



palestine NEWS

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palestine NEWS

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E-mail info@palestinecampaign.org

The editorial team

Editor: Hilary Wise
Victoria Brittain, Sarah Colborne, Diane Langford, Mike Marqusee, Glen Rangwala, Ann Wright and John Yandell.

Design and layout

Lithoprint Ltd: info@lithoprint.ltd.uk

If you would like to contribute or respond to one of the articles in this issue please write to:
The Editor, Palestine News, Box BM PSA,
London WC1N 3XX

Palestine Solidarity Campaign

- Campaigning against the oppression and dispossession suffered by the Palestinian people
- Supporting the rights of the Palestinian people and their struggle to achieve these rights including the Right of Return in line with UN resolution 194
- Promoting Palestinian civil society in the interests of democratic rights and social justice
- Opposing Israel's occupation and its aggression against neighbouring states
- Opposing anti-semitism and racism, including the apartheid and Zionist nature of the Israeli state

Fuelling the flames

Betty Hunter asks if the Palestinians can circumvent the strategy of 'divide and rule' being applied by Israel and by Western governments

The beginning of 2007 finds the Palestinian people in the most perilous position of their entire history, at the mercy of an Israeli regime able to act with absolute impunity.

As UN Special Rapporteur John Dugard wrote in his September 2006 report:

"It is pointless for the Special Rapporteur to recommend to the Government of Israel that it show respect for human rights and international humanitarian law. More authoritative bodies, notably the ICJ and the Security Council, have made similar appeals with as little success as have had previous reports of the Special Rapporteur. It also seems pointless for the Special Rapporteur to appeal to the Quartet to strive for the restoration of human rights, as neither respect for human rights nor respect for the rule of law features prominently on the agenda of this body, as reflected in its public utterances. In these circumstances, the Special Rapporteur can only appeal to the wider international community to concern itself with the plight of the Palestinian people."

Governments who talk of upholding democracy and human rights are actually perpetrating collective punishment on the Palestinian people. While the UN and NGOs called for \$453 million of emergency humanitarian aid in November, in December the US and Canadian governments both reiterated their refusal to send aid to the Hamas government. On 26 December Israel sponsored the delivery of a huge consignment of arms (including 2000 machine guns) to President Abbas' security forces in Gaza – a deliberate fuelling of the present tensions between Fateh and Hamas and a provocation to civil war. Similarly, Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice has declared that she intends to ask Congress for tens of millions of dollars to "strengthen the security forces" of President Abbas.

Our own Prime Minister's recent, predictably fruitless visit to the area epitomises everything that is wrong with Western policies vis-à-vis Israel/Palestine. He talked to Arab governments who do not recognise Israel. He talked to leaders who are dictators, ruling by repression, and he talked to the leaders of the Israeli government, who routinely ignore international law, and who have refused to implement more than sixty UN resolutions. He did not, however, talk to the democratically elected government of the Palestinian people. Instead he gave his support to President Abbas' decision to put aside the democratic choice of the Palestinian people in order to hold early elections – in contravention of the Palestinian constitution.

"One way out of the impasse would be to bring Hamas and other parties into the PLO"

Does President Abbas assume that the overthrow of Hamas and the election of a Fateh government acceptable to the 'international community' will benefit the Palestinians in the long run? Arafat made concession after concession, and went so far as to recognise Israel as a Jewish state, but the Israelis refused to negotiate with him. Abbas himself was backed by Israel in the Presidential elections, only to find he too was not considered a 'partner for peace'. Does he have any reason to believe it will be different next time round?

The temptations facing Abbas are

considerable, but the exacerbation of internal strife could be utterly disastrous. Fortunately, there are clear indications that the Palestinian people themselves recognise that the internal situation is being dictated by external pressure. In a recent opinion poll (see www.faf.no), confidence in the Hamas government having the capacity to solve the crisis alone was very low at 7%, yet this is simply a recognition of the international refusal to talk to their elected government. There is no doubt that the majority of the Palestinian people favour a National Unity Government. More than half (54%) of those asked said that they would prefer a new national unity coalition government over new elections. The suggestion of new elections received the support of one in five (21%) of those asked. The poll data provides little grounds for believing that new elections would bring change. The same balance of support was found in the poll for Fateh and Hamas as before the last elections in January 2006. In addition, almost a third of respondents indicated that they would not vote in a new election (28%). If new elections were held, and if Hamas won again, would the pro-Israel coalition of governments demand that the Palestinians keep holding elections until they make the 'right' choice, under threat of starvation?

One way out of the impasse would be to bring Hamas and other parties into the PLO, as the only body which represents Palestinians inside Israel, in the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora. Palestinians need the opportunity for dialogue and debate on how to achieve their rights as laid down in international law.

President Abbas has said that he is still prepared to talk about a National Unity Government. It is to be hoped that this has positive results. The Palestinian people will only gain their just and lawful rights by working together and not succumbing to the divide and rule agenda of Israel.

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A state of siege

Sarah Colborne reports on the relentless pressure on the Palestinians in Gaza

Although poorly reported in the Western media, information about life in Gaza is readily available from numerous NGOs and international organisations working on the ground. They all tell the same story – that of a noose tightening inexorably around the already beleaguered population of this narrow strip of territory.

The World Food Programme (WFP) reported that 35 per cent of Gazans do not have enough money to buy food, while 25 per cent are only just managing. In the Deir Al-Balah governorate almost three-quarters of the population are defined as 'food insecure'. Over a million of the Gaza Strip's 1.4 million inhabitants rely on UN food handouts to survive. Many Gazans do not eat enough protein – partly because Israel has severely curtailed fishing off the Gaza coast. (Moreover 35,000 people depend directly on this as a primary source of income.)

Although some fuel is allowed in, it is only enough to provide emergency power and cooking facilities – less than 40 per cent of the energy formerly provided by the power station bombed by Israel in June.

"The situation could deteriorate very rapidly," said Jacques Higgins, the WFP's deputy country director for Gaza and the West Bank. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)'s last estimate was of 65 per cent of Palestinians living in poverty, a

figure which is continuing to rise. The Palestinian health care system is running out of medicine and on the verge of collapse.

This humanitarian catastrophe is not the result of a natural disaster, but one that has been directly and intentionally created by Israel, with the active participation of the British, US and European governments.

What price 'disengagement'?

An OCHA report at the end of November analysed the implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), signed on 15 November 2005 between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. The earlier

The absence of Israeli settlers in the Strip has, moreover, made shelling, bombing and harassment of the population by sonic booms a less risky business for the IDF, and the economic blockade more straightforward.

OCHA's report has helped to expose the lie that Israel ended its occupation in 2005. It notes that, despite the intention of the AMA being "to facilitate the movement of goods and people within the Palestinian Territories", to "put the Palestinians in control of the entry and exit of people" and to "promote peaceful economic development and improve the humanitarian situation on the ground", none of the above have been achieved, because Israel has failed to implement any part of the agreement.

The crossing at Rafah has been closed for 86 per cent of the time since 25 June, for 'security' reasons; in November, it was open for only 36 hours, spread over four days. Returning inhabitants of Gaza, including patients in urgent need of medical treatment, have therefore been trapped for weeks at a time on the Gaza/Egypt border. According to Gideon Levy, Israel "admits that the closure is solely intended to exert pressure on the residents... Israel only announces the opening of the crossing at 11 pm the night before; this is also a form of abuse."

"This humanitarian catastrophe is not the result of a natural disaster, but one that has been directly and intentionally created by Israel, with the active participation of the British, US and European governments"

withdrawal of the Israeli settlers from Gaza had been hailed by Western powers as a huge concession (while the simultaneous expansion of the illegal settlements on the West Bank was largely ignored). Capitalising on this international kudos, the then-Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert boasted to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, concerning his illegal assassination operations in Gaza: "There is not a single word of criticism anywhere in the world. And do you know why? Because the disengagement gave us degrees of freedom in carrying out everyday security activities which we never had before... The day before yesterday we carried out a targeted interception [sic] in Gaza. The day before that we did another targeted interception. Not a critical remark, not a hint of critical remark, has come from anywhere in the world."

