present-day Police Service of Northern Ireland and otherwise supporting the Northern Ireland peace process. There must also be external pressure on Israel to curb and punish racist incitement and to launch broad public initiatives, particularly in schools, to combat hateful stereotypes of Arabs.

As Israeli politicians and parties increasingly propose "solutions" that treat all Palestinians, whether citizens or not, as equally inferior, Palestinians in the Diaspora, the occupied territories and inside Israel must urgently engage with each other to formulate common strategies to protect and advance their human and political rights.

Notes

1. The four documents are:
   1. The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel published by The National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel (*http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article6381.shtml*);
   2. The Democratic Constitution published by Adalah: The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel (*http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article6606.shtml*);
   3. An Equal Constituion for All? On a Constituion and Collective Rights for Arab Citizens in Israel published by Mossawa Center - The Advocacy Center for Arab Citizens in Israel; and 4. The Haifa Declaration.
2. Press release, "Mossawa Center releases racism report detailing over 169 cases, "Mossawa, 19 March 2008.
3. AmirBen-Porat, "Death to the Arabs: the right-wing fan's fear,"*Soccer & Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January 2008, pp. 1-13.
4. American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), "ADC Sends First Hand Accounts of Israel's Entry Denials of U.S. Citizens to Secretary Rice,"20 March 2008.

Information on Palestine

www.aqsa.org.uk

Journal – Referenced articles from previous issues of Al Aqsa.
Newsletter – Quarterly printed by Friends of Al Aqsa.
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Outsides

Saree Makdisi*

Mohammad Jalud lives in the small village of Izbat Jalud, just south of Qalqilya in the West Bank. He has been eking out a living by farming a small plot of land, growing tomatoes and cucumbers and other crops. Until recently, it took him ten minutes to walk from his house to the plot of land that he owns just to the west of the village. In September 2003, the immense wall[1] that Israel had started building in the West Bank reached the Qalqilya region. The wall skirted the very edge of the built-up part of Izbat Jalud, cutting off the town from much of its most valuable farmland to the west.

The Israelis had built a gate in the wall that could enable access to the other side, but the gate was not open to Palestinians. To reach his crops, Mohammad had to start traveling several miles along the wall to the gate at Azun Atma, which was open to Palestinians. For a couple of months, he was able to go south to Azun Atma, cross through the gate there, and then go back north on the other side of the wall to reach his land—just across from the Izbat Jalud gate, which remained closed to him. What had once been a ten-minute walk to his land now involved at least an hour, assuming there was no delay coming and going through the gate at Azun Atma. But at least, for now, he could get to his crops.

For most of its length, the wall is not built on the 1949 Armistice Line border that had separated Israel from the West Bank until 1967. Rather, it is on the inside, often miles inside and in certain places almost halfway into the occupied territory itself. Almost 10 percent of the West Bank's most fertile land will eventually be absorbed into the gap that Israel has opened between the 1967 border and the wall: an area which the Israelis refer to as the "seam zone."

In October 2003, the Israelis classified the "seam zone" as a closed military area which, if the wall is built as currently projected, will ultimately enclose some 60,000 Palestinians in forty-two villages and towns. "Facing the special security circumstances in the area and the need to take the necessary steps in order to prevent terrorist attacks and the exit of attackers from the areas of Judea and Samaria to the state of Israel," wrote General Moshe Kaplinsky that month, "I hereby declare that the seam zone is a closed area." Henceforth, according to General Kaplinsky's orders, "No person shall enter the seam zone or stay in it."

General Kaplinsky's orders, reiterating Israel's standard protocol for orders declaring a closed military area, explicitly exempt Israelis. And the orders specifically define "Israeli" not only as a citizen or resident of Israel, but also as "one who is eligible to emigrate to Israel in accordance with the Law of Return." Consequently, as of October 2003, Mohammad Jalud could not access his own land without applying for a permit from the Israeli authorities; but Jews from Latvia and Moldova could, if they wanted to, because they are eligible under the Law of Return.

Israeli military regulations, pursuant to General Kaplinsky's orders, specify up to a dozen different types of permits that Palestinian farmers living on the east side of the wall need to apply for in order to access and work on their land on the west side. A complex series of bureaucratic and administrative hurdles needs to be cleared for each permit.

The main hurdle involves proving that one actually *has* land on the other side of the wall. This is easier said than done. For one thing, Palestinian farming depends heavily on traditional practices and relations to the land. Often, whole families, rather than

The Israelis had built a gate in the wall that could enable access to the other side, but the gate was not open to Palestinians.

up to a dozen different types of permits that Palestinian farmers living on the east side of the wall need to apply for in order to access and work on their land on the west side.

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individuals, maintain plots of productive land. In such cases, for as far back as anyone can remember, the ownership of agricultural land was passed from generation to generation through traditional methods that never required documentation in the modern sense; families and communities just *knew* whose land was whose. Superimposed on the traditional system of tracking land ownership was the Ottoman Land Code of 1858, which classified large swathes of fertile land as *miri* lands. Although the Sultan was recognized as the ultimate (nominal) owner of *miri* land, the Ottomans' complex tax system granted to farmers, in return for paying a tax on the crops grown there, the right to possess, sell, and inherit actively cultivated *miri* land, as long as there was no break in cultivation for more than a certain number of years, in which case the land reverted to the ownership of the Sultan.

The Israelis immediately suspended the process of formally registering land ownership when they took over the territory.

With the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the institution of the British Mandate in Palestine in 1922, a systematic effort was made to modernize landholding, including formally registering *miri* land ownership, freed from the Sultan at last, and assigning it to specific individuals or families.

This program of modernization was continued after 1948 when the West Bank came under Jordanian rule following the destruction of Palestine and creation of Israel and the eventual annexation of the West Bank by Jordan, in April 1950. But the process was slow; by the time the West Bank fell to the Israelis in 1967, only about a third of the land had been formally registered, and most of that was in urban areas.

The Israelis immediately suspended the process of formally registering land ownership when they took over the territory. They also issued a number of military orders based on their reinterpretation of the 1858 Ottoman Land Code, which, on their reading, granted to the Israeli military command the authority to assume the former power of the Sultan and to take possession, in the name of the state, of hundreds of thousands of dunums[2] of not-yet-registered *miri* lands, even if they were already cultivated. Many Palestinian farmers found out too late that the plot their family had been tending for generations had been declared "state land" by Israel and was henceforth off-limits to them, and thus could not do anything about it.

'Peace Now' found that, as of November 2006, privately held Palestinian land (not state land) accounted for some 40 percent of the land used for Jewish settlement in the West Bank.

The Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem notes that even if Israel had followed the Ottoman Land Code to the letter, and not declared private property to be state property, its treatment of properly identified state land has also been improper. "State-lands are public property, belonging to the lawful residents of the West Bank," B'Tselem notes. "The role of the occupying power, i.e., the State of Israel, as the temporary substitute of the sovereign, is to administer the public land for the benefit of that public, or, alternatively, to meet its [short-term] military needs in the occupied territory. Rather than acting this way, Israel, since it started taking control of those state-lands, has completely denied the Palestinians their right to use these lands, and has allocated them exclusively for the establishment and expansion of Jewish settlements." In fact, the land seized for "military needs" and land expropriated for "public use"; all together amounting to almost half of the entire territory, was immediately made available for Jewish colonization and settlement.

A widely cited report published in 2006 by the Israeli organization 'Peace Now' found that, as of November 2006, privately held Palestinian land (not state land) accounted for some 40 percent of the land used for Jewish settlement in the West Bank. Even according to Israel's own laws (and of course international law), the construction of settlements on privately held land is illegal.

Today the built-up areas of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank account for no more than 2 percent of the territory's surface area. But, according to B'Tselem, through a variety of Israeli bureaucratic procedures, the settlements actually exert administrative control over some 42 percent of the West Bank's surface area. And according to a report published by the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) in July 2007, almost 40 percent of the West Bank is now taken up by Israeli infrastructure, including roads, settlements, and military outposts.

Israel's actions are in violation of the Hague Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land as well as the Fourth Geneva Convention, which are the key international legal documents regulating the disposition of militarily occupied territory. The Geneva Convention, for example, expressly prohibits the "destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or the state, or to any other public authorities, or to social or co-operative organizations." It also forbids "individual or mass forcible transfers, as well

as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country," and stipulates that "the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." Israel has tried to claim that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to the Palestinian territories it occupies, but this claim has been dismissed not only by international legal scholars but also by a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions affirming the applicability of the Conventions to the Israeli occupied territories.

"*Affirming once more* that the Geneva Convention relative to the protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, is applicable to the Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem," Security Council Resolution 465 of 1980, for example, reiterates that "all measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, or any part thereof have no legal validity and that Israel's policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in those territories constitute a flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and also constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East." More recently, in its Advisory Opinion of July 2004 ("Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory"), the International Court of Justice in The Hague also unanimously reaffirmed the applicability of the Geneva Conventions to the Israeli-occupied territories and added that all of the agreements (notably the Oslo Accords) entered into by the Israelis and Palestinians since 1993 "have done nothing to alter" the fact that "all these territories (including East Jerusalem) remain occupied territories and Israel has continued to have the status of occupying power."

None of these findings and rulings has made any difference to the way in which Israel administers its occupation of the West Bank. Its own regulations, rather than those of international law, are the ones to which the Palestinian population is held accountable. Even when, as with the case of Jewish settlement on privately owned land, Israeli actions violate Israel's own laws, there is little Palestinians can do to seek redress. And when it comes to land west of the wall, those regulations require that a Palestinian prove to the satisfaction of the Israeli authorities that a given plot of land is his.

It is often extremely difficult for a Palestinian to do so. Even if some ancestor did obtain a tax certificate from the Ottoman Empire, or register the land with the British or the Jordanians, the Israelis apply the most stringent criteria to his application for a permit to enter the "seam zone." Papers are often incomplete or inconsistent, especially given the fact that the legal documentation of West Bank land has gone through various conflicts and upheavals, including two world wars, and passed through the hands of countless municipal offices in four different political entities (the Ottoman Empire, Britain, Jordan and Israel). If a Palestinian farmer's land was mis-registered, or if there are errors in the original registration, or if the original owner had died or moved overseas, or if there are any questions about inheritances or divisions of land among or within or between families, or any questions about bills of sale, or titles, then the application for a permit will be suspended until all the legal difficulties can be sorted out. In the meantime, Israel will retain control of and access to the land in question.

a permit will be suspended until all the legal difficulties can be sorted out. In the meantime, Israel will retain control of and access to the land in question.

In a number of cases, a Palestinian landowner has been able to prove that he does indeed have a claim on the land, only for the Israelis to declare that the land in question may be his, but that it does not lie on the west side of the wall after all. Eid Ahmed Yassin, for example, lives in al-Ras, a small village near Qalqilya. He and his family own and farm 110 dunums, or about 28 acres, of land in the "seam zone" west of the wall, but still in the West Bank. Eid submitted several applications to the Israelis for a permit in order to access his land, all of which were turned down. Finally, with the help of a coalition of human rights organizations, he applied again and was granted a permit in late 2004. When that permit expired in early 2005, he reapplied and was again rejected. This time his application was returned, overwritten with Hebrew handwriting asserting that his property does not exist west of the wall. He can see and point to his land, his trees, his crops, from a nearby hilltop. But neither he nor the al-Ras municipality possess one of the official Israeli maps indicating the exact location of the plots of land listed in their taxation documents (through which he was able to establish ownership). Since Israel

prints and controls the maps, he has no way to prove that the land specified on a piece of paper is the land that has now been enclosed on the other side of the wall.

He could buy a donkey, but the donkey would need a permit too—and that would involve a whole separate set of applications.

This is not just Eid's problem. According to the municipality, 90 percent of al-Ras's land is located west of the wall. In February 2005, 120 applications for permits to access land west of the wall were submitted to the Israelis by farmers in al-Ras. By April, only seven had been approved, all for elderly people. In June, another three permits were granted, for children aged ten to fifteen. Their parents' applications were rejected. Between June and September, one more person was granted a permit. In anticipation of the autumn's crucial olive harvest, al-Ras's farmers submitted 180 applications to the Israelis in the late summer. One in three was granted. For an impoverished agricultural community, this was a catastrophe.