Since 15 January, OCHA's report notes that the Karni crossing into Israel has also only "opened erratically", with an average of 12 trucks exported per day (the AMA specified 400 a day by the end of 2006). Less than 4 per cent of Gaza's harvest was exported, although Israel signed up to 'ensure the continued opportunity to export'. Although under AMA Israel agreed to allow the passage of convoys to facilitate the movement of goods and people between Gaza and the West Bank, no convoys have been permitted by Israel and no talks initiated; and Gaza's seaport and airport are still not functioning.

As a result, unemployment rose from 33.1 to 41.8 per cent between 2005 and 2006 and movement inside the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has been even further restricted. The report states that "the number of physical obstacles to



SHAREEF SARHAN

Fishing boats lie idle off the coast



A survivor of the Athamneh family

movement has increased by 44 per cent in the West Bank. Further restrictions to movement have been imposed on individuals through the extension of the permit system”.

Stepping up collective punishments

Alongside the blockade, Israel responded to the democratic Palestinian parliamentary elections last January by redoubling its military assault on the civilian population.

Last summer the IDF killed over 300 Palestinians, laid waste to swathes of the Gaza Strip and shelled entire families. On 8 November, Israeli shells fired at a residential street in Beit Hanoun killed over 20 civilians including 18 members of the Athamneh family, six of whom were children under 16. Their deaths followed a week of destruction in Gaza, during which 55 people were killed.

An Israeli spokesman “regretted” the killing of the family, but it is unlikely that any further steps will be taken. (In June, after the shelling which killed seven members of the Ghalia family on the beach in Gaza, an Israeli investigation found that the IDF was not responsible, despite independent findings to the contrary.)

On 17 November the UN Human Rights Council called for a high level investigation into the Beit Hanoun atrocity. When the Commission, led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, was refused entry into Gaza by Israel, the fact was barely mentioned in the Western media and no official representations were

made by Western governments.

Following a recent visit to the area, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour reported that people in the Occupied Palestinian Territories “find that virtually all their rights are being denied, both individually and collectively, chronically and critically. Particularly vulnerable in this situation, as is invariably the case where respect for rights has been eroded, are women and children.

“I left Gaza with a sense that the right of its people to their physical integrity – their right to life – was particularly imperilled: Beit Hanoun is only one case in many. In the West Bank, the Barrier and the system of checkpoints that is in place, road blocks, trenches and earth mounds is having a profound impact on family life and economic life, indeed, on the quality of life: in short, on human dignity and the sense of having any semblance of individual autonomy. In both places, economic and social indicators – unemployment rates, poverty rates, access to food – are worsening. Central causes for this severe deterioration are the physical restrictions imposed on the territory by Israeli policies and practices in the pursuit of their security agenda, as well as the fiscal constraints which Israel and the international community more broadly have put in place.”

The Temporary International Mechanism, which is being proclaimed as an interim solution to the funding crisis, is failing to reach those in need. A press release by Oxfam explained that the deep poverty that the Palestinians have been forced into, where “hundreds of thousands of people have been left without an income. Rubbish is piling in

the streets, sewage is overflowing from household cesspits, schools are running without budgets and government employees are striking for lack of pay” has not been solved by the TIM, and Oxfam International spokesperson Adam Leach said: “if donor governments are serious about tackling the poverty and suffering facing Palestinians, they should immediately resume funding to the local and national authorities charged with delivering essential services. They must also press Israel to transfer Palestinian tax revenues that are being held on behalf of the Palestinian government. The temporary mechanism, established to provide direct support to Palestinians, excludes tens of thousands of government employees. Plans to provide payments to the poorest 40,000 Palestinians and their families, who used to receive social welfare payments, have so far failed to materialize.”

How to resist?

Astonishingly, even the Palestinians’ right to peaceful resistance is being challenged. This was seen in the claim by Human Rights Watch that calling on civilians to gather to defend houses from demolition, or women gathering to march to defend men in a mosque surrounded by the Israeli army, were ‘war crimes’. According to such a mind-set, one must assume no form of resistance would be considered ‘acceptable’.

It is difficult to imagine how the people of Gaza must be feeling. On the one hand they are supported by international law, on the other they have been effectively abandoned by governments around the world to an occupier that appears to be without scruple or mercy.

Rafael Eitan, Israeli Chief of Staff in Lebanon under Sharon, had a vision which present Israeli leaders must now feel is within their grasp:

“Force is all they do or will ever understand. We shall use the ultimate force until the Palestinians come crawling to us on all fours... When we have settled the land, all the Arabs will be able to do will be to scurry round like drugged roaches in a bottle” (*New York Times* 14 April 1983).

That “ultimate force” is now being applied, and the colonisation nears completion.

2007 will be a year that puts us all to the test: the Palestinians should not find us wanting.

Christmas in Bethlehem

Nicholas Blincoe
reports on a community
in crisis

Winter brings the citrus harvest in Bethlehem and this year's light snowfall has dusted the orange trees in snow. It should be a perfect end to Christmas. I have spent the last eight Christmases here and though this year's public decorations were meager – a result of the economic blockade – the private decorations shone all the brighter. The freedom of religion enjoyed in Palestine contrasts sharply with the persecution experienced on the other side of Israel's eight-metre wall. This year, Israel's public housing authority banned Christmas in the Israeli housing projects, outlawing nativity scenes and tearing down Christmas trees. According to them, Christmas is highly offensive to the eight-out-of-ten residents who are Jewish. The rights of Christians count for nothing (forget about the Muslims: there are almost none in Israeli public housing).

The model of an open, democratic and multi-faith Middle East can be seen in Bethlehem, a city where Muslims, Jews and Christians have lived together for centuries. Today, it is the Christians who are being driven out and the vision of a multi-faith future is fast fading. The building of the illegal Wall led to a catastrophic exodus of 400 Bethlehem Christian families, prompting an emergency UN report that the Wall will have eliminated the city's Christian community within two generations. This crisis led to the solidarity pilgrimage by Britain's church leaders: the Archbishop Rowan Williams, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the Moderator of the Free Churches David Coffey and the British-Armenian Bishop Nathan Hovhannissian. Archbishop Williams' condemnation of the Wall was welcomed in Bethlehem. The expression on his face as he faced the Wall for the first time was even more eloquent. The four church leaders, accompanied by the Bishops and Patriarchs of Jerusalem's thirteen Christian sects, were barred from walking in the footsteps of the Holy Family, a sacred pilgrimage route that has been closed since the Israeli authorities shifted the gate a hundred paces east, making a residential backstreet the only route into the city. Astride the old main road, Israel has built a vast military compound that obliterates the old elegant structure of Rachel's Tomb.

Leila Sansour founded Open Bethlehem as a save-the-city campaign to protect the multi-faith heritage of the city. The organisation has its headquarters by the Omar Mosque on Manger Square. Both these buildings stand on land made available by the Christian churches, a good example of the co-operation between faiths that characterises the city.

As the plight of the local Christians hit the headlines, Israel hit back by claiming, in contradiction to the UN report, that Christians were leaving because of rising animosity from Muslims. A survey commissioned by Open Bethlehem revealed that, on the contrary, 78 per cent of local Christians blame Israel's closure of their city for the wave of emigration, while only three per cent blamed the rise of political Islam. 90 per cent of respondents from both communities



Visiting church leaders with Leila Sansour and Open Bethlehem passports

spoke of the friendship that existed between people of different faiths.

Open Bethlehem also commissioned a second poll, carried out in the States by top US pollsters Zogby International. It revealed that 65 per cent of Americans wish to see Bethlehem protected as a world heritage site and that 80 per cent want to see the Christian community protected, a figure that rises if the respondent is a conservative voter. Unfortunately, conservatives are the least knowledgeable about the situation and after reviewing the conservative press over Christmas, one sees why. (The Daily Mail, for instance, printed false figures claiming to show the Wall's efficacy as a security measure and interviewed only the small fraction of Christians who feel threatened by political Islam.) As the US survey showed, voters want to see Christianity protected in its birthplace. They would be horrified to know that 66% of local Christians find Israel treats their heritage with brutality and indifference, and possibly surprised to learn that 73% of Christians believe the Palestinian Authority treats their heritage with respect.

“Christians have suffered most from the slump in tourism, as well as from Israel's land thefts”

Thanks to the tourism industry, Christians have traditionally formed a property-owning entrepreneur class in Bethlehem. They have therefore suffered most from the slump in tourism, as well as from Israel's land thefts. The Wall has also made it impossible for the Christians to run the businesses they own in Jerusalem, as well as separating them from families in the Christian communities of Haifa, Nazareth and Jerusalem.

Palestine needs the energy, experience and relative wealth of the local Christians to continue investing locally and to bring down the 65% unemployment figures. But above all, without the Christians there can be no multi-faith community in Palestine. Once they are gone, the greatest promise of Palestine is under threat.

The politics of archaeology

Mahmoud Hawari shows how excavations of the Old City of Jerusalem are being used to justify annexation

No city in the world arouses such strong emotions as Jerusalem. Sacred to the world's three great monotheist religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is of profound spiritual and religious importance for more than one half of humanity. Above all, it evokes immense nationalist feelings on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian divide. To Jews it is the focal point of their religion: the site of the Temple of Solomon and that of Herod, of which the Western Wall is the only remnant, since it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. To Christians it is the centre of the Christian world, since the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the traditional site for the crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ. And to Muslims it is both the sacred city of the Prophets, and the site of the Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey and Heavenly Ascension (7th century AD). The Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary), including the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque, is the third most important site for Muslims, after Mecca and Medina in Arabia.

“UNESCO demanded, in numerous resolutions, that Israel stop the excavations and cease altering the city”

The Old City of Jerusalem is enclosed by walls built by the Ottomans in the 16th century on earlier foundations. It in part overlies the smaller ancient city to the south-east, which was first occupied around 6000 years ago. From there the city expanded to the north and west over the course of centuries, accumulating dozens of historical, religious, architectural and ethnic layers.

As it stands today, the Old City of Jerusalem remains one of the best preserved medieval Arab-Islamic cities to have evolved over the last fourteen hundred years. For centuries, it has been the centre of Palestinian political, economic and cultural life.

“Biblical Archaeology” in the service of the State

Increasing European colonial intervention in the Middle East, especially in Palestine, during the second half of the 19th century, when the Ottoman rule began to weaken, coincided with a rising interest in the cartography, historical geography and archaeology of the region. The efforts of European scholars to recover the historical roots of Christendom and verify the narratives of the Bible led to the emergence of “Biblical archaeology”.

With the creation of Israel in 1948, this approach to archaeology became dominant in the new state. It has been utilised to provide “roots” and to search for historical justification for the founding and existence of the Jewish state, with complete disregard for the indigenous Palestinian Arabs – both Muslims and Christians – who have been living there for millennia. Archaeology has been used to provide Israeli society with historical myths with which to identify, and has contributed to the emergence of an Israeli national identity. Israeli

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The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem

biblical archaeologists are largely interested in the occupation layers from the biblical periods, and discard evidence from later or medieval Islamic periods as irrelevant.

Historical claims over Jerusalem

Israel's annexation and “re-unification” of Jerusalem on June 27, 1967, was not based on legal or moral justification, but primarily on historic claims that the city had been the capital of a Jewish Kingdom which existed some 3000 years ago. The claim that the city is more sacred and spiritually meaningful for Jews than for Muslims or Christians has been made by Zionists during the whole process of the colonisation of Palestine. An effort to substantiate these claims through material evidence provided by archaeology has therefore been encouraged by the state. New Jewish colonies have often been established on sites identified as having been settled in biblical times by ancient Israelites, thus extending present-day territorial claims.

Immediately after the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, Israel initiated large-scale excavations to reveal the city's biblical history, in an attempt to reinforce Israel's historical claims to the city and to promote its Jewish character.

Excavations south-west of the Haram al-Sharif

The most extensive excavations, which took place in the area against the south-western corner of the Haram al-Sharif and lasted for nine years (1968 -1977), aimed at finding remains associated with the Jewish Temple. These excavations aroused Palestinian outrage and international condemnation. The UN denounced the excavations and demanded that Israel should “preserve the historical and religious heritage of the city”. UNESCO demanded in numerous resolutions that Israel stop the excavations and cease altering the city's cultural and historical character. Finally, Israel was expelled from UNESCO for violating the organisation's charter.

The results of the excavations, however, were disappointing for Israeli archaeologists, as no substantial remains of the Jewish Temple were found. Instead, they revealed the remains of monumental palaces dating from the early Islamic period (8th century), which could not be ignored. In recent years, further excavations have been conducted in this area, including a “restoration scheme”, resulting in the establishment of the so-called “Jerusalem Archaeological Park

7 – Davidson Centre”, with exhibitions, illustrations and virtual model panoramas, mainly of the Temple.

The Jewish Quarter

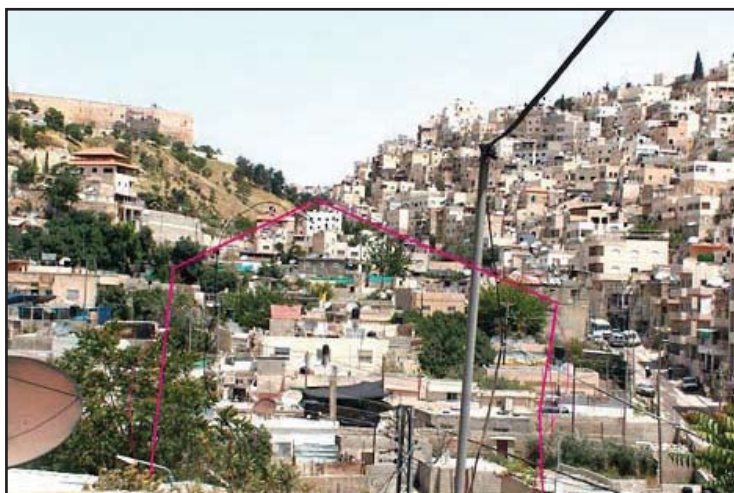
In June 1967, Israel declared the whole of the Jewish Quarter state land. A large and vigorous scheme to “judaize” it began. Here, planning, archaeology and “restoration” were intertwined to achieve political and ideological aims. Various methods were used to evict most of the Palestinian residents, ranging from buying them out, to expropriation and forced eviction¹. Many of the houses evacuated were demolished, and archaeological excavations carried out. These resulted in highlighting remains of fortifications of “the First Temple period” and “Jewish secular architecture in the Second Temple period”. Some archaeological discoveries were restored, including “the Burnt House”, which became a public museum. A film shown there attempts to make connections between the Jewish presence in ancient Jerusalem and the modern “rebirth” of the city. Luxury apartment blocks have been constructed in the area and sold exclusively to wealthy immigrant Jews.