Thus, even if a landowner is granted a permit to access his land, his immediate family may not be, so he may not have anyone to help him plow, sow, weed, water, or harvest his crops. And even if various members of the family are granted permits, seasonal day laborers will almost certainly be turned down. These are laborers on whom the farmer depends at peak moments of the production cycle, such as the annual olive harvest, when traditionally, up to half the Palestinian population would take time off from other occupations to help out. About half of the tenant farmers, spouses, day laborers, grandchildren, all along the length of the wall have had their permit applications denied. By mid-2005, almost 40 percent of the permits submitted by Palestinians to access farmland on the west side of the wall were being rejected by the Israeli authorities (a figure that would rise to more than 80 percent by November 2007, by which time Israel was granting permits only to some 18 percent of those who used to work-land west of the wall). Two-thirds of the rejections are handed down because the applicant can't prove to Israel's satisfaction that he or she owns land, or has a direct relationship to the landowner.

Mohammad Jalud, however, had cleared all these hurdles. Shortly after November 2003, when the Israelis institutionalized the "seam zone" permit system, Mohammad was able to obtain the two permits he needed to get to his land. The Israeli army allowed him to use its patrol road to cover the distance from the Azun Atma gate back up to where his plot of land lies, near the still-closed Izbat Jalud gate; any other route would have taken him too close to the settlement of Oranit. (The wall had also obliterated the previous road and path system, so farmers often had to cross through each other's fields to get to their own land). Mohammad was not, however, allowed to bring his tractor. He would have to carry his farm tools himself for the long walk on the west side of the wall, and he would have to carry his produce back out on his back. He could buy a donkey, but the donkey would need a permit too—and that would involve a whole separate set of applications.

Mohammad persevered. He kept going with the hour-long journey, tending his crops, looking after the irrigation, fertilization, and so on. Then the gate opening and closing times got more erratic. The Israelis started opening the gates for twenty minutes to an hour three times a day, not always in a punctual and timely manner. Even if he had only an hour or two of work to do, Mohammad would have to commit to four or five hours on the other side of the wall, waiting for the gate to reopen so he could leave the "seam zone." And after any security incident, no matter how distant, the Israelis would seal all the gates and keep them closed for days or weeks. At the peak of the olive harvest season in 2003, for example, the Israeli army sealed all the gates in the wall near Qalqilya in response to a bombing in Haifa, about forty miles away on the coast.

Then in mid-2004, the Israelis decided to open the Izbat Jalud gate: the one close to Mohammad's home and fields. That would cut his daily commute down considerably. But when he tried to get through the gate at Izbat Jalud, the Israeli soldiers manning the gate told him that his permit was for the gate at Azun Atma. He could not cross through at Izbat Jalud. Then, making his way down to the Azun Atma gate, he was informed by the Israeli soldiers there that he could no longer use that gate because the army would no longer allow him to use the patrol road to reach his land. The reason, they said, was that another, more direct route, through the Izbat Jalud gate, was now open to him.

For much of the summer of 2004, Mohammad couldn't get to his land. He applied for another permit. In August, the new permit came through, but it once again restricted him to the Azun Atma gate. He made an official request to the Israelis to change his gate assignment to the Izbat Jalud

gate. In February 2005, at last, he received a new permit.

But it also assigned him to the Azun Atma gate. Cut off from his crops on the other side of Israel's wall, Mohammad had to start working as a day laborer just to make ends meet. He made further requests and entreaties, and, finally, in September 2005, he was granted a permit allowing him access to the Izbat Jalud gate. It had been over a year since he had tended his land.

He lost a year's worth of crops, but at least he was able to save his land, for now. According to Israel's interpretation of the Ottoman land laws, *miri* land that is not actively cultivated for a certain amount of time (even if its cultivation is being actively and forcibly prevented) reverts to state ownership.

Occupation by the Numbers

- Length of West Bank–Israel border: 196 miles
- Projected length of West Bank wall: 437 miles
- Projected proportion of wall built on border: 20 percent
- Length of wall in and around East Jerusalem: 104 miles
- Length built on internationally recognized border near Jerusalem: 3 miles
- Percentage of West Bank surface area, including enclaves in and near East Jerusalem, cut off by the wall: 12
- Amount of land expropriated for construction of the wall: 8,750 acres
- Number of gates built into the wall: 67
- Number open on a daily basis to Palestinians (with appropriate permits): 19
- Percentage of Palestinian agricultural land planted with olive trees: 45
- Percentage of Palestinian population that participates in annual olive harvest: 50
- Number of olive trees in occupied territories: 9 million
- Number inaccessible or access restricted after construction of wall: 1 million
- Number of trees burned, uprooted, or bulldozed by Israeli army from 2000 to 2005: 465,945
- Percentage of Palestinian families not permitted to access their land in "seam zone" in northern West Bank: 82
- Palestinian communities in "seam zone" with 24-hour access to emergency medical care: 1
- Palestinians living in "seam zone" upon its completion: 60,500
- Palestinians living in Jerusalem cut off from the city by the wall: 63,000

Notes

1. I will use the terminology adopted by the International Court of Justice in its 2004 Advisory Opinion.
2. A dunum is about 1,000 square meters, or about a quarter of an acre.

Al-Aqsa

Editor

The Articles published in this journal ***do not*** necessarily reflect the views of the Editorial Board or of Friends of Al-aqsa

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Military Occupation: Samoud and Sorrow

Alice Rothchild*

Since 2003, a health and human rights project developed by members of Jewish Voice for Peace has organized yearly delegations to Israel and Palestine, joining with partners such as Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, (PHR-I) and Palestinian Medical Relief Society, (PMRS). We document conditions on the ground, bring our stories home, and work on moving the political conversation towards a change in US policy. We focus on issues related to occupation, its impact on the civilian populations, and the consequences of Israeli incursions, restrictions of movement, and collective punishment.

Returning in the fall of 2007 so much has changed and so much is worse. Kalandia "checkpoint" is now a "terminal," the implication being that the unpredictable lines, arbitrary approvals, tightly-controlled turnstiles, and soldiers staring at permits and passports behind bulletproof windows are merely a modern but permanent inconvenience.

Even though I have seen the statistics, the growth of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank is stunning. The sprawling 31 square mile Jewish city of Ma'ale Adumin with its industries and neighborhoods stretches ever closer to Jericho, cutting the north of the West Bank from the south. The ancient olive trees transplanted to the entrances of tastefully landscaped plazas feel like an added insult to history. Even the scattered hilltop "outposts" that dot the landscape like mushrooms after rain, have paved roads, electricity and running water, flaunting their resources and military support as surrounding Palestinian villages do without basic human needs. The martyrs' posters hanging on the walls of Rafidia Hospital in Nablus are no longer of suicide bombers, but young men killed in nightly Israeli incursions. The separation wall enclosing Bethlehem is decorated by a graphic artist; he paints hugely distorted hideous portraits, pushing the ugliness in our faces. I sense both a normalization as well as sterilization of the state of military occupation.

The Palestinians I meet often admit that they are losing the battle, living on memory, hope, and *samoud*, or steadfastness. Their lives are more constricted, their traumas are mounting, and their government has failed to change the course of Israeli expansionism and control. The loss of land continues, the Israeli military incursions are almost a routine occurrence rarely reported in the Western press, and people are tormented by the bureaucracy that constrains their lives. I am seized by a desire to give voice to this reality, to share the lives of ordinary Palestinians who are the players and casualties in this painful drama.

The ancient olive trees transplanted to the entrances of tastefully landscaped plazas feel like an added insult to history.

Returning to Nablus: Collateral Damage

After spending the morning at the PMRS Nablus Child Rehabilitation Center, Dr. Allam Jarrar takes the delegation to visit a number of families who experienced an attack by Israeli soldiers several days before. Although Allam had explained earlier that there are almost nightly Israeli incursions into Nablus, the reality is still jarring and painfully surreal. We walk past a dusty cement-mixer, through a gate and down cracked stone steps to reach the entry to the top floor of a five-story white stone house, built into the hilly landscape in the neighborhood of Ras al-Ein. Potted plants, shattered tiles, and glass are strewn along the path. Men lumber by, cigarettes in hand, carrying panes to repair fractured windows and the air echoes with the sounds of hammering and electric

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machinery. We are soon met by three older men, eager to tell their stories, as a woman stands in the doorway holding a crying child and a teenage boy peeks shyly out of a broken window. One man speaks animatedly.

a quick check on an internet weapons guide reveals that these flares were made in the US.

Around 2:30 a.m. I heard a lot of soldiers out there and they start to launch the grenades. Like, tens of hand grenades have been thrown here. By loudspeakers they started to say, "Everybody should get out of the house, raising their hands up," without identifying what house. We couldn't realize if it was our house or some other houses here.

In no time, the children woke up from the sounds of grenades. Shooting started from all directions, and we stood inside the house. And the shooting started from outside here and here. The windows have been crashed all over the house. I started to shout, "Why are you shooting us? We have children," but they continued. So my wife and children, we went out here, we raised our hands. They took us and forced us to remove our clothes. They cuffed us. He asked me, "Whose is this house?" I said, "It's my house." The officer told me there had been shooting from this house. I said, "It's me, my wife and my children. We didn't shoot! We don't have guns to shoot."

The delegates are ushered into one apartment after another; richly upholstered living room furniture, formal dining room tables, long white draperies, decorative wooden head boards, posters in a child's room, a blinking TV, now all splattered with bullet holes. The curtains are shredded and burned by gunfire; walls, floors, and ceilings fissured and pock-marked in every direction. In one apartment we are shown a neat pile of rocket parts, bullet casings, mortar shells, and empty flares, the English lettering clearly visible: "White Star Parachute." Later, a quick check on an internet weapons guide reveals that these flares were made in the US.[1] There is a sense of grim determination and horror in the faces of the people who belong to this place and everywhere, wide-eyed, terrified, crying children. One teenage boy plays at his computer, seemingly oblivious to the destruction around him, American pop music drifting through the open rooms. On the first floor, we are told that a 70-year-old man was shot and killed when he opened his door for the soldiers.

In one apartment we are examining a tiled fireplace, fractured during the attack. An intense young woman, holding her crying child, approaches the group, clearly wanting to talk.

> "The soldiers are all in this building. You are American? I want to say something. I want to transport a true picture about our life. They in America, they don't know what we are living here. They think we are shit. Really! I heard it from more than one person. We are human being, like you! Transport a picture to see why and how we live here in Palestine. My God put us here. If he put us in America, then we live there. You understand me? I am very nervous and terrified."

She shows us her daughter's tiny white sweater, shot through with bullet holes and the child's bed, also riddled with bullets. Her husband hovers nearby. Later, I meet this woman, Fedaa Bolos, sitting with her child at the Rehabilitation Center, waiting to see the psychiatrist on our delegation.

An attractive woman with delicate features and a burning sense of indignation, Fedaa is trying to comfort her anxious two-and-a-half-year-old daughter Lara. Gradually we start to talk about trauma, recovery, and the recent events that radically changed her life. I learn that Fedaa is 28 years old, a graduate of Najah University with a major in economics. Because she has been unable to find work, she stays at home and cares for her daughter, reading and watching TV for distraction. "There is no place to go or to take my child to play." Her husband, Nomair Isbaih, is now 30 years old and a production manager in his father's industrial engineering company.

She recounts that her husband woke her at 1:15 a.m. and told her:

> "There's Jewish in our area and I am afraid about Lara alone in her room. Go to her room." I said, "Nomair, I want to sleep." He came back angry and said, "Fedaa, wake up." Suddenly they shoot at us. There is a bombing sound in the bathroom. I get out and go quickly to Lara's room. I sat behind my daughter and they shoot us again in Lara's room. Nomair started shouting at them, "Go! What do you want? Why do you shoot us? There is a baby here." The soldier was standing in front of the window, maybe one meter from us. He said to Nomair, "Go, I will shoot you now." Then Nomair carries me and Lara to our room, seconds between Nomair and death. This is a miracle, I was shaking and I felt my soul go and Nomair hit me on my face and Lara is not crying, not speaking, just shaking.

> When we go to my room, it started to rain bullets and glass and rocks where Nomair was standing. After that we realize they saw us, we move from one room to others and Nomair was thinking quickly and he said we must hide in a place they can't see us, under a chair in the corner from 2 o'clock until 5:30 a.m. We heard something broken and shooting. They search me on the stairs. Then the soldiers sat in my home for a day-and-a-half during which time we went to a neighbor's home. They smash my home when we was in our neighbor's house.
>
> I saw death in my eyes and in my husband's eyes and child's eyes. And the difficult thing is that I saw Nomair can't protect me and my child. He hasn't anything in his hands to do it. The cat can protect her child, but we can't. Why are we like this? Why can't we live in peace? Why must we live in fear?

Now she waits in a crowded clinic with her child, unclear how to cope with her own incessant shaking, her inability to go to the bathroom at night alone, her husband's anger with his wife's paralysis in the face of danger and his own impotence in front of soldiers. Her daughter clings fearfully to her and has started to wet her bed at night. Fedaa struggles with feelings of aggression and anger and is having difficulties sleeping. She talks of the soldiers confronting Nomair, forcing him to strip to his underwear, and "tying his hands so bad, the blood cannot move in his fingers." She adamantly denies that anyone was involved in shooting at the Israeli soldiers. Weeks later we exchange emails and she says, "We are still tired and still afraid to move in our home after 8 p.m." She desperately wants to move to a safe place, "where there are no Jewish guns," but her visa has been repeatedly denied. She has never met an Israeli who is not a soldier.

Reports in the BBC[2] and the Israeli daily 'Haaretz'[3] note that an Israeli raid into Nablus killed "one Palestinian civilian and one militant." The Israeli military expressed regret but did not assume responsibility for the death of the elderly man. Interestingly, B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, includes a careful description of the event on its website. This confirms what we were told and adds additional details regarding the shooting of the old man, the soldiers' delay in calling an ambulance, and the rounding up and temporary detention of a number of the men in the Sabiah apartment.[4]

For me, there is so much that is truly obscene in this description, both in its particulars and as an example of daily occurrences in the Occupied Territories. Israelis have a right to demand security, but I wonder what is happening in the mind of an Israeli soldier when he threatens to shoot an unarmed Palestinian man clutching his wife and child in his own home, or uses another as a human shield to move from apartment to apartment, or shoots an elderly man in the doorway of his apartment? How do repeated acts of collective punishment and humiliating and terrorizing civilians possibly contribute to Israeli security? Think of the tens of thousands of Fedaas whose lives are constricted and traumatized by these experiences. Think of the children who have never met an Israeli who did not carry a gun. Look at what we know and what we choose not to see. Consider our media, where the suffering of the innocents in the Israeli town of Sderot periodically bombarded by Katusha rockets from Gaza, is squarely in the public eye while the innocents in the city of Nablus under frequent attack by a heavily-armed military, stand invisible and unheard.

Think of the children who have never met an Israeli who did not carry a gun.

A Day in Tulkarem: Hope and Harassment

The morning of October 24, 2007 is supposed to be straightforward. I board a sparkling, new ambulance, a row of stethoscopes jangling like loose-legged frogs, grasping my passport and US medical license. We set off for Route 60, the main north-south highway used by Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank. Five minutes into the trip, at the first checkpoint, an Israeli soldier demands our papers, flips through the documents and says, "No!" thus violating the Geneva conventions and a host of humanitarian laws regarding the safe passage of medical personnel.

The ambulance driver returns to PMRS, and after further consultation, I find myself in a vehicle with a PMRS sign perched on the dashboard, snaking through small Palestinian villages as we make our way up the back roads between Ramallah and Tulkarem. The trip involves seven checkpoints, long lines of cars, tiresome delays, and takes one-and-a-half hours. Our documents are never again reviewed.

At one point, we arrive at a flying checkpoint with one car ahead of us. Two Israeli soldiers have parked their military

vehicle to obstruct passage and are lackadaisically setting up metal pyramids, draping cloth over them that read "STOP," and placing a ribbon of spikes across the road. As we wait, I study the body language of the soldiers. A little flick of the hand, a quick nod of the head, a gesture of the arm, either means stop or go. I can see the first driver constantly watching and at one point he interprets a nod of the head to mean, "Go," and drives up to the flying checkpoint and we follow. This infuriates the soldiers and they start yelling, "Back up! back up!" After this slow motion choreography, the checkpoint is finally complete and the soldiers wave us through, ending a bizarre moment of arbitrary harassment.

They consider moving to Ramallah, but Khuloud is afraid she will be caught without papers, deported and separated from her family.

Tulkarem is a sad little city with a lively marketplace and the PMRS clinic is located on the second floor above a women's clothing store. A row of blond, blank-faced mannequins, probably dating from the 1950s, wearing delicately embroidered Palestinian dresses, lines the entry to the shop as I head up the steep stairs to the tumult of a clinic waiting room. As I feared, I am so late that Dr. Khuloud Salman has already seen most of the patients.

Khuloud is an attractive, small-boned woman with a vivacious face and easy laugh. Her nine-year-old and six-and-a-half year old daughters, Waed (Promise) and Majd (Glory), play at the computer behind her desk and are soon absorbed in drawing with the magic markers I pull out of my pack. In between discussing medical topics from vaginitis to menopause, nibbling on sweets and strawberry juice, and seeing two patients, Khuloud agrees to share her life story.

> "I am a Palestinian from Ramallah but I was born in Kuwait. My parents left the West Bank before the last occupation in 1967. They have to work; my mother was a nurse and my father was working in an insurance company. So I am born in Kuwait, I finished my high school there and then I went to get my training in Bulgaria."

She explains she cannot live in Kuwait because the Gulf States do not offer citizenship to foreigners born there and at this point she holds a Jordanian passport. At the age of 18, she traveled to Bulgaria and started her university and medical school training. She met her future husband and because he is a citizen of the West Bank, after a seven year sojourn in Jordan, they returned to Palestine. Her problem is that she does not have an identity card. "My parents, they lost their identity card when they were working in Kuwait. When the occupation in 1967 happened, the Israelis gave the identity cards for the people who are here in the West Bank. So now they are living in Jordan and I came here. Now I haven't seen them for 10 years."

She initially entered the West Bank with a three-month permit because she is married to a Palestinian with papers. The permit was renewed for another three months and Khuloud gave her documents to the Israeli authorities to obtain an identity card and permanent status, "because I have the right, not only because it is my land, but because I am married to a citizen from here. But you know what happened after the Intifada, they stopped everything." Since 2000, she has waited for a response, living illegally in Tulkarem, constantly afraid that she will be deported to Jordan. She laughs, "What are you going to do?" and explains, "Everything in our lives stopped for this ID card." The couple would like to own a home, but they rent because of the uncertainties surrounding her ID. They consider moving to Ramallah, but Khuloud is afraid she will be caught without papers, deported and separated from her family.

She works six days a week from 8 to 2 o'clock and the girls join her when school is over at 1 o'clock. Her sweet-faced daughters laugh shyly and pose coyly for photos in their dark blue and white striped school uniforms, and then return to the serious business of drawing. Khuloud explains that her husband is a pediatrician and works in a Ministry of Health hospital in Nablus and he and the daughters all have identity cards and have traveled to see her parents. She describes a very modern marriage in which her husband cooks and cleans, "He is a big helper." This may be a reflection of their experiences in Bulgaria, but both of them are from families that are "communist and open-minded." After living in Bulgaria and traveling in Germany, Eastern Europe and many Arab countries, she finds Tulkarem provincial and not open to other cultures as people rarely travel out of the city. She remarks that she maintains her equanimity through contact on the internet. She keeps medically up-to-date and also exchanges videos and messages with her family, although she notes her children are much more computer savvy than she.

As the sound of Arabic music and honking traffic insinuates into our conversation Khuloud says she would like her children to study the oud, (a Middle Eastern stringed instrument), and plans to

hire a private teacher from Ramallah. She dreams that they will be able to live a better life, to have a good education, and to travel around the world.

Meeting Nonviolent Resisters: Combatants for Peace

I meet up with an Israeli, Shimon Katz, south of Hebron near a dusty, devastated Palestinian village called Tuwani after visiting a family forced to live in a cave due to Israeli restrictions on housing in the area. Sweet-faced and earnest with a gentle manner, Shimon talks of his recent personal conflicts and his plans to move to the north of Israel to begin a training program in clinical social work. I am interested in his transformation from an elite combat officer in the IDF to an active member of Combatants for Peace, started in 2005. As we drive past hilltop Jewish settlements and tiny outposts, Israeli army installations and old Palestinian villages, Shimon shares his personal journey.

> "I was an officer in the army in an elite unit but afterwards I went to the Far East and started getting involved in meditation and it was a very transformative period in my life. I was also examining the masculine, macho stuff and switching onto the more feminine part, more listening. I became interested in meditation and the Dali Lama and Mahatma Gandhi. It was a profound transformation in my life. When I got back I still served in the reserves. I really felt how I grew up as an Israeli that needs to serve, defend and take care, and I should be a loyal citizen who obeys the law. I actually advocated for that when I was an officer in the army and then I felt at the same time it doesn't follow my moral way of thinking."

He describes a gradual process as well as a critical turning point. His unit was serving in "Schem" (Nablus) and one Israeli soldier was shot in the head and killed. He remembers that they were on a mountain overlooking the city around 6 p.m. and there was shooting towards his unit. "And the routine was to shoot back into the city, even if you don't really see exactly where the shooting is coming from." One soldier suggested shooting at the Palestinian rooftop solar panels.

> "We're going to make them suffer and then the shooting will stop." Something felt wrong with that kind of thinking. I said, "No, we are shooting into a crowd of people or to the city, that's not responsible. We can defend ourselves without shooting back into the city, because shooting back into the city creates more and more suffering and misery and reasons for them to want to retaliate." This is the whole story in a nutshell, the action and reaction between us and them. I personally think that Israel doesn't have negative aspirations, and is not blood hungry. Since it was formed, Israel is just not sensitive enough to the native people who have been living here.

IDF trucks rattle by and we pass clusters of heavily-armed Israeli soldiers along the highway. Shimon comments, "The truth is honestly I feel more safe driving on this road when I know that there is army guys every few kilometers because there's been a lot of rock throwing and shooting and that kind of stuff. I think we shouldn't be here at all as Israelis or maybe if the Palestinians welcome us to come here, but not forcefully to be here." He then reflects that Arabs too have flaws; everyone makes mistakes.

> "It's not like one side is completely the victim and the other side is the aggressor. Sometimes it seems like that, but I think truth is beyond that, from my point of view. It's not that they're only innocent victims and we're bloodthirsty, it's not true. We could have gotten along with each other."

Shimon needs to leave to join up with other Combatants for Peace who are going to work in the olive harvest. He explains that picking olives side-by-side with Palestinian farmers is both an act of solidarity and a means of protection for the farmers who are often harassed or assaulted by hostile, gun-toting, rock-throwing Jewish settlers. I need to return to Ramallah to meet up with the other half of this organization, Palestinian fighters who have been imprisoned in Israeli jails and now have decided to put down their guns and fight non-violently to end the communal bloodletting.

I head back to Ramallah to the Rocky Hotel, an elegant building a half-an-hour walk from the center of town, surrounded by that mix of construction and catastrophe that is part of the historical legacy of this area. Two Palestinian Combatants for Peace

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meet us for an evening of discussion, sweets, and chain-smoking. Once again, I am most interested in the personal transformation that these militant fighters have undergone.

I am most interested in the personal transformation that these militant fighters have undergone.

Osama Abu Kersh, a handsome man with slightly graying hair, a gentle look of determination, and a pensive, expressive face, is more fluent in English than his colleague, Ra'ed al Haddar. Wearing an open plaid shirt, white khaki pants, and holding a small cup of coffee and a cigarette with a long tail of ash, he begins his story. In the First Intifada when he was 14 years old, living south of Hebron, he became involved in demonstrations, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, writing on walls, and organizing anti-occupation activities. The focus of the group was to raise the Palestinian flag. "It's a symbolic thing about our identity, about our state, but we speak here about thirteen-year-olds. It's like children games. But somehow, it's about occupation."

> "Our parents, they try to keep us away from the Israeli army. Our parents dressed us in the morning to go to school. We go to school but on the way to school we see the Israeli army. When we go out we saw them in the street, we saw them in our playground, in front of our houses. Everywhere we see the Israeli army, the military jeeps. It's not about control of our parents. They tried to punish us, to control us, "Don't go. Don't leave the home." But in the end, you can see them anyway, anytime, you can see the Israeli army."