The Citadel

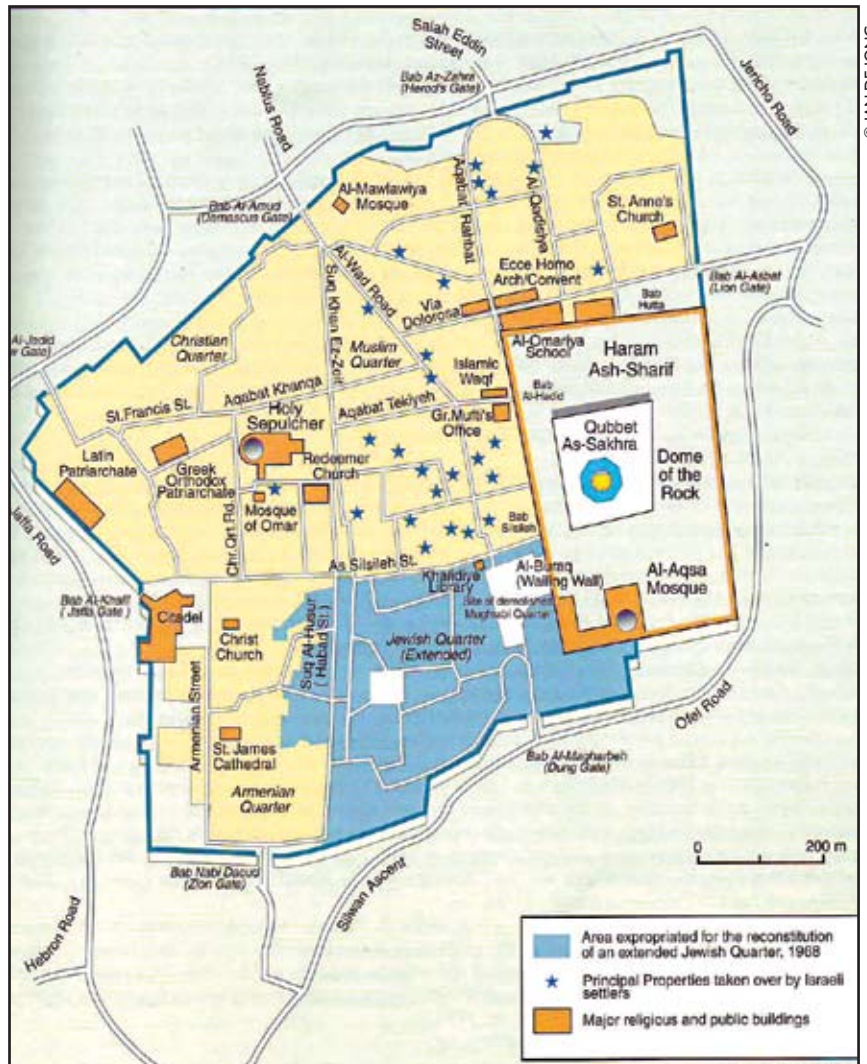
The archaeological excavations and restoration works at the citadel of Jerusalem, just south of the Jaffa Gate, were aimed at transforming the building into a museum, “the Tower of David Museum for the History of Jerusalem”. The history of Jerusalem from ancient until modern times is presented in a highly biased manner: the museum narrates a story that locates Jerusalem’s origin, identity, and destiny as the spiritual and political capital of the Jewish people, while the presence of other cultures and ethnic groups is marginal. There is much more focus on the history of the city in biblical times than on the medieval Islamic period. An audiovisual presentation of the modern history of Jerusalem presents a blatantly biased version of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which cannot be seen as other than transparent propaganda.

Excavations in Silwan

Since 1978, Israeli archaeological excavations have been carried out on the west hill of the village of Silwan, just south of the Old City. It had been identified as the site of ancient Jerusalem dating from the Bronze age (the Canaanite period), and it has also been named by biblical archaeologists as “the City of David”. However, contrary to the expectations of the excavators no substantial remains from



Silwan, home to 5000 Palestinians, under threat of demolition



The Old City, showing the areas (in blue) expropriated by Israel

the time of David and Solomon (10th century BC) were uncovered. In late 1991 Jewish settlers, with the support of Israeli police and right wing organisations, took over numerous Palestinian houses in the village, and their inhabitants were forcibly evicted. Since then, attempts to take over Palestinian houses continue, employing illegal methods, pretexts of historical rights and previous Jewish ownership – or simply threats. The aim is to establish a Jewish settlement in the heart of Silwan village, and ultimately to drive all Palestinian residents out.

“Contrary to the expectations of the excavators, no substantial remains from the time of David and Solomon were uncovered”

Israel’s annexation of East Jerusalem under the pretext of resurrecting the capital of a Jewish Kingdom that existed some 3000 years ago is an affront to history; it is also contrary to international law and UN resolutions. The process of judaization of Jerusalem and Israel’s unlawful actions violate its status as a holy city with a global cultural and historic heritage and as a centre of political, economic and cultural life of the Palestinian people.

Mahmoud Hawari is a Palestinian archaeologist engaged in research in Jerusalem.

¹For details of the methods of transfer of Palestinians out of Jerusalem see The Forced Migration Review 26, August 2006 (<http://www.fmreview.org/text/FMR/26/12.doc>).

My land — and Israeli 'laws'

Shareef Omar is a farmer living in the village of Jayyous, near Qalqilya, just to the east of the Green Line (which indicates the limits of the territory annexed by Israel after 1948).

When the Wall was built on their land, 2002-2003, Jayyous and neighbouring villages found themselves cut off from 95% of their cultivable lands — and from nearly all their water resources. The land and water are currently being used for the expansion of illegal settlements.

Here Shareef talks to PN about the methods Israel uses to expropriate the land.



When did it first become clear that Israel intended to take your land — and other land in the West Bank?

We realised that the Camp David agreement in 1980 [between Egypt and Israel] in effect gave Israel the green light to annex land in the West Bank and Gaza. That's when we set up local Land Defence Committees, of which there are now more than a hundred in the West Bank. I am the local representative. When the Wall began to be built in 2002 these Committees became part of the anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign.

How exactly does Israel take the land?

By both direct and indirect means. They rely heavily on laws which were in place under the British Mandate, in the thirties, and prior to that, laws established under Ottoman rule.

For instance, under the British the government claimed the right to confiscate the land if it was needed for new roads or pipelines, for new or expanding communities. Israel of course has no mandate over the West Bank and is in no sense our government, but nevertheless they claim they can apply this law. We are unable to build; the only 'new communities' are the illegal Israeli settlements.

Another law from the same period stated that the government could take land unsuitable for agriculture — the sort we use for sheep and goats. It had to be designated "at least 70% stony ground" — though Israel has since modified this to 50%.

But perhaps the most insidious law was one set up under the Ottomans, which gave the state the right to any land left uncultivated for three years. Israel puts every possible obstacle in the way of our working the land, so it can use this pseudo-legal argument to take it.

How have these measures affected you, personally?

Serious confiscation started in 1988. The military authorities said 1,362 dunums of the village would become state land — including 62 dunums of mine.

Of course we appealed, and there followed a long legal battle, which was not resolved till 1996. In the meantime I had to sell off my sheep and goats and my wife's gold and jewelry.

I was luckier than most, in that 19 of my neighbours lost all of their land. I obtained an Israeli document stating that I do actually have the

right to all of my threatened land — at least for the time being.

The Israelis take aerial photographs to prove whether land is being cultivated or not. However, they take photos after harvest and before planting, so that it looks as though the land is empty. We of course do not have the means to take aerial photos ourselves.

Another major problem is access to water. As early as 1967 the Israelis forbade us to dig any new wells on our land — which sits on the major West Bank aquifer. In 1982 officials from the Israeli Water Department came and put meters in our wells, and limited the amount of water we can take from them. We can no longer plant all our land so the farmers have to take turns, planting it on a rota basis, so that none is left uncultivated for more than two years.

How has the Wall affected you?

Our village is cut off from 75% of its land, which is now in the no-man's land between Israel and the Wall (what they call the 'Seam Zone'). There is access via gates roughly 6–7 kilometres apart, but the Israeli army has absolute power over who is allowed through. You need a permit, but if you are known to be an articulate protester, you don't get one. In fact it's difficult for any able-bodied person to get one.

I took our case to the Hague in 2003 and gave the judge a list of people who were allowed permits. They included babies and young children, many who were deceased and people living abroad, while very few were given to those actually living in Jayyous. This publicity rather embarrassed the Israelis and I was told: if you keep your mouth shut, you will have a permit. Unfortunately, none of my three sons has been allowed one — they all now work elsewhere.

I have 3,000 fruit trees and olive trees, as well a few dunums of vegetables. You can imagine how much work that involves. It is very difficult to find workers with permits, and I am 63. My wife



Thousands of olive trees have been uprooted, throughout the Occupied Territories



View from the village of Jayyous towards the settlement built illegally on village land.

9 and I do the best we can.

Sometimes they close the gate near to our village, and tell us to use one 7 kilometres to the north. This means a round trip of nearly 30 kilometres a day, on foot or donkey for those who don't have a tractor — another very effective way of stopping us working.

Now I sleep in a shed on my land, to avoid the hassle at the gate, and just go back to the village at weekends.

“It's clear the Wall is about land, water and demography — not about ‘security’”

And many of your neighbours have lost their land...

I remember in 2004 — my wife and I were sleeping in the shed — and we were woken up by the sound of bulldozers on the land next to ours. There were three army jeeps, with a bullozer uprooting the olive trees. I told the officer in charge that my neighbour has proof from an Israeli court that it belongs to him, and rang the neighbour on my mobile. When he came he was beside himself. No farmer can bear to see his centuries-old olive trees dangling from the mouth of a bulldozer — the villagers fought them, many were arrested — but work stopped for ten days. During that time we were supposed to meet with the various parties involved, including the developer who claimed to have bought the land from the government. As the relevant Israelis simply didn't turn up to the meetings called by our lawyers the case fell through; they shut us out and the uprooting continued.