At the age of 14, Osama was imprisoned for three years in three different jails. He describes his arrest in the cold of March and nine days of investigation punctuated by cold showers, food deprivation, and painful beatings with a plastic rod while handcuffed. He wrinkles his forehead, gesturing with his well-manicured hands, and depicts the technique used for sleep deprivation: hanging the prisoner by his arms from the wall in an arched position where a sharp object jabs him in the back if his body curls forward. "I think if you are 150 cm, you will be hanging 155. You understand?"

The first nine days, no one was allowed to visit him. These nine days were the most difficult in his life, "because of pain, because of all these techniques that they use, I give them all information. I will not be a hero, because I'm a child then. What kind of information you need from me?"

He was then transferred to a regular prison and became acquainted with the prison system and the monthly visits from his lawyer. Osama lived in a four meter by four meter cell with 16 similarly aged teenagers in an Israeli prison internally organized by Fatah. He says he had to wake up at seven, do exercises, have breakfast and then study subjects, "related to our history, our evolution, our identity, our state, our politics," led by the oldest boy in the group. They were supplied with books, pens, and paper. At 11 o'clock they were taken to an outside area enclosed by a net, "But you can see the sun. We sit or walk one hour and then we go back to the room. It's free time until two. You can sleep. You can read. You can play." At two there was lunch and at four, another educational meeting. The prisoners had personal free time until dinner. "From nine-and-a-half until ten it's preparing beds to sleep. After this we sleep until morning, and another day, another day."

We are impressed by this very disciplined educational system in the jail and Osama explains that this arrangement was built through nonviolent struggles and strikes against the Israelis. He adds that the emotional turmoil continued despite the organization.

> Because we are children, we are boys, there. We change it from jail space to play space. We eat chocolate. We laugh, we cry, we fight each other, but it's not fighting-fighting. We are as children fight each other, but the hard moment in this day is when you go to sleep. You miss things you have in daily life. It's about your parents, about your family. Hard moments. That's our life in the jail.

Upon release, he says he was quieter, ready to complete high school, start college, and that is when he met Ra'ed at Birzeit University. The two students became active in the Fatah youth movement and in student council. In 1994, one year after the Oslo agreement, Osama was asked to join an Israeli-Palestinian youth meeting organized through the Fatah Youth Organization. He started to meet Israelis through a group called People to People.[5] "I met many Israelis in Jericho, Tel Aviv, in Italy." They continued meeting until 1999, the debacle at Camp David, and the beginning of the Second Intifada.

Everything changed in 2000. There was great confusion, "Whether to join this violence or to stop, it's a big question raised at that

time." Some of Osama's friends joined in violent resistance, others focused on their personal lives and families. Then in 2002, the Israeli army invaded the cities of the West Bank and was met with violent resistance. Osama and Ra'ed struggled with the personal changes that had started in the prisons and continued while they were in the university.

> This time we think, "No! We can defend our people through nonviolent struggle. I remember when the Israeli army entered the Moquata, where Arafat lived, and surrounded him. All the people of Ramallah took things from the kitchen and start to bang pots. Through one hour, tens of thousands of peoples were in the roads. And that night I think there are three who are killed and many wounded.
>
> This proved to me that the nonviolent struggle is more effective. I start through a project with an NGO named MEND, (Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy) to establish groups of nonviolence in each city. At the end of 2004 we, as a group of friends, started to meet the ex-Israeli soldiers who refuse to serve in West Bank and Gaza and we start to build Combatants for Peace.

Like Ra'ed, Osama's family needed to discuss his positions before they were able to support him.

Osama explains that the Combatants for Peace are involved in nonviolent protest rallies that attract thousands of Palestinians as well as meetings with Israelis which usually occur in Area C on the West Bank. He reminds us that there is a long history of Palestinian nonviolent resistance in the form of boycotts, refusal to pay taxes to the Israeli authorities, and demonstrations. The combatants continue to meet and share their individual stories despite the pain and conflict. Osama describes hearing Israeli soldiers talk of establishing curfews in Palestinian towns, entering cities in tanks, and killing Palestinians. The Palestinians are also aware that at home, the Israeli soldiers have been personally threatened and sometimes jailed when they take public positions refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories.

The Israeli combatants deal with both the accusation of betrayal and the apathy of the Israeli population. Many reservists prefer to forget the details of their military experiences, preferring to go off to India like Shimon, but often becoming more involved in the amnesia produced by drug use than the insight born of meditation. We discuss the continued violence, the recent prison riot in the desert detention camp, Kitziot, the steady loss of Palestinian life, the dangers of bringing Israelis into areas where the wounds are fresh.

On the other hand, these combatants have more credibility than many other grassroots organizations because they personally have been involved in the violence, whether in the army, on the streets, or in the prisons. This group is also unique in that it has attempted to address the common problem of Israel domination of joint organizations by establishing a democratic steering committee, with seven Israelis and seven Palestinians, where decisions are made by consensus. The combatants plan to maintain their office in Al Ram, a neighborhood northeast of East Jerusalem, and to branch out into smaller local groups in Tel Aviv and Tulkarem, Jerusalem and Ramallah, Be'ersheva and South Hebron. Because of the intense restrictions on movement for Palestinians, the combatants are trying to develop local autonomous groups, guided by the steering committee. They focus on meeting with Palestinian ex-prisoners and as Osama explains, "We are not against Israel, against the Israeli army. We are against the occupier of the West Bank and Gaza. We are against the occupation. The best solution is a two-state solution on the '67 border. When you defend your state on your border it's your right." He laughs and adds, "Ah! But you have to know where your border is!"

He reminds us that there is a long history of Palestinian nonviolent resistance in the form of boycotts, refusal to pay taxes to the Israeli authorities, and demonstrations.

Notes

1. http://www.inetres.com/gp/military/infantry/grenade/40mm_ammo.html (accessed 12/28/07)
2. http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7046541.stm (accessed 12/28/07)
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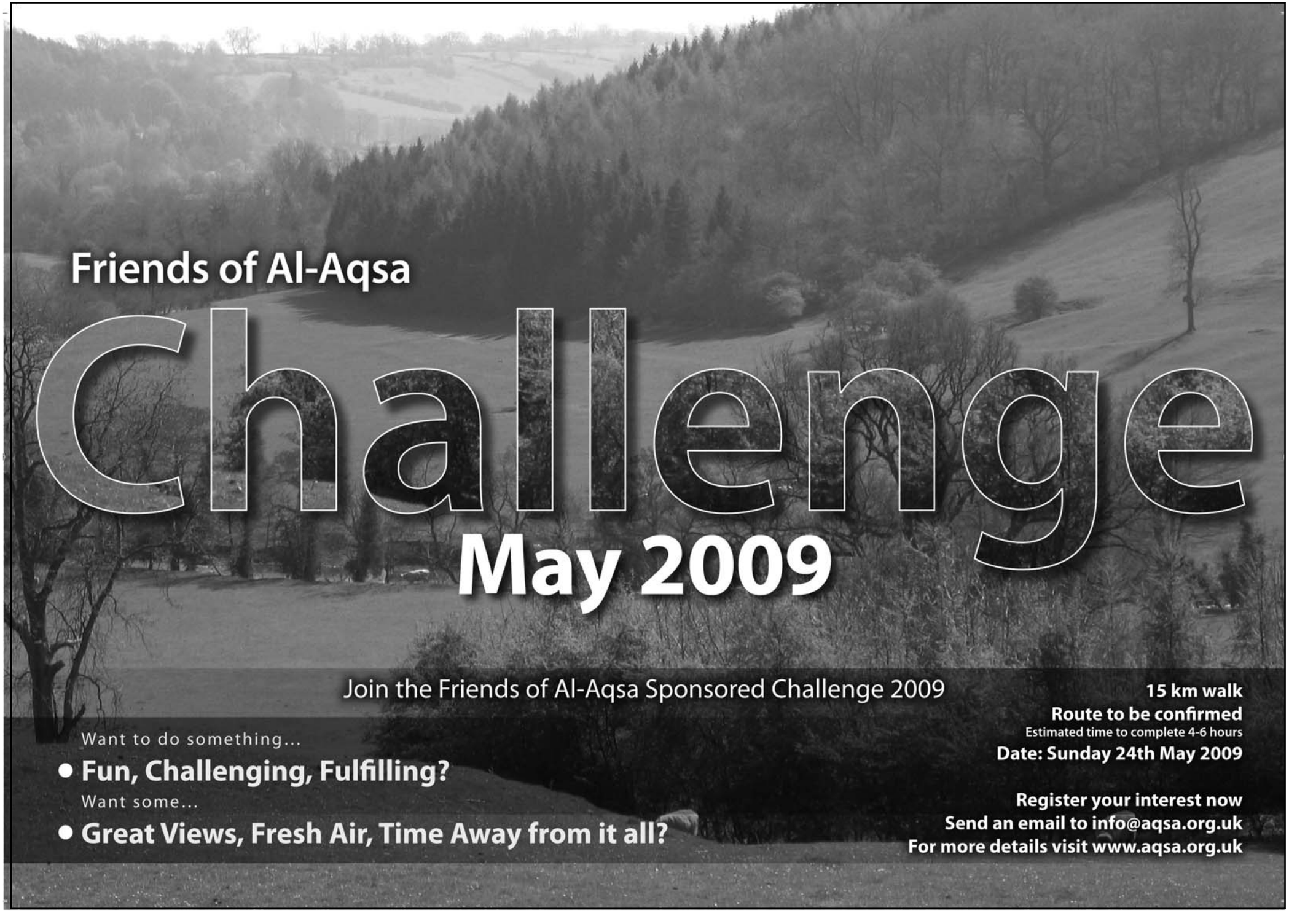
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The Israeli 'Miracle', Denial and the Alternative to Apartheid

Ramzy Baroud*

Israel: A Miraculous Birth?

Israelis and their supporters tend to depict Israel as a country of miracles. What else could explain the country's astonishing "birth" and subsequent survival against all sorts of "existential threats"? How else would Israel develop at such a phenomenal pace, making the "desert bloom" and continually scoring a high ranking amongst developed nations in most noteworthy aspects?

Meanwhile, Palestinians continue to be depicted as "their own worst enemies", a people who "never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity" and who stand outside the parameters of rational human behaviour. Israel is often, if not always, contrasted against a regional backdrop of "backward", "undemocratic" and essentially violent Arabs and Muslims.

Such depictions - of luminous, civilised Israelis facing wicked, backward Arabs - are the building blocks of a polemic sold tirelessly by Israeli, American and Western media. Most often, it goes unchallenged, thus defining the West's understanding of Israel and its moral "right to exist". The argument is rooted in the horrors of the Jewish holocaust; however, Israel's handlers have managed to turn deserved sympathy for that tragedy into an unwarranted assertion, somehow equating Palestinians with Nazi Germany in order to justify a constant state of war in the name of self-defence.

In this specific context, the power of the media cannot be over-emphasised. It has defined a fallacious reality based on a skewed narrative. Never in history has a story been so slanted as that of Palestine and Israel. Never has the victim been so squarely blamed for his own misfortunes as the Palestinian. This is not an arrogant counter-narrative to Israel's concoctions. It is a glaring truth that continues to be either ignored or misunderstood.

The "miracles" often associated with Israel are not random; they are assertions. Miracles are a religious notion, referring to the unexplained and supernatural. Thus they become exempt from rational questioning. This formula has served Israel's strategic purposes well. On one hand, Israel's existence is portrayed as a resurrection of sorts: from near-annihilation to a "miraculous" rebirth. Indeed, considering how the 'Birth of Israel' story is offered, the narrative is no less impressive than biblical legends. Such discourse has been used successfully to appeal to a much larger group than those who identify with Israel on ethnic or religious grounds. It has impressed tens of millions of Christian fundamentalists worldwide. In the United States, Christian Zionists represent the popular backbone of the pro-Israeli camp. While American Jews tend to vote based on economic or political interests, Christian Zionists see their allegiance to Israel as a religious duty.

Like all religious miracles, Israeli miracles are "matters of faith". They can either be accepted as one package or rejected as such; the bottom line is that they are beyond argument, beyond the need for tangible proof. Those foolish enough to deconstruct this - and thus question Israel as a state accountable to law, like all others - are subjected to the wrath of God (in the case of the "true believer") or the wrath of the media and the Zionist lobby (in the case of the sceptic). When an American politician, for example, is accused of not standing "fully behind Israel", the accusation doesn't warrant justification. It stands on its own, like a biblical command that has survived the test of time and reason: Thou shalt stand fully behind Israel. The accused politician can only defend his record of support for Israel; he

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cannot question why this is necessary in the first place, or ever acknowledge the fact that the latter's track record is soaked in blood, sullied by illegal occupations, and grounded on human rights violations and defiance of international law.

They lost because, as parallel historic experiences demonstrate, neither bravery nor fortitude were enough to withstand so many powerful forces at play, all plotting for their downfall.

As the 60th anniversary of the birth of Israel came and went, a most impressive, albeit grotesque, misrepresentation of that history was offered in abundance. Media pundits and politicians once again celebrated the miracle, omitting how Israel was delivered on top of the ruins of hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages. The killing and ethnic cleansing that became known as the Palestinian Catastrophe, or *Nakba*, was not the work of invisible and miraculous seraphs, but rather well trained and well-armed Zionist gangs and their supporters.

Nor did Palestinians lose the battle due to their laxity or backwardness. Their bravery, for those who care to consult serious historical works (such as those of Israeli historian Ilan Pappe or late Palestinian Professor Edward Said), is a badge of honour that will be carried by Palestinians for years to come. They lost because, as parallel historic experiences demonstrate, neither bravery nor fortitude were enough to withstand so many powerful forces at play, all plotting for their downfall.

Moreover, those celebrating Israel's miraculous efforts in making the desert bloom, the inference being that "nomadic Palestinians" failed to connect with the "neglected" land, and only the "return" of its rightful owners managed to bring about its renewal, will most likely forget that its was the Palestinian proletariat, the cheap, oppressed, and dispossessed labour force, that mostly worked the land, erected the homes and tended to the gardens of the miracle state. And no less than $100 billion of American taxpayers' money contributed to Israel's current economic viability, as well as military preparedness.

All of this is likely to be overlooked as Israel and "friends of Israel" around the world celebrate another miraculous year of survival and affluence. Will they pause to wonder why over five million Palestinian refugees are dispossessed and scattered around the world? Will they lend a moment's silence to the many thousands who were brutally murdered so that Israel could live this fallacious miracle? Will they ever understand the pain and the tears of successive generations dying while holding onto the keys of homes that were destroyed, deeds to land that was stolen, and memories of a once beautiful reality from which they were violently uprooted?

If there is any miracle in Israel's existence it is that the lies upon which it is founded could be perpetuated for so long, despite glaringly obvious truths to the contrary. Indeed, it is a miracle that such grave injustice could reign for so long uncontested.

And as the Israeli miracle is celebrated, the very existence of Palestinians, or, at best the recognition of their long denied rights, is doubted.

Palestine and the Palestinians

'Don't ask for what you never had,' is the underlying message made by supporters of Israel when they claim Palestine was never a state to begin with.

The contention is, of course, easily refutable. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century, colonial powers plotted to divide the spoils. When Britain and France signed the secretive Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916, which divided the spheres of influence in west Asia, there were hardly any 'nation-states' in the region which would fit contemporary definitions of the term.

All borders were colonial concoctions that served the interests of the powerful countries seeking strategic control, political influence and raw material. Most of Africa and much of Asia were victims of the colonial scrambles, which disfigured their geo-political and subsequently socio-economic compositions.

But Palestinians, like many other people, did see themselves as a unique group linked historically to a specific geographic entity. *All That Remains* by Professor Walid Khalidi is one leading volume which documents a thriving pre-Israel history of Palestine and the Palestinian people. Such history is often overlooked, if not entirely dismissed. Some choose to believe that no other civilization ever existed in Palestine, neither prior to nor between the assumed destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE until the founding of Israel in 1948. But what about irrefutable facts? For example, the Israeli Jerusalem Post was called the Palestine Post when it was founded in 1932. Why Palestine and not Israel? Whose existence, as a definable political entity, preceded the other? The answer is obvious.

It is not the denial or acceptance of Israel's existence that concerns me. Israel does exist, even if it refuses to define its borders, or acknowledge the historic injustices

committed against the Palestinian people. The systematic and brutal ethnic cleaning of the majority of Palestinian Christians and Muslims from 1947 to 1948 is what produced a Jewish majority in Palestine and subsequently the 'Jewish state' of Israel.

Also worth remembering are the equally systematic attempts at dehumanising Palestinians and denying them any rights. When Ehud Barak, Prime Minister of Israel at the time, compared Palestinians in a Jerusalem Post interview to "crocodiles, the more you give them meat, they want more,"[1] he was hardly diverting from a consistent Zionist tradition that equated Palestinians with animals and vermin. Another Prime Minister, Menachem Begin referred to Palestinians in a Knesset speech as "beasts walking on two legs."[2] They have also been described as "grasshoppers", "cockroaches" and more by famed Israeli statesmen.

Disturbingly, such references might be seen as an improvement from former Prime Minister Golda Meir's claim that "there were no such thing as Palestinians...they did not exist."[3]

To justify its own existence, Israel has long subjugated its citizens to a kind of collective amnesia. Do Israelis realise they live on the rubble of hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns, each destroyed during a most tragic history of blood, pain and tears, resulting in an ethnic cleansing of nearly 800,000 Palestinians?

As Israel celebrated its 60th birthday, nothing is allowed to blemish the supposed heroism of its founding fathers or those who fought in its name. Palestine, the Palestinians, and an immeasurably long relationship between a people and their land hardly merit a pause as Israeli officials and their Western counterparts carry on with their festivities.

While some conveniently forgot many historic chapters pertinent to the suffering of Palestinians, Israeli leaders - especially those who took part in the colonization of Palestine - were fully aware of what they did. David Ben Gurion, the first Prime Minister of Israel, warned in 1948, "We must do everything to insure they (the Palestinians) never do return." By ensuring that Palestinians were cut off from their land, Ben Gurion had hoped that time will take care of the rest. "The old will die and the young will forget," he said.

Moshe Dayan, a former Israeli Defence Minister also had no illusions regarding the real history beneath Israel's momentous achievements. His speech at the Technion in Haifa was quoted in the Israeli daily Haaretz thus: "We came here to a country that was populated by Arabs and we are building here a Hebrew, a Jewish state; instead of the Arab villages, Jewish villages were established. You even do not know the names of those villages, and I do not blame you because these villages no longer exist. There is not a single Jewish settlement that was not established in the place of a former Arab village."[4]

Israel has, since its inception, laboured to undermine any sense of Palestinian identity. Without most of their historic land, the relationship between Palestinians and Palestine could only exist in memory. Eventually though, memory managed to morph into a collective identity that has proved more durable than the physical existence on the land. "It is a testimony to the tenacity of Palestinians that they have kept alive a sense of nationhood in the face of so much adversity. Yet the obstacles to sustaining their cohesiveness as a people are today greater than ever,"[5] reported the Economist.

Memory managed to morph into a collective identity that has proved more durable than the physical existence on the land.

Living in so many disconnected areas, removed from their land, detached from one another, fought with at every corner, Palestinians have not just been oppressed physically by Israel, but psychologically as well. There are attempts from all angles to force them to simply concede, forget, and move on. It is the Palestinian people's rejection of such notions that makes Israel's victory and 'independence' superficial and unconvincing.

Sixty years after their Catastrophe (Nakba), Palestinians still remember their past and present injustices. Of course more than mere remembrance is necessary; Palestinians need to find a common ground for unity - Christians and Muslims, poor and rich, secularist and the religious - in order to stop Israel from eagerly exploiting their own disunity, factionalism and political tribalism.

However, despite Israel's hopes and best efforts, Palestinians have not yet forgotten who they are. And no amount of denial can change this.

The Alternative?

For the last 60 years, all those who have sought a genuinely peaceful and fair solution for Israel and Palestine have faced the same obstacle—Israel's sense of invincibility and military arrogance, abetted by the US and other Western governments' unwavering support.

Despite recent setbacks on the military front, the Israeli government is yet to awaken

to the reality that Israel is simply not invincible. The wheel of history, which has seen the rise and fall of many great powers, won't grind to a halt. Experiences have also repeatedly shown that neither Israel's nuclear arms nor Washington's billions of dollars in annual funds could create 'security' for the former.

What Israel has created in Palestine belies its own claim that its ultimate wish is peace with security.

While Israel can celebrate whatever skewed version of history it wishes to, it still cannot defeat ordinary people armed with their will to survive and reclaim what was rightfully theirs. The same problem confronted the US in Vietnam, France in Algeria and Italy in Libya. The Palestinian people will not evaporate. Attempts to undermine Palestinian unity, instigate civil violence, and groom and present shady characters as 'representatives' of Palestinians have failed in the past and will continue to fail.

Representing, and thus dealing with the conflict as one invented and sustained by Arab greed and Palestinian terrorism helped Israel garner sympathy, while simultaneously convoluting what should have been an urgent example of injustice, predicated on colonialism and ethnic cleansing.

More, depicting the mere existence of Palestinians as a 'threat', a 'problem' and a 'demographic bomb' is inhumane and actually a full-fledged form of racism. Throughout its 60 years of existence, successive Israeli governments have treated Palestinians—the native inhabitants of historic Palestine—as undesired and thus negligible inhabitants of a land that was promised only to Jews by some divine power thousands of years ago.

This archaic concept has managed to define mainstream politics in Israel, and increasingly the US, allowing religious doctrines to discriminate and brutally repress Palestinians, both citizens of Israel and residents of the occupied Territories.

Needless to say, neither a figurative Iron wall, like that proposed by Vladimir Jabotinsky in 1923, nor an actual massive and menacing structure as the one being erected in the West Bank can really separate Israel from its 'problem', the Palestinians. An area roughly the size of the US state of Vermont cannot sustain such a complex model—a country that is open unconditionally for all Jews who wish to immigrate, and an oppressed population that is caged in between walls, fences, and hundreds of checkpoints—without inviting perpetual conflict.

What Israel has created in Palestine belies its own claim that its ultimate wish is peace with security. While occupied East Jerusalem is entirely annexed by an Israeli government diktat, 40 per cent of the total size of the West Bank is used exclusively for the purposes of the illegal Jewish settlers and the Israeli military. How can Israel's claim of wanting to live in peace be taken seriously if it continues to invade the lives, confiscate the land and usurp the water of Palestinians?

When Israel invaded East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, the Jewish citizens of Israel celebrated the 'return' of biblical Judea and Samaria and the reunification of Jerusalem. Nearly 300,000 more Palestinians were ethnically cleansed, adding to the many more who were evicted from historic Palestine in 1948.

Yet, most Palestinians have remained hostage to the Israeli-invented limbo that suggests they were neither citizens of Israel, nor of their own state, nor deserving of the rights of an occupied civilian population under the Geneva Convention.

Despite this, Israel's insistence on employing military 'solutions' in its dealing with Palestinians have constantly backfired. Palestinians naturally rebelled and were repeatedly suppressed, which only worsened the feud and heightened the level of violence.

The PLO's acceptance of Israel's existence, and UN Resolution 242 as a first step towards a two state solution was both ridiculed and rejected by the Israeli government, which continued to arrange for its own ineffective and ultimately destructive solutions.

Throughout the years, Israel translated its military strength to erect more settlements and move its population to occupied Palestinian territories. Even after the Oslo Accords of September 1993, the construction of settlements didn't slow down, but rather accelerated. After the most recent peace talks in Annapolis in November 2007, Israel continues to grant more permits to build more homes in illegal settlements under the guise of 'natural expansion.' But it may have gone too far, leaving itself and Palestinians with few options now.

In a November 29, 2007 interview with Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warned that without a two-state agreement, Israel would face "a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights" in which case "Israel (would be) finished." It is ironic that Israeli leaders are now advocating the same solution that they vehemently rejected in the past. However, the Israeli version of the two-state agreement hardly meets the minimum expectations of Palestinians.

Without Jerusalem, without their refugees' right of return as enshrined in UN resolution 194 and with a West Bank dotted with over 216 settlements and scarred by a mammoth wall, asking Palestinians to accept an Israeli version of the two-state solution is asking them to agree to their eternal imprisonment, subjugation and defeat—which they have rejected generation after generation.