We understood a few months later why they were uprooting that area. In April 2005, we were given maps with new confiscation orders, for the expansion of the illegal settlement of Tsofim (built in 1990) on eight and a half dunums of our land. They are planning 1500 houses.

As they expand, it isn't just the land they are building on that is lost. The expansion is scattered, so we can no longer use the land in between the areas they take.

The Wall itself has of course taken a lot of land. When you are crossing it, via one of the gates, there are in fact three barriers. There is first a trench, 3 metres wide and 3 metres deep, then a barbed wire fence, then a gap of 20 metres, then a road 18 metres wide (built with stones taken from our dry stone walls) with in the middle the Wall itself, 3 metres wide, 8 metres high, equipped with sensors, then another gap of 20 metres, another barbed wire fence and trenches. That makes 70 - 90 metres in all.

Don't the Israelis often cite ‘security concerns’ to justify the Wall?

If that were the case they could have built it on the Green Line, not on Palestinian land — the International Court of Justice made that point in 2004.

What makes it clear that it's nothing to do with security are the maps devised as early as 1979 by Professor Arnon Sofer of Haifa University — the one we call ‘the Godfather of the Wall’. It was very quiet at that time, with very little armed resistance. But he pointed out that the Palestinians, across Israel and the Occupied Territories, would constitute 60% of the whole population in the area by 2020. He suggested that his proposed Wall — identical to the route this one takes — would deprive 2 million Palestinians of water and good agricultural land. Many would have to leave, so it would effect a bloodless ethnic cleansing and help achieve a Jewish majority up to the Jordan river.

It's clear the Wall is about land, water and demography — not about ‘security’.

How do you manage for water, in the village?

We have one well for four villages to the east of the Wall — not enough for drink. Each area of Jayyous has only two hours of water, once every three days

You mentioned ‘indirect’ methods of expropriating the land...

Apart from limiting the water and the labour needed, they make

The rise and rise of Avigdor Lieberman

Moshé Machover predicts an intensification of ethnic cleansing under the new Deputy Prime Minister

In November 2006 Avigdor Lieberman became Israel's Minister of Strategic Affairs (with special reference to the alleged 'threat' posed by Iran to Israel's regional nuclear monopoly) and Deputy Prime Minister.

He was born in June 1958, in the then Soviet Republic of Moldova, and emigrated to Israel in 1978. Lieberman soon made his mark as a right-wing activist, especially among fellow immigrants from the former Soviet Union, many of whom hold extreme chauvinist and racist views ('What are all these Arabs doing in our country?' they ask soon after arriving in Israel).

From 1993 to 1996 he was Director-General of the Likud party. In 1999 he made a shrewd move, founding his own party, Yisrael Beytenu ('Israel — Our Home'), appealing mainly to the million fellow ex-Soviet immigrants. In the elections of that year his party got four seats in the 120-member Knesset. He served in the Sharon cabinet, first as Minister of Infrastructures, later as Minister of Transport. In that post, he called for all Palestinian prisoners held by the Israeli occupation authorities to be drowned in the Dead Sea, and offered to provide the buses (*Ha'aretz*, July 11, 2002). He also suggested to the Israeli cabinet that the air force systematically bomb all the commercial centres, gas stations and banks in the Occupied Territories (*The Independent*, March 7, 2002).



Sharon dismissed him in 2004 for opposing the plan for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. But Yisrael Beytenu continued to swell in the noisome swamp of Israel's right-wing politics: in the 2006 elections it got 11 seats, making it the Knesset's fifth largest party (the Likud rump under Netanyahu came fourth, with 12 seats).

"Lieberman is merely giving voice to the whispered desires and wet dreams of all mainstream Zionists"

Lieberman advocates revoking the Israeli citizenship of Israel's Palestinian minority, and ceding some localities, in which they form a majority, to the Palestinian Authority — in exchange for much larger areas of the Occupied Territories colonised by Israeli Jews. His rhetoric is openly racist and violent. He has called for the execution of Israeli Arab members of the Knesset who meet with Hamas or don't celebrate Israel's Independence Day. Compared to him, Austria's Jörg Haider and France's Jean-Marie Le Pen are relative pussycats.

Yet, Lieberman's recent elevation to a senior cabinet post passed without adverse comment by the so-called 'international community' — hardly surprising, as this is another name for the coalition of the wilful, led by the US,

which habitually allows Israel to get away with murder. Lieberman, with his Iran-directed brief, may be especially useful to the US now that it is unleashing its Israeli Rottweiler to intimidate (and possibly to attack) Iran.

The Israel Labour Party, which is part of the ruling coalition, accepted Lieberman as a partner with hardly a murmur: only one Labour minister resigned in protest, the other seven didn't budge from their ministerial chairs. This too should surprise no one. For Lieberman, in his inimitably crude way, is merely giving voice to the whispered desires and wet dreams of all mainstream Zionists.

Israel, the last active settler state, is often compared to the last-but-one: South Africa under its late unlamented apartheid regime. But in fact Zionist colonisation followed, right from the start, a rather different model. Apartheid was a system specifically designed to keep the non-whites at hand, as a super-exploitable labour force, but without civil rights. They were vitally needed by the South-African economic structure. Zionist colonisation — aiming to create and preserve an ethnically 'pure' Jewish state — had no use for the indigenous Palestinians: they were not to be exploited — but excluded altogether and expelled, ethnically cleansed. On 12 June 1895, the founder of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl, noted in his diary:

"The poorer section of the [indigenous] population we shall try to transfer across the border, without raising noise, by giving them employment in the transit countries, but in our own country we shall deny them all work."

Since then, ethnic cleansing — referred to as 'transfer' in Zionistspeak — has been the preferred option of all major Zionist factions, planned in advance and implemented as and when opportunity offered itself.¹

The more pugnacious Zionist leaders, such as Ariel Sharon, have not been content to wait for a transfer opportunity — say a regional war — to arise all by itself. Opportunities can be planned and created. In this light, the poll published by Yedioth Ahronoth on 21 September 2006 is ominous: Lieberman is second favourite to become Israel's Prime Minister. Netanyahu came first. The incumbent, Ehud Olmert, came fifth.

¹ See Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of 'Transfer' in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992; Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld, 2006.

"The vision I would like to see here is the entrenching of the Jewish and the Zionist state... When there is a contradiction between democratic and Jewish values, the Jewish and Zionist values are more important."

Lieberman
(*The Scotsman*, October 23, 2006)

TUC unanimous

The overwhelming vote at the Trade Union Congress in the autumn of 2006 for a motion on Palestine, presented by the Fire Brigades Union, represents a major step forward. Not a single vote was cast against the motion.

It clearly expresses support for the rights of the Palestinian people to an independent state, the right of refugees to return to their homeland, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories and the removal of the illegally constructed Apartheid Wall.

Currently there are 18 national trade unions affiliated to PSC, representing 80% of the members of the trade union movement. Since Congress two more national trade unions have affiliated to PSC: AMICUS, with nearly 1.3 million members and the National Union of Teachers, the largest teachers union in Europe.

The TUC is to send out a letter to all its affiliated trade unions, encouraging them to affiliate to PSC.

Ruth Winters, President of the Fire Brigades Union, condemned the Labour Government for its failure to support justice for the Palestinian people and condemned Israel for its "state terrorism". She called on all unions to affiliate to PSC: "I'm tired of debating the same issues – it's time for action in support of the Palestinian people," she said.

Rick Daley of the Transport and Salaried Staff Association said that the Israeli army regarded themselves as "untouchable" and said that for many in the media the "state sponsored murder of Palestinians seems to be OK".

Bernard Roome of the Communications Workers Union condemned the Israeli army action of "taking out Palestinian communications assets" and reminded the Congress that inside these "assets" were fellow Palestinian workers.

Keith Sonnet, Deputy General Secretary of UNISON, which represents over one million workers, called for an end to the British arms trade with the country and for an end to Israel's 'favoured nation' status with the EU.

Maggie Wright of the TGWU called for the building of links with Palestinian workers and described the project for a library for Palestinian children that she is involved in.