If Israel is indeed interested in a peaceful resolution to this bloody conflict, one that is based on equal human and legal rights, justice, security and lasting peace, then it must add a new word to its lexicon: coexistence. Jews and Arabs coexisted peacefully prior to the rise of Zionism, and they are capable of doing so in the future. Any other solution would simply institutionalise racism and apartheid, undermine democracy and human rights and thus further perpetuate violence.

Notes

1. *Jerusalem Post*, 30 August 2000
2. Quoted by Amnon Kapeliouk, "Begin and the 'Beasts'", the *New Statesman*, 25 June 1982.
3. Interview in the *Sunday Times*, 15 June 1969.
4. Haaretz, 4 April 1969.
5. 'The Wandering Palestinian', *The Economist* (print edition), 8 May 2008.

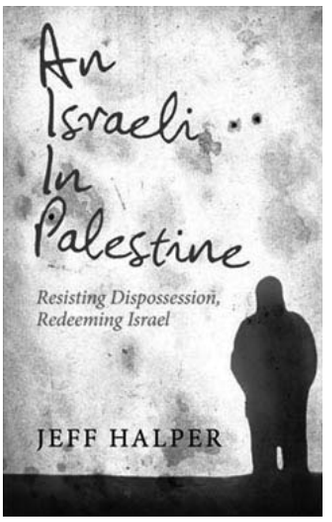
Books Available For Review

1. The Middle East in International Relations, Power, Politics and Ideology, by Fred Halliday
2. The Israel Palestine Conflict, by James Gelvin
3. Palestine Inside Out, An Everyday Occupation, by Saree Makdisi
4. A Doctor in Galilee, by Hatim Kanaaneh
5. Hamas in Politics, Democracy, Religion, violence, by Jeroen Gunning

Interested individuals contact Friends of Al-Aqsa

An Israeli in Palestine, Resisting Dispossession, Redeeming Israel

BY JEFF HALPER, London, Pluto Press, 2008, ISBN 978-0745322261, pp. 317, £16.99



In "An Israeli in Palestine," Jeff Halper describes his own journey from being a Jew living in the USA to becoming what he describes as an Israeli in Palestine. The turning point in Halper's view of Israel and Palestine occurred when he witnessed the demolition of a Palestinian family home by Israeli bulldozers. This experience was an eye opener through which he started to discover the injustices against and oppression of, the Palestinians.

Oppression is regarded by Halper as the key issue in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and he has based this whole book around it. The text is divided into four parts which are titled in consecutive order: "comprehending oppression", "sources of oppression", "the structure of oppression" and "overcoming oppression." Halper believes that "oppression names the situation and names the oppressor as well, in this case Israel and the Zionist movement that preceded it" (page 8).

The first three parts are divided into seven chapters and give a comprehensive account of the forced displacement of Palestinians which began in an organised way as early as 1904 and reached its peak in 1948, but never actually ended. The author acknowledges the ethnic cleansing that happened in 1948 with 36 massacres and the destruction of 517 entire villages (page 113). This horrible crime was not enough for the founders of Israel, as many of them saw the 1948 war as a "job undone." Halper quotes Yigal Allon who wrote just before the 1967 war "in case of a new war we must avoid the historic mistake of the war of independence and must not cease fighting until we achieve total victory; the territorial fulfilment of the land of Israel" (p141).

After the 1967 war which resulted in another catastrophe for the Palestinians and more dispossessions; the attempts to transfer Palestinians from their land continued. Moreover, Israeli governments have always tried to create facts on the ground aimed at making the occupation permanent.

In Halper's view, the causes of the oppression are rooted in the Zionist idea of having an ethnocratic Jewish state in Palestine. He rightly states that an ethnocracy cannot be democratic contrary to the claim that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East.

Halper concludes the book by proposing his personal views about overcoming this oppression, stating that the only way forward is by redeeming Israel from its colonial status and normalising its existence in the Middle East. The solution, he suggests, is a Middle East confederation within which Israelis can live peacefully and Palestinians can have the right to return. Halper also believes that reframing the conflict with the adoption of alternative opinions about the struggle and its roots is a necessary step to reaching a just peace.

In the introduction, Halper emphasises the importance of critical thinking, and he states that "one of the hardest parts of critical thinking is the ability to detect in yourself elements of irrationality, prejudice, fear, peer pressure and social conditioning- and to confront them" (page 29). It is easy to agree with this statement and in this book. Halper has shown critical and indeed courageous thinking. However, some further critical questions which are important in understanding the conflict were left unanswered.

Halper and many other Israeli academics and peace activists accept the Zionist idea that Jews as a nation "possess the right of self determination in their historic homeland…and it seemed …self evident that that home was the land of Israel" (page 21).

This statement gives rise to two questions overlooked by Halper. Firstly, if the Jewish people as a nation despair to have a homeland then why have only 1% of American Jews immigrated to Israel? Why have the other 99% stayed content and satisfied with living in the USA rather than fulfilling the urge to return to their national homeland? While Halper does mention that this fact is problematic, he makes no attempt to explain it.

Secondly, is it a fact that Palestine *is* the historic homeland for the Jewish people? Halper says this is "self evident", with religious and national sources to back up this claim. The religious claim roots from the Bible as God says to Abraham in Genesis12:7 "unto thy seed will I give this land." There are several problems regarding interpreting this verse:

1. God says 'I give this land'. Many religious Jews including orthodox rabbis believe it is only God who decides when to give the land and when to take it. Thus, they believe the Torah allows their return to

Palestine by divine intervention only and not by human attempts.

2. The verse speaks to Abraham and not to the Jewish people and Arabs are also the seeds of Abraham, thus why are they excluded from this promise?
3. The modern world cannot accept a religious text as the basis for claiming sovereignty over a land and justifying the ethnic cleansing and transfer of a whole nation.

The national claim to Palestine as being the homeland of Jews is even more difficult to justify. Palestine has 10,000 years of recorded history. The first people who lived there were the Canaanites who were Arabs and the Jewish people first came to Palestine as immigrants. Although the sons of Prophet Abraham were born in Palestine, Abraham himself immigrated to Palestine from Iraq. Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was the son of Isaac, went to Egypt as a slave, and when he was reunited with his family he asked them to bring all their people to Egypt. Thus, it was only a maximum of three generations of Jews who lived in Palestine during that period.

Following that, it was not until 1020BC that they again could enter Palestine with Prophet David. The kingdom of David and that of his son prophet Solomon lasted until 922 BC (98 years only). After that, Palestine was ruled by Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Romans until 638AD when it came under Islamic rule lasting for 1300 years.

It is clear from this historical background that Jews only ruled Palestine for a very short period and they were always immigrants to it. So the reference to Palestine as the national homeland of the Jewish people lacks credibility.

The confederation between Jews and Palestinians suggested by Halper could be an ideal peaceful solution within which the Israeli nationality could flourish within the larger Middle Eastern one. However, in reality, Israeli leaders are highly unlikely to accede to such a solution due to deep rooted prejudices and anti-Arab cultural conditioning.

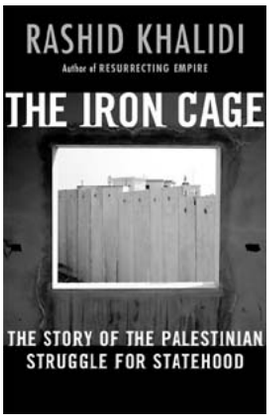
Halper is clearly sincere in his analysis. He says "I am an Israeli living in a real country called Israel, that means for me that Israel is a fact of life. No matter whether Israel should have been established, the crimes committed in 1948…Israel is a political fact that can not be simply erased, even if one feels all the moral justification to do so" (page 31). However, one would have to question the "facts on the ground" and what Halper's views about Israel as a permanent entity could mean in the future. If Israel is aiming to annex more Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, which it is clearly seen to be doing, and making this occupation permanent and a "political fact"; would Halper, in a decade or so, argue that the land stolen post-1967 is a fact which cannot be reversed and therefore requires no more discussion?

In conclusion, this is a thoroughly enjoyable book and the author is to be congratulated for his courageous ideas which for many Israelis would be unacceptable and unthinkable. However, some issues require further critical exploration in order to fully succeed in the aim set out by Halper, when he states: "a conflict cannot truly be ended unless its underlying causes are addressed."

Dr Heyam Awad

The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for State

BY RASHID KHALIDI, Oxford, Oneworld., 2006, ISBN 0807003093, £10.99



In this excellent and comprehensive account of the "Palestinian struggle for statehood" since the beginning of the British mandate in the early 1920s, Rashid Khalidi, while acknowledging that the Palestinians were "the weakest of all the parties engaged in the prolonged struggle to determine the fate of Palestine", sets out to explore the argument that the Palestinians were not only victims but should also take some responsibility for their continuing failure to achieve an independent state. He recognizes the link between the "pressing current issues of terrorism.

War in Iraq, United States policy, and the seemingly unconnected question of the Palestinians' failure to achieve independence" and attributes this to the continuity of western policies in Palestine. He argues, firstly, that we have to understand Palestinian history in its own terms; secondly, that we must "ascribe agency to the Palestinians", in order to avoid seeing them as "no more than helpless victims of forces far greater than themselves"; and, thirdly, that "the unfortunate case of Palestine illustrates…the long-term perils and pitfalls of great powers following short-sighted policies that are not based on their own professed principles, and are not consonant with international law and legitimacy".

There is no doubt that Palestinian history has been one of tragedy and injustice. This raises the question of whether the Palestinians could have done anything differently. By describing in detail British policies during its mandate over Palestine and, in particular, its commitment to the creation of a "national home" for the Jewish people and its use of "divide and rule" tactics to prevent the emergence of Palestinian pre-state structures, and by challenging some of the founding myths of the Israeli state, Khalidi suggests that Palestinians were let down by their leadership, mainly composed of traditional notable families, who failed to respond adequately to the rapidly escalating crisis in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet, even had the national leadership been more united and proactive, Khalidi argues that the outcome could probably not have been avoided. From the start, he notes, there was a "basic asymmetry" between the two sides. By the time the grassroots Palestinian revolt began in the mid-1930s, it was already too late. Palestinians were unable to escape from what he describes as "the fiendish iron cage devised for them by the British".

After 1948, the Palestinian people were scattered beyond the borders of their homeland and national identity became even more difficult to construct or maintain. The major achievement of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), founded in 1964, was its success in creating a vehicle for the achievement of Palestinian national aims "that was universally accepted among the entirety of the Palestinian people". In 1988, the PLO accepted a two-state solution but failed, in Khalidi's view, to draw "the logical conclusion that what was necessary was the re-education of the Palestinians away from armed struggle and toward a whole new approach of unarmed mass popular struggle (as demonstrated in the first *intifada*). Unfortunately, as Khalidi makes clear, the PLO – and its leader Yasir Arafat – had great difficulties in making the transition from a liberation movement engaged in armed struggle to an embryonic government. The Palestinian Authority, established in 1994 under the terms of the Oslo peace process, suffered from inexperience and was accused of arrogance and of engaging in increasingly corrupt practices. It contributed to what Khalidi described as "the Palestinians' failure to develop structures of state through most of their modern history". As a result, the ruling Fatah regime was defeated, in the January 2006 elections, by the Islamist Hamas party; many Palestinians believed that, not only was Hamas less corrupt than Fatah, but was also willing to stand up to the increasingly aggressive tactics of the Israeli occupation.

This book is a painstaking and scholarly piece of research. Khalidi starkly illustrates the awful dilemma of Palestinians who have, since the 1920s, faced an uphill struggle. Three principal levels of argument emerge. The first reveals the enormity of the struggle which pitted unprepared Palestinians against the might of the British empire. After the creation of the state of Israel, British patronage was replaced by the support of the mighty United States. Secondly, it seems that Palestinians have not been well served by their leaderships, either in the early chaotic days of struggle against the British and the Zionists or the more recent era of an inexperienced and corrupt Palestinian Authority. Thirdly, despite their many setbacks, the Palestinian people have refused simply to disappear as perhaps the Israelis might have liked; instead they have continued to resist the obliteration of their identity and the total loss of their land and, although the odds against them appear, especially since the start of the second *intifada* in 2000, almost insurmountable, Khalidi insists that Palestinians still have some power to influence their own future. It is here, I think, that we find the strength of this book.

To date, as Khalidi states, none of the Palestinian parties have been able to assert Palestinian rights or move closer to self-determination, and this raises the question, for him, of whether an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is any longer feasible. Given the continued Israeli expansion of settlements, the building of a network of roads for Israeli use only, and the construction of what Palestinians call the "Apartheid Wall" in the West Bank, it may be time to return to the old idea of a one-state solution. While acknowledging that such a step would face enormous obstacles and would be highly unequal, he concludes that this might be the best available answer to allow the Palestinians at last to be liberated from their iron cage.

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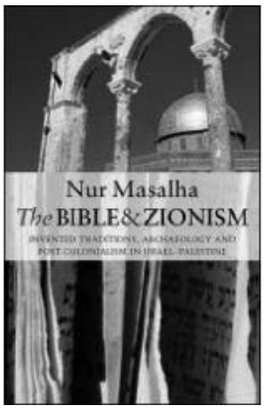
Dr Maria Holt

The Bible and Zionism: Invented Traditions, Archaeology and Post-Colonialism in Israel-Palestine

BY NUR MASALHA, London,Zed Books, 2007, ISBN: 978 1842777619, Pp.321 + notes, bibliography and index, £19.99



The author is a British-Palestinian academic who is Director of the Centre for Religion and History in the Department of Theology, Philosophy and History, St. Mary's University College, Twickenham, London. He is the author of numerous books on the Palestinian refugee crisis, and is a leading authority on this issue in the post-1948 history of the state of Israel. The book under review is as much a detailed scholarly work as well as an anguished 'cry of the heart' for Dr. Nur Masalha, as he seeks to reason out why his native homeland of Palestine was forced to become a kind of 'refuge(e)' holding station for Jewish people worldwide, whilst rendering the indigenous Palestinian Arab inhabitants expellees, refugees and aliens in their own land or elsewhere in the region and the world as such. All this was done in collusion and under the grip of a nationalistic ideology totally alien to the peaceful eastern Palestinian and Arab ethos of the Holy Land. Masalha himself belonged to the so-called 'Palestinians of 1948,' those indigenous Arab people who never left the former British Mandatory state of Palestine when it was conquered by Zionist Jewish forces in 1948. All his works to date have focussed on the eternal dilemma of Palestinians in the state of Israel, simultaneously Israeli citizens as well as unwilling 'refugees' caught in legal and bureaucratic limbo in a state that does not want them, as they struggle for recognition from the very same state.

The book starts with the astonishing fact that nearly 70% of the Palestinian population worldwide are actually refugees, unable to return to their homeland, even if they want to (p.1). This fact is repeated again to emphasize the disastrous consequences of this cataclysmic event in the psyche of the Palestinian people (p.55). One of the great weights of Masalha's scholarship is his ability to integrate archival research into his work, particularly using his proficiency in four main European and Middle Eastern languages as well as his relatively easy ability (due to his joint identity as a Briton as well as a Palestinian with roots in the present state of Israel) to access the archival sources both in Israel as well as the UK (p.6). As a collection of virtually independent, yet

interdependent essays, this book must strike the reader as unique in its breadth of discourse in the now increasingly over-subscribed as well as predominantly 'area study' focussed discipline of Middle Eastern politics and history. The book evidently reflects half a life-time's passion for study and research into the crucial political, historical-sociological and theological issues of the Palestine-Israel region. Masalha's work must also mark the first time that a scholar of Palestinian Arab-Muslim background has attempted a detailed analysis of the historical and political claims underlying the writing of the 'Judaeo-Christian Torah-Old Testament' in the light of contemporary religious-political ideologies such as Zionism and Christian Zionism in the West.

Masalha's first chapter is the longest in the book at a massive 70 pages and is a summary of much of the author's previous scholarship into the field of 'Nakba' studies as well as the genesis and creation of the Palestinian refugee issue. The Author's presence in the state of Israel during the 'activist' post-foundational period of the formation is evident in the making and the content of this chapter. Pertinent to Masalha's thesis in his latest book is the 'conviction' as he puts it among Westerners and Zionists, of both secular as well as religious orientation that 'God' through the 'Bible' has given Canaan-Palestine in perpetuity to the Jewish people (p.15). All Jewish as well as later Israeli settler colonialism in the Holy Land was based on this 'scriptural' fact. This is one of the reasons why Masalha has titled his first chapter with the highly provocative heading: 'The Bible is Our Mandate.' While the earlier political Zionists who played a major role in the establishment and development of the pre-state Yishuv in Palestine were staunchly secular like the first premier of the state of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, they were also literally convinced of the historical authenticity of the Bible (p.17). This, after all, would be the sole testing point to their claim to 'exclusivist' ownership of the land of Canaan-Palestine-Israel in Western Christian eyes. The Bible was viewed more as a guide book by Israeli leaders in their attempts to justify the Zionist project for the state of Israel (p.21, 22).

Masalha has sought to deal with the symbolically and strategically appropriated political tendencies of early Israeli leaders such as David Ben Gurion to portray their occupation of the land of Palestine in line with the direct fulfilment of the earlier 'divine' biblical mandate to occupy and colonise the land of Canaan-Palestine to the 'total' exclusion of its previous occupants. Early Israeli leaders were soundly secular, but they still sought to portray themselves as religious so as to appropriate the historic and heroic 'Jewish-Christian' images from the bible in their quest for establishing a Jewish 'free' state in the Holy Land with Western backing. Masalha traces how the early radical theoreticians for a state of Israel such as Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky were greatly indebted to the kind of 'racist' nationalist ideologies emanating from the West, to justify their occupation and colonisation of the land of Palestine. Jabotinsky himself popularised the so-called 'Iron Wall' doctrine that sought to develop the aggressive thesis that the Zionist settlement of Palestine could only be achieved against the wishes and aspirations of the native Arabs of the region. The leaders of early Israel, Zionist and otherwise, often appealed to the Joshua story and to the process by which Joshua, son of Nun (p.24-35) cleared the land of Palestine and Jericho in particular, in order to justify the expulsion of Palestinians from their territory in the land of Canaan-Palestine.

Masalha quotes extensively from the first founding prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion to show that he comprehensively advocated the concept of transfer along with the early Zionist leaders (p.48-49). He refers to how the Bible, from a pre-eminently spiritual and historic 'Judaeo-Christian' document has become secularized and internalised in the contemporary Israeli and Western cultural dialogue by its appropriation by the early Zionist colonists in Palestine. Even the poetry of the early Zionists was tuned to the strains of an 'empty land waiting for a people.'

Masalha reveals some 'shocking' facts that were brought to light in previous archival research by him, especially as regards the willingness of the 1967 Jewish religious-military hierarchy in Israel to level the Temple Mount and pull down the Mosque of Omar as well as the Dome of the Rock (p. 79). He refers to attempts by Israeli leaders well into the 1990s to portray the state of Israel as a state formed in an empty void where nobody resided (p. 43-44). The early Zionists had always fixed their eyes on something much bigger than the part of Palestine that they acquired. They were looking at a space that included trans-Jordan eastwards almost up to the Euphrates River in today's Iraq, as well as the entire region up to the Litani River now in Lebanon and the region that extended south west to the Suez Canal in Egypt.

Some interesting information that Masalha raises in his first chapter includes the description of the so-called 'Government Names Committee,' a state-sponsored committee set up by the Israeli government in July 1949 to rename the areas of the former Palestine that had been evacuated and taken over by the new state of Israel (p.68). He also refers to the similar process by which Israeli archaeologists sought to manipulate the archaeology of the Holy Land to suit the designs and aspirations of the 'new' Zionist rulers of Israel.

Masalha's second chapter is dedicated to the growth of 'biblical archaeology' in the Holy Land. Masalha traces the influence of Christian Zionism on Western attitudes towards the state of Israel. Masalha details how the Western Protestant reformation provided cannon fodder for the development of Christian Zionist attitudes in the West. He details the exploits of British military colonel Orde Wingate and others in the mandatory political and geographical landscape of Palestine and their early support for the pre-state Yishuv's military training programs. Masalha clearly links the development of biblical archaeology in the Holy Land with the modern re-emergence of Christian Zionism in the West. He traces the impact and influence of biblical archaeologists like William Foxwell Albright and others on the 'digging' scene in mandatory Palestine and describes how these people sought to glamorise the ancient biblical heritage of the Holy Land while simultaneously denigrating and even discarding the then contemporaneous 'Arab' social and political scene.

Masalha mentions the impact of the Crusades on the Arab psyche over the last millennium and also traces the rise of the Christian Zionist lobby in America, particularly as a result of the Israeli victory in the 1967 war and the need to theologise this event in the national and public consciousness of Christian America. Some interesting issues raised by Masalha in this chapter include the description of the ongoing

conflict between the US Embassy in Tel Aviv which is accredited to the state of Israel whereas a US consulate functions in East Jerusalem and is primarily meant to cater to the Palestinians of the West Bank and East Jerusalem (p. 119). Masalha ends his second chapter with a call for committed liberal Christians to come together with a vision for a democratic pluralistic state of Israel-Palestine where all its citizens, Jews as well as Arabs can live together in peace and on the basis of shared interests.

Masalha's third chapter focuses on internal 'theological' developments within the state of Israel, the development and growth of the so-called movement of 'neo-Zionism' that sought to play itself out primarily in the post-1967 settlements as the new face of 'old' state-sponsored political Zionism. Masalha documents the attempts to rid the so-called 'Eretz Israel' region of 'Judea and Samaria' (Occupied Territories of the West Bank) of Palestinians by the religious Zionist settler groups. Masalha specifically deals with the ideology and politics of the Gush Emunim settler movement as well as the teachings of the two Rabbi Kooks, father and son, who were responsible for the development of religious Zionism as a force to be reckoned with on the Palestine-Israel stage.

The Author details the incredible lengths to which right wing Rabbis would go to justify any amount of militaristic expansionist activity on the part of the Israeli state and army directed at neighbouring Arab nations in the Middle East. He also describes the increasing popularity of Torah based 'Halacha' Jewish law among Orthodox and neo-Zionist groups in Israel along with warnings of strong demands by Rabbis to extend the halachic status of 'resident alien' to non-Jews in Israel-Palestine (p. 152,164). Masalha ends this chapter with a warning that the state of Israel must be careful lest they realise too late that their support for the militant settlers of the West Bank has actually turned into a dagger aimed at the very heart of the 'Jewish' state.

The fourth chapter deals with the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem, a city holy for three major world religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Over the last two millennia, Jerusalem has been the focus of contestations by followers of all the three religious groups, with very bloody results for the ordinary residents of the 'holy' city. Masalha rightly raises the point that today and since 1967, the greatest threat and danger to the Palestinian Arab and Muslim presence in East Jerusalem has been the uniting of religious Zionists and the ultra-Orthodox settler lobbies with the Western Christian Zionist movement as a potent tool of money and effort directed at taking over the Al-Aqsa / Dome of the Rock compound and building a Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount again. Masalha narrates how Jerusalem is critically important and holy for Muslims as the place of the third holiest site (al-Masjid al-Aqsa) in the Islamic world.

Masalha describes the moves made by the Israeli right wing as well as their Western and 'Jewish state' sponsors to radically change the ethno-political and religious make-up of the Old City of Jerusalem. He makes special reference to the Old City settler group known as Ateret Cohanim, set up in December 1978 with the aim of settling Jews in Arab East Jerusalem and thereby preparing the way for an eventual return to a period when the 'Third Temple' can be built on the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif esplanade. Allied to these movements that grew up in the 1980s were the various groups of violent settler militias that sought to terrorise the Palestinian populations of the West Bank as well as East Jerusalem and the Palestinian areas within the state of Israel.

The Author ends this chapter with a call to the international community and the UN to put pressure on Israel to end its skewed policies benefiting one community alone-the Jews in Jerusalem, and to actively engage under international law to protect the Palestinian Muslim and Christian residents of the city from the 'depredations' of Jewish right wing groups active in the Old city area of Jerusalem.

Chapter five is a continuation of some of the issues raised by the Author in chapter four as he seeks to analyse and interpret the philosophy and teachings of the great medieval Arab-Jewish philosopher and theologian Moses Maimonides, a functionary and close associate of various medieval Islamic courts and rulers. Born in Umayyad Cordoba, Maimonides ended up in Fustat, Egypt at the court of Salah-e-din Ayyubi and his son. Maimonides was credited with describing medieval Catholic Christianity as a form of idolatry. Masalha is very critical of the way that nationalist and religious Zionists have appropriated Maimonides without making any allowance for the medieval Islamic context in which he operated and the Umayyad and later Ayyubid civilisational contexts in which he functioned.