Other speakers compared Israeli actions to those of the Apartheid regime in South Africa and called on the British Government to end its "even-handed" approach: one cannot equate the oppressor and the oppressed.

• For full text of the resolution see www.palestinecampaign.org.

MPs speak out

November's **lobby of Parliament** was the most successful to date, supported by national trade unions, Muslim, Jewish and Christian groups, and anti-war organisations. Over 100 MPs were approached by more than 300 constituents, and asked to work towards restoring aid to the Palestinian Authority, ending the Israeli blockade, releasing the Palestinian parliamentarians held by Israel and ending the British arms trade with Israel.

The lobby was followed by a public meeting in Parliament organised by PSC, addressed by Tony Benn, Dr Manuel Hassassian, Jeff Halper of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Barry Camfield from the TGWU, Mohammed Abdul Bari from the Muslim Council of Britain and Dan Judelson from Jews for Justice for Palestinians.

Sir Gerald Kaufman MP strongly criticised Israel's withholding of the taxes due to Palestine – comparing it to theft – and its arrest of Palestinian parliamentarians. Phyllis Starkey MP added that the "kidnapping of the Speaker of the Palestinian parliament attacked democracy itself", while Jeremy Corbyn MP pointed out that if the PA had decided

to abduct members of Israel's parliament (the Knesset) there would be an immediate military strike by Israel and international condemnation. Richard Burden MP highlighted the shelling in Beit Hanoun in November which killed 19 people, and urged that action be taken on Israel's settlement policy, particularly in East Jerusalem.

The number of MPs prepared to speak out on the issue has clearly increased, as demonstrated by the number signing Early Day Motions (EDMs) supporting the Palestinians. Even some MPs previously described by their constituents as 'pro-Israeli' now express sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians and condemnation of Israel's policies.

Over the summer, 103 MPs signed an EDM tabled by Jeremy Corbyn calling for EU aid to be reinstated and he has re-tabled the motion for the current parliamentary session.

• Please check if your MP has signed EDM 343, on restoring funding, and Richard Burden's EDM 330 on promoting peace, by going to <http://edmi.parliament.uk>. If they have not, urge them to do so.

Student breakthroughs

From the start of the autumn term there has been a strong pro-Palestinian presence on UK campuses, with a PSC student newsletter and other materials distributed widely at freshers' fairs.

In November PSC organised a highly successful **Student Day School** attended by activists from 22 different universities. Students heard from Tony Benn, Palestinian Delegate to Britain Manuel Hassassian, Dan Judelson of European Jews for a Just Peace, Palestinian academic Karma Nabulsi, Israeli refusenik Shimri Zameret and NUS Vice President Welfare, Veronica King. They discussed the impact of Israel's illegal occupation on Palestinian lives and education and the need to build support for Palestine in the student movement here.

Later that month the **NUS Black Students Campaign** continued its strong support for peace and justice for the Palestinian people at its winter conference in **Wolverhampton**, attended by 170 African, Arab, Asian and Caribbean students from colleges and universities across the country.

At **Leeds University**, resolutions

supporting Palestinian rights to education, and twinning with Birzeit University were passed at referendum with over 1400 votes. One resolution sought to ensure that supporters of the student Palestinian Solidarity Group be allowed to criticise the policies and actions of the state of Israel, without being harassed by supporters of Israel. There was an immediate furious reaction from Zionists, who claimed this was tantamount to 'gagging Jewish students' and threatened the University with legal action.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Michael Arthur refused to be intimidated, saying: "The referendum decision... does not conflict with the university's values."

At **Sussex University's** AGM a motion was passed denouncing the 'entrenched system of racial apartheid' operated by the Israeli state. The Union resolved to support the Right to Education Campaign at Birzeit University, to affiliate to Friends of Birzeit University in the UK and to raise awareness about the issues facing Palestinian education, in the NUS and beyond.

• See <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu> for more information

In Brief

● **NEW ILLEGAL SETTLEMENT?** On 26 December Israel announced plans to build yet another settlement in the West Bank, in the northern Jordan Valley. Existing illegal settlements have been steadily expanding for decades – but this is the first time in ten years that a major, completely new one has been announced. It will be used initially by the 20 families from the fundamentalist Gaza settlement Shirat Hayam, which resisted evacuation.

One Israeli source suggested that it might be part of a deal with settlers to get their acceptance of the removal of minor outposts from the West Bank, which could then be presented as a major 'concession', prior to a unilateral declaration of Israel's borders.

According to a spokeswoman for the American consulate in Jerusalem, the US is disturbed by the announcement: "We're looking into it, and if turns out to be a new settlement, we would be very concerned, given Israel's obligations under the roadmap."

(In 2003, under the so-called 'roadmap for peace', Israel pledged to freeze settlement activity.)

● **ISRAELI ARMY ROBS PALESTINIAN BANKS – AGAIN:**

On 20 September the Israeli army raided financial institutions in the cities of Ramallah, Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin, removing property from the raided sites and detaining seven of their owners. In addition, they took six million New Israeli Shekels (NIS) (approximately 1.3 million dollars), claiming that the banks and money exchanges handle cash to be used in operations against Israel. Mohammed Assar, a money changer in the West Bank town of Jenin, said troops made off with \$254,000 and destroyed his business. "They took me from my house and forced me to open the door and took everything I have: money, cheques, dollars, shekels," Assar said. "They didn't leave me anything except for the rubble."

The Israeli army conducted a similar raid on 25 February 2004 against the Arab Bank and Cairo-Amman Bank in Ramallah and El-Bireh, confiscating 40 million NIS (approximately nine million dollars). The then defence minister Shaul Mofaz claimed that there was intelligence information that the 390 bank accounts of Palestinian charitable organisations targeted in the raid were used to finance operations against Israel.

● **UN COMMISSION CALLS FOR REPARATIONS FOR LEBANON:** On 1 December the three-member commission of the UN human rights inquiry into the war on Lebanon recommended to the UN that: "It should consider the creation of a commission competent to examine individual claims for reparations and compensation."

The inquiry team was expanding on its report of 21 November, which said Israel was guilty of "excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force" in the July/August war, which it said caused 1,191 deaths in Lebanon and damaged 30,000 homes.

It suggested setting up an international compensation programme similar to the one which has paid out billions of dollars to cover losses due to Iraq's 1990-91 invasion and occupation of Kuwait.



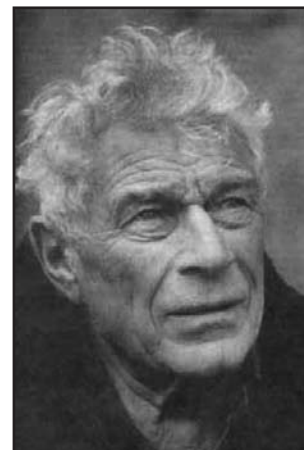
● **CULTURAL BOYCOTT CALL:**

On 15 December a letter appeared the Guardian, signed by 94 prominent authors, film-makers, musicians and performers, headed by the renowned author John Berger. It carried the basic message: "Don't visit, exhibit or perform in Israel!"

This has since been signed by several hundred more people working in the arts worldwide.

The letter comes after the August 2006 statement issued by Palestinian filmmakers, artists, writers, and other cultural workers calling for a cultural boycott of Israel. The statement, letter and signatories can be viewed at: http://www.pacbi.org/boycott_news_more.php?id=315_0_1_0_C

● To endorse the letter and add your name, contact info@bricup.org.uk.



John Berger

● **IDF CHIEF FORCED TO FLEE NEW ZEALAND:** Former

Israeli army chief-of-staff Lieutenant General Moshe Ya'alon, better known as 'the Butcher of Qana', left New Zealand in a hurry on 28 November, after a warrant was issued for his arrest for suspected war crimes.

The New Zealand Justice Ministry issued the warrant several days after receiving a request from a New Zealand resident that was co-signed by various local and international human rights organisations.



The warrant referred to the Israeli Air Force attack on the home of senior Hamas official Salah Shehade in the Gaza Strip in 2002. Shehade and one of his aides were killed in the attack, along with 13 civilians, including several children.

Transport Minister Shaul Mofaz and Major General Doron Almog have evaded similar charges in Britain over the past two years.

Diplomatic relations between Israel and New Zealand have been tense in recent years. In 2004, two members of Israel's Mossad espionage agency were imprisoned for illegally trying to obtain New Zealand passports.

● ROW OVER ISRAELI TEXTBOOKS:

Currently, Israeli textbooks show the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967 – the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights – as an integral part of Israel. International law considers them to be occupied land that Israel has illegally settled.

Israel's education minister, Yuli Tamir, once a leading anti-settlement activist and co-founder of Peace Now, has said the textbooks should show Israel's pre-1967 borders, prompting criticism and abuse from right-wingers.

Right-wing MP Yitzhak Levy accused Ms Tamir of "politicising the education system".

The Minister said Israeli children need a proper understanding of their history, and has ordered the books to be changed. "We can't teach children what happened in 1967 if they are not aware where the border runs", she said.

Her action is seen as a direct challenge to the Jewish settlement movement, a politically powerful group in Israel.



Yuli Tamir



● PRESIDENT CARTER UNDER FIRE:

In an op-ed in the LA Times on 8 December, Jimmy Carter defended his recent book, 'Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid', which has created a furore in the US.

He highlighted the difficulty of discussing the Israel/Palestine question in the US:

"For the last 30 years, I have witnessed and experienced the severe restraints on any free and balanced discussion of the facts."

The book describes "the abominable oppression and persecution in the occupied Palestinian territories", which he sees as "in many ways, more oppressive than what blacks lived under in South Africa during Apartheid."

He reported that the book sales were brisk, despite hostile reviews and harsh criticism from fellow Democrats in Congress, who rushed to distance themselves from his position.

"Out in the real world, however, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. I've signed books in five stores, with more than 1,000 buyers at each site. My most troubling experience has been the rejection of my offers to speak, for free, about the book on university campuses with high Jewish enrollment and to answer questions from students and professors. I have been most encouraged by prominent Jewish citizens and members of Congress who have thanked me privately for presenting the facts and some new ideas."

He voiced the hope that the book would "precipitate discussion and help restart peace talks ... that can lead to permanent peace for Israel and its neighbors. Another hope is that Jews and other Americans who share this same goal might be motivated to express their views, even publicly, and perhaps in concert. I would be glad to help with that effort."

CATCH THIS CLIP...

If you missed the graphic report on the massacres of Beit Hanoun, on Channel 4 News, 23 November, you can view it on: channel4.com/player/v2/player.jsp?showId=3356.

It is followed by a short interview in which Jon Snow attempts to question Israeli General Miri Eisen about the clear targeting of the civilian area from two different artillery positions.

The General does her best to shout him down, affirming her deep sorrow 'as a mother', and preferring to repeat 'Israel is a democracy' as a kind of mantra, rather than responding to his repeated question.



General Miri Eisen

● On 3 October, Sky News carried a story of racial discrimination in Israeli football. Betar Jerusalem is the wealthiest, most popular club in Israel, but no 'Arabs' are allowed to play for it. Fans forced the owner to back down when he said he wanted to end the discrimination. Some interesting comments here from the fans, and from the manager, former Spurs player Ossie Ardiles: http://news.sky.com/skynews/video/videoplayer/0,,30200-israel_081006_1200,00.html



Ossie Ardiles

● If Scott Ritter (former chief UN weapons inspector turned whistle-blower on the Iraq war) is one of your heroes, you can see a 3-minute clip of him saying the unsayable: that the Israel lobby in the US should be a topic for open discussion, that Hizbullah represents no direct threat to the US, etc... <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article15591.htm>

● NUCLEAR LEAK IN ISRAEL: On 28 November Israel's Channel 2 Television reported that a leak of irradiated water had been



The nuclear reactor at Dimona

detected, near the nuclear reactor in the Negev Desert city of Dimona. They stated that "high levels of radiation" were detected in water just outside the nuclear complex.

Israeli authorities acknowledged the "incident," but claimed that the

water was located in an area not accessible to the public – a claim disputed by the TV Channel.

Israel is believed to have built more than 200 nuclear warheads over the last 20 years – though, officially, it neither admits nor denies their existence.

● **HOLIDAY OF A LIFETIME...** For those bored with beaches, temples, fabulous scenery, Israel has something rather special on offer. Shurat HaDin, an Israeli Law Centre apparently doubling as a travel agency, organises “fact-finding missions” in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

You are invited to “Experience a dynamic and intensive eight-day exploration of Israel’s struggle for survival and security in the Middle East today: a military, humanitarian, historical, judicial, religious, and political reality check.”

Among the promised highlights of the trip are:

- Briefings by Mossad officials and commanders of the Shin Bet
- Inside tour of the IAF [Israeli Air Force] unit which carries out targeted killings
- Inside tour of the controversial Security Fence and secret intelligence bases
- Live exhibition of penetration raids in Arab territory
- Briefing by Israel’s war heroes who saved the country
- Small airplane tour of the Galilee and jeep rides in the Golan heights

Moreover you can:

- Observe a trial of Hamas terrorists in an IDF military court
- Meet Israel’s Arab agents who infiltrate the terrorist groups and provide real-time intelligence
- Meet with senior Cabinet Ministers and other key policymakers

All this, with five-star accommodation at the Sheraton Plaza Jerusalem and three kosher meals a day – for £1,100!!

One satisfied customer is quoted as saying “I have never in my life been part of such an incredible and emotional experience... The ‘Ultimate Mission’ lived up to its name and is something which I will never forget. It is indeed the Israeli adventure of a lifetime”.

[Dr. Simon Goldberg, Los Angeles, CA].

Interested? You can check it out on: <http://www.israellawcenter.org/template.php?section=MI>

● **HOMES BULLDOZED IN THE NEGEV:** At 5:00am on 6 December hundreds of police with six bulldozers demolished 17 homes and three animal shacks in the village of Twail Abu-Jarwal in the Negev area of South Israel. Not a house was left standing.

This is just one phase in the plans of Israeli Minister of the Interior, Roni Bar-On, to demolish more than 42,000 Palestinian homes in the region.

Of the 150,000 Bedouin citizens of Israel living in the Negev, over half live in villages that the government has left “unrecognised”, meaning that there are no options for building permits, running water, electricity, roads, sewer systems and rubbish collection. Additionally there are very minimal education and health facilities. The aim is to force the Bedouins off their ancestral lands – while denying them the right to build homes elsewhere.

The Regional Council for the Unrecognised Villages is the representative

• ALTERNATIVE INFORMATION CENTRE



body for the residents of the 45 Bedouin villages of the Negev. For more information, contact Yeela Raanan, 054 7487005, or via email at yallylivnat@gmail.com or contact info@al-awda.org.

● **‘WAR ON THE WEB’ DECLARED:** Amir Gissin, head of Israel’s Foreign Ministry information machine, has been making strenuous efforts to patch up Israel’s image in the aftermath of last year’s carnage in Lebanon and Palestine.

He has declared there to be a “War on the Web”, in which Israel has a new weapon, a piece of computer software called the “internet megaphone” – to be found at www.giyus.org (Give Israel Your United Support). There are already more than 25,000 registered users, who receive alerts asking them to respond to pro- or anti-Israel events or statements, and to influence polls by mass votes.

They are particularly vigilant concerning the BBC, who they view as having a very anti-Israel stance. Stewart Purvis, Professor of Television Journalism at City University in London, who was a member of the independent panel set up by the BBC governors to review the BBC’s coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reported that the panel received a huge number of emails from North America, complaining of anti-Israel bias. However, a majority of the emails from the UK thought the BBC anti-Palestinian and pro-Israel.

Suggestion: why not register with GIYUS – and help to ‘balance’ the views they are seeking to promote...?



● **THE DIASPORA SPEAKS:** In November, a collective report, ‘Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions’, was launched at meetings of Palestinian communities around the world.

In the report *Palestinians in the Diaspora*, in more than 25 countries, demand their rights and discuss their needs and priorities.

This is the result of the ongoing Civitas project based at Nuffield College at the University of Oxford, headed by Dr Karma Nabulsi. It aims to facilitate communication between the Diaspora and the PLO and its institutions, and with humanitarian agencies and other refugee communities, both inside and outside Palestine.

The report is available online at <http://www.civitas-online.org/>. For hard copies in English or Arabic or for more information, write to: civitas@nuffield.ox.ac.uk.