Chapter six gives us a comprehensive account of the rise and growth of the Palestinian radical Islamist party Hamas which grew out of the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. The Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank) was one of the strongest political and social movements in the pre-and post-1967 interregnum as the premier party of Palestinian resistance per se in the Occupied Territories. This 'fact on the ground' changed with the arrival of the erstwhile 'banned' Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in its new 'avatar' as the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) after the Oslo Accords in 1993.

Hamas was always staunchly against the Oslo process which it saw as an act of 'treason' against the Palestinian people and a process initiated behind the back of the Palestinian people without adequately consulting them or the 'legitimate' resistance in the Occupied Territories. Masalha raises the interesting issue that Hamas contrary to popular as well as international awareness, was not united as regards their policy of carrying out 'suicide-bombings' both in the state of Israel as well as against 'legitimate enemy' targets in the Occupied Territories. There were strong voices within Hamas that called for an end to the policy of 'suicide-bombing.' He reminds us how Hamas actually called for a ceasefire with the Israelis as early as June 2003, almost three years into the Al-Aqsa Intifada. It was Hamas's highly 'pragmatic' approach towards the use of violence and peace in the conflict that secured them victory in the January 2006 Palestinian elections, according to the Author.

Chapter seven is probably the most important chapter in this book as the Author seeks to deal with the debate in Biblical studies concerning the historicity and scientific 'validity' of the Hebrew Bible in our modern world. Biblical archaeology started in the 'holy land' as a tool to represent and establish Western and later Jewish links to the ancient land of Israel-Palestine. Masalha describes how the Hebrew

Bible has always been used as an instrument to legitimise the rule of the Jewish state in Israel. Western scholarship on the Bible in its entirety has always been based on the assumption that there are certain unassailable truths that cannot be debated or denied in the Bible. However this has not been proved by early and later twentieth century archaeological excavations in the fertile Levant. Masalha had already made the point in an earlier chapter about the 'racist and prejudiced' policies of American archaeologists like William Foxwell Albright who sought to disregard the 'legitimate' historical, political and demographic realities of the majority (Arab Muslim) population of historic Palestine in favour of a mythologized 'pseudo-reality' from the ancient past of Canaan-Israel-Palestine.

Masalha traces how the critical biblical theorists were described as 'anti-Semitic' by Israelis as well as other Western evangelical Christian writers (p. 258). He emphasizes the fact that there is no archaeological evidence to prove that there was an ancient 'great' Davidic or Solomonic kingdom in the land of Canaan (p. 250).

Chapter eight focuses on the contribution of Dr. Masalha's former close friend and companion, the late Professor (Fr.) Michael Prior C.M., to the development of a radical Palestinian theology of liberation. Michael Prior was a fellow academic at St. Mary's College of the University of Surrey, London's leading Catholic College of higher education. Prior was heavily influenced by the need to ensure a just and peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue. Prior was heavily influenced by Edward Said's 'post-colonialist' studies approach as well as Robert Allan Warrior's 'Canaanite' model of interpreting Biblical literature and the Exodus 'liberation' story. Prior's main contribution to biblical studies was in his attempt at a post-colonial reading of the Bible as an intended reflection on the way the Bible has been used to justify colonialism and imperialism worldwide

Masalha's final chapter in what must surely rank as his most significant book to date, is a tribute to the overriding genius of the late Professor Edward Said, the Palestinian-American academic who in his long tenure as Professor of English at Columbia University, was the direct inspiration for the development of the relatively 'new' academic fields of post-colonial and cultural studies (p. 280). The Author has never sought to hide his reverence and admiration for Edward Said, a man who strode like a colossus across the stage of modern twentieth century literary and cultural criticism.

This book is indeed a dedication to the monumental efforts of intellectual and academic giants like Michael Prior and Edward Said to the growth and development of an intellectual probity and clarity as regards the Palestinian issue. As Masalha states in his epilogue to this very important and contextually relevant book, both Prior as well as said remained implacably opposed to Zionism and were not afraid to critique it, despite the inevitable badge and ultimate scandal, from an academic point of view, of being called anti-Semitic in the West (p. 318). Masalha's subject bibliography in this book is very recommendable as a painstaking collection of all the most relevant works in the multivariate disciplines involved in this work, selected from three contemporary and very important world languages, English, Arabic and Hebrew.

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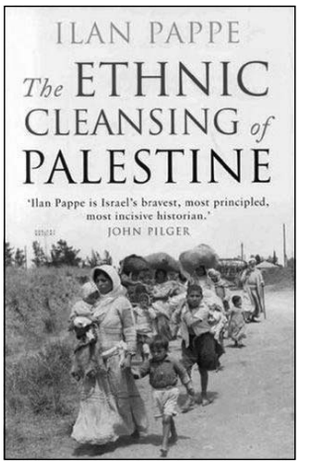
The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

BY ILAN PAPPE, Oxford, Oneworld, 2006, ISBN 1851685553, Pp.313, £16.99



This vital book should be sent to President Bush. He has denied the Palestinian Right to Return, instead insisting on compensation. Perhaps if he could visit the victims of the 1948 Nakba and hear their stories, even he might pause for reflection. This book sets the record straight about one of the worst crimes against humanity since 1945. However, the reader must be warned: this book is not for the faint-hearted. Never have I encountered a book that turned my stomach so much, as I read of the forced expulsions, rapes and massacres. That this history has been covered-up is one of the greatest scandals in modern history. The fact that an Israeli scholar is the one unearthing this story is an encouraging step.

Pappe sets the context in his preface when he refers to David Ben-Gurion addressing the Jewish Agency Executive in 1938 and stating 'I am for compulsory transfer; I do not see anything immoral in it', (p. xi). This demonstrates two points: firstly, that Zionist policy saw ethnic cleansing as a central plank throughout its history, from Theodor Herzl onwards (p. 7). Secondly, that Zionist racial ethics cannot be equated with modern Western morality on ethnicity. The Western reaction to ethnic cleansing of Bosnia and Kosovo demonstrates that Zionist racial ethics are irreconcilable with ours. Thus, to insist that Israeli society and state share our values is simply false. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the Israeli regime and its supporters seek to suppress this information.

Another important point, often neglected, is how Pappe addresses not just *Nakba-denial*, but also *Nakba-trivialisation*. Sometimes Muslims fall into the trap of Holocaust-trivialisation, usually to offset Zionist propaganda that utilises the Holocaust to justify policy against the Palestinians. In the latter case, this usually consists of noting that Stalin or Mao massacred more people than Hitler. This ignores the *proportional* enormity of the Holocaust, and the *targeted* nature of the genocide – there was legally nothing a Jew or a Gypsy could do to avoid it, because the victim was attacked on account of his *race*, not his politics. Equally, Zionist supporters frequently engage in *Nakba-trivialisation*, saying that 'only' a half-million people or slightly more were made refugees,

usually comparing this with refugee movements of Germans after 1945 or the disruption following the Indian Partition. Pappe counters that we need to think in *percentages*: 'Half of the indigenous people living in Palestine were driven out, half of their villages and towns were destroyed, and only very few among them ever managed to return' (p. 9). Perhaps Palestinian, Arab and Muslim spokesmen need to denounce this practice by identifying it specifically as unacceptable 'Nakba-trivialisation'.

Essentially, Pappe shows us that the immediate origins of the Nakba lie in the 'Red House' in Tel-Aviv, which in 1947 became headquarters for the Hagana, the socialist Zionist militia, (p.xi). It deserves to be compared to if not the villa where the Wannsee Conference plotted the Final Solution, then certainly to the Presidential residence of Slobodan Milosevic where the Bosnian and Kosovar tragedies were planned. In was in the Red House, on a date that should go down in infamy, 10 March 1948, that eleven Zionist leaders 'put the final touches to a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine', (p. xi). This plan, codenamed Plan D (Dalet in Hebrew), was generally successful: around 800,000 people, i.e. over half the Palestinian population, were ethnically cleansed, 531 villages destroyed and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied. Among the methods used were poisoning the Acre water-supply with typhoid, 'numerous cases of rape', and 'dozens of massacres', (p. xv).

The British involvement in the enterprise is something that needs to be highlighted for the UK public. Quite apart from the Balfour Declaration, the British had prepared the field by the ruthless suppression of the Palestinian uprising in 1936-39. One British officer in particular bears much responsibility: Order Wingate, the 'Chindit' hero of Burma during the war, (p.16). Becoming a fully-fledged Zionist, he taught Zionist forces special combat tactics. He even attached Hagana troops to British forces during the uprising. Of course, the British quashing of the revolt also undermined Palestinian resistance to the Nakba.

When the ethnic cleansing began in 1948, British forces, still legally obliged to maintain order (p.93) generally stood aside at best, or at worst assisted the Zionists by encouraging the Palestinians under siege to flee (p.124), as in Haifa (p.94). Some British politicians rightly acknowledge these events as the most shameful in the history of the Empire in the region. Yet no apology has been forthcoming, and certainly no commemoration of the Nakba. Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in the UK need to redress this by publicly staging Nakba commemorations, inviting local and national government officials to participate, and shaming those who decline.

Page after page presents stomach-turning atrocities by Zionist forces, the best known among them being Deir Yassin. I will not soil sensitive consciences by listing them. Here, Britons need the opportunity to witness accounts and pictures of the Nakba on an annual basis through commemoration/education programmes, and Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities should begin this process immediately. This should counter both Nakba-trivialisation and Nakba-denialism. One facet of the latter is that the Palestinians left voluntarily and cleared the way for Arab armies to decimate the new Israeli state. A vital point made by Pappe is that the ethnic cleansing began months before any Arab forces entered the land, and indeed, whilst the British were still present:

> 'All this took place before a single regular Arab soldier had entered Palestine… Between 30 March and 15 May, 200 villages were occupied and their inhabitants expelled. This is a fact that must be repeated, as it undermines the Israeli myth that the 'Arabs' ran away once the 'Arab invasion' began. Almost half of the Arab villages had already been attacked by the time the Arab governments eventually, and, as we know, reluctantly decided to send in their troops. Another ninety villages would be wiped out between 15 May and 11 June 1948, when the first of two truces finally came into effect', (p.104).

So much for the 'voluntary exodus' lie. Indeed, another important contribution by Pappe is to show how totally useless and cowardly the Arab governments were at this point: 'they procrastinated, and postponed, for as long as they could, the inevitable military intervention, and then were only too happy to terminate it sooner rather than later', (p.117). That could almost be a contemporary account of the reaction of Arab states to Palestinian suffering. Indeed, the only force that could have stood up to the Zionists, the Jordanian Arab Legion, stood by during the initial ethnic cleansing (p.119), basically because King Abdullah was in cahoots with the Zionists to divide Palestine between them. What this does show is that the Palestinians did not flee to allow Arab armies free rein, and also that the Palestinian exodus was indeed the consequence of Zionist ethnic cleansing. It also demonstrates that the Zionists were not the victims of Arab state aggression: rather the Palestinians were the victims of Zionist aggression.

Even after the ceasefire, massacres and abuses continued, such as the labour camps for Palestinian detainees, (pp.202-203). Any Arabs remaining in 'mixed' cities such as Haifa were deported to and ghettoised in Wadi Nisnas, one of the city's poorest areas, (p.207). The pattern was repeated across the land, with 'Israeli Arabs' being reduced to second-class 'citizens' in a racist system of discrimination and dispossession. However, not only were Palestinian villages and towns wiped off the map physically: the actual history of the ethnic cleansing was deliberately smothered in what Pappe calls 'memoricide', (ch. 10.) Prime Minister Blair never ever referred to the Palestinian villages that were 'wiped off the map'. Nor has President Bush ever done so. Moreover, Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities and their spokesmen in the West have failed to make known the nature and extent of the Nakba, thus leaving Israeli propagandists the field. Yet would 9/11, Madrid or 7/7 have happened if Arab and Muslim opinion had not been so inflamed by this, the most central of their causes? In a sense, these atrocities by deranged, evil murderers should remind us of those atrocities committed by other evil murderers in 1948; the two are linked. Hence, if we want to prevent more of the same by isolating Al-Qaida, the 'memoricide' of the Nakba must be confronted.

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