Branches respond to Summer Rains and Autumn Clouds

Branches were clearly energised by the recent terrible events in Palestine

Taking off...

The **Halifax and Calder Valley** branch kicked off this autumn with a whole programme of meetings, the first being 'Refugees, The Forgotten People'. Like many branches they found that the film 'The Iron Wall' had a great impact, and at another meeting Lucia Pizarro, the international co-ordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions was a powerful speaker, joined by last-minute guests from Nablus.

Other highlights included Khaled Hroub's Northern launch of his book, ' Hamas, A Beginner's Guide' and a showing of 'Visit Palestine', which was followed by a lively question and answer session with the film's director, Katie Barlow.

In parallel the branch holds monthly town centre stalls in Halifax and Hebden Bridge, and hopes to extend these to Todmorden in the New Year.



Khaled Hroub, author of 'Hamas, A Beginner's Guide' with local MP, Linda Riordan and former MP Alice Mahon

The programme for 2007 includes meetings at local churches and cafés, a **Northern Activists' Dayschool**, and plans to make contacts with the local NUT and get material into the Citizenship curriculum.

Finally the group is proud to have raised almost £1000 for Medical Aid for Palestinians – not bad going since their launch on 28 June!

The fledgling **Hertfordshire** branch is also about to be launched this January, with monthly cinema nights in the area. On the programme: 'The Iron Wall', 'Arna's Children', and 'Visit Palestine'. Palestinian olive oil will be available to taste and buy.

Boosting the boycott

The **BIG (Boycott Israeli Goods)** campaign got a boost with **Days of Action** on 7 October and 9 December, when branches around the country organised special activities.

Oxford was active as ever in the heart of the city, where they leafleted three supermarkets and got an excellent response at their stall. (Prior to the action they contacted the shops, identifying goods they were selling from Israel and explaining the reasons for not stocking them). **York** similarly found people very willing to engage in discussion on Palestine, and Lebanon was equally a topic raised by the public.

Tyneside PSC focused on two Tesco stores after their Saturday stall, leaving visiting cards with the Israeli herbs, dates and Jaffa oranges, while **PSC Cymru/Wales** were highly visible – and audible – in the centre of **Cardiff**.

The **Southport** branch had a stall with information sheets, petitions, postcards and badges by the mainline station entrance and distributed leaflets in Lord Street.

An encouraging number of young people took an interest, having heard about the injustice to the Palestinians on Punk websites and Punk songs!

A vigil and leafleting also took place in **Liverpool**.

Bucks & Berks found the general public overwhelmingly supportive and receptive to the idea of boycott, with a surprising number having personal connections with Palestine – e.g. one

person had been to Gaza recently on business when the house next door to where he was staying was demolished by the Israeli army.

Leafleting by **Lambeth and Wandsworth PSC** in Brixton outside Sainsbury's was only briefly interrupted when someone reported to a local police patrol that anti-Semitic literature was being distributed. Police came and looked at the leaflets but could see no grounds for complaint. (Anyone else had problems of this kind?)

• **For more details of events and ongoing campaigns see www.bigcampaign.org.uk.**

Raising the issues

Hackney PSC hosted a standing-room-only meeting in September with **Rauda Morcos**, co-founder of **Aswat** ('Voices'), the Palestinian feminist lesbian organisation and winner of the 2006 Felipa de Souza Award presented by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission earlier this year. Rauda stressed that, for Aswat members, being lesbian and being Palestinian and committed to ending the occupation are integrated and not separate identities (see their website, www.aswatgroup.org).

Another very successful occasion was a stall outside Fresh and Wild in Hackney, providing tasters of Palestinian olive oil to passers-by. After discussions with Fresh and Wild they agreed to consider stocking Palestinian oil and also Palestinian embroideries.

Exeter PSC organised a **Palestine Day** at the university, with a range of stalls representing different initiatives, including the twinning group with Hebron, preparation for the Lobby of Parliament and the Prisoners subgroup, plus of course the ongoing Boycott campaign. They were able to link up with the local Institute for Arab and Islamic Studies and the Student Friends of Palestine group.

The keynote speaker at the Open Forum was Khaled Hroub from the Arab Media Centre in Cambridge, who gave an excellent talk about Hamas, from



Stalls at Exeter's Open Day for Palestine

their inception in 1987 to the present day government.

Finally a dabke dance workshop was perfect to change the mood and lift the spirits.

Camden celebrated with a **Palestine Solidarity Festival** – a very successful display of Palestinian culture – visual arts, film, poetry (read by Ahdaf Soueif and Michael Rosen), music by 'oud player Nizar Al Issa and food by Rahel's Kitchen, rounded off with a speech by Azzam Tamimi. (For review of Nizar's CD see p22).



Nizar Al Issa at Camden's Festival

Dabke also played a role in a major initiative in **Sheffield**, where a new scholarship fund has been started by a group of Sheffield women working in partnership with two health NGOs in the Gaza Strip. The scholarship fund was inspired by an international women's day event '**Palestinian Women Speak**' held in Sheffield in March 2006. Dr. Mona El Farra from the Union of Health Work Committees and member of the Board of Directors of the Red Crescent Society of Gaza (to revisit the UK in January), highlighted the extreme difficulties many young Palestinian women face in gaining higher education.

The organisers of 'Palestinian Women Speak' therefore took the decision to put £1500 raised by their event into setting up the **Sheffield Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund**. This academic year the Fund is already supporting four young women through university in Gaza, where they are studying engineering, pharmacy, journalism and English. The Sheffield women, working closely with **Sheffield PSC**, are committed to expanding their scheme. Their second fund-raising evening featured singing, middle eastern dancing, and dabke dance workshops. For more info: hilary@nelsonandco.org.uk.

Meanwhile **Sheffield** held another protest in October 2006 against the collective crimes taking place in Gaza and the West Bank, and hosted two public meetings: one as part of Al Haq's tour of the UK, and the other an inspiring talk by Swee Ang on the 24th anniversary

of the Sabra-Shatila massacre. Like most branches, they continue to buy and distribute olive oil from **Zaytoun** throughout the Sheffield area.

Fund-raising events included a sponsored fun run in Derbyshire, a falafel evening and – most successful of all – a **concert4palestine** which attracted a sell-out crowd of 400 and raised well over £3,000 for the children's centres which the branch support in the Gaza Strip. The concert featured renowned guitarist Martin Simpson, and radical folk singer Roy Bailey, both of whom gave their services free. During the evening Roy was congratulated for his brave decision to return his MBE (received for services to folk music) as a protest against the Government's foreign policies. The evening also saw the launch of a new appeal leaflet promoting the children's centres supported by Sheffield, and a brand new solidarity mug, both of which were produced with the help of generous donations from our supporters.

Sheffield also had the great idea of combining their AGM with a Dayschool, where Palestinian speakers and international returnees led the discussion, and viewed 'The Iron Wall'.

Lambeth and Wandsworth PSC raised important issues with their showing of the documentary 'Mafateeh' (Keys), a new, award-winning film about the yearning of refugees to return to their home villages.

Reporting back...

The indefatigable Joanne Moston of **Cheltenham PSC** was able to tell packed meetings in Cheltenham, Gloucester, Cirencester, Tring, Totnes, St Austell and Pimlico just what life is like in the Occupied Territories, following her most recent visit there in November.

Cheltenham also hosted a major debate in October, attracting over 120 people. The keynote speaker was Edward McMillan-Scott MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament with special responsibility for relations with the Arab world, who chaired the European Parliament's observer missions at the Palestinian presidential and parliamentary

elections. Viv Jackson of Jews for Justice for Palestinians and Saida Jaser, an academic at Al Quds University in Ramallah also spoke.

PSC and Sabeel members, just back from the **Sabeel Conference** in East Jerusalem, spoke at a number of meetings around the country about the current situation, and the future of Arab Christians in Palestine.

Apart from its regular weekly stall, **York PSC** has held demonstrations against Israel's massacres of civilians, which met with warm support from the general public.

They reproduced over 100 copies of the devastating report by Prof John Dugard, the Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Territories to the **UN Human Rights Council**, in which he describes in great detail many of the latest Israeli crimes in both Gaza and the West Bank. Among the recipients were local politicians, local councillors, branch secretaries of local political parties and around 40 church leaders of all denominations.

Like many branches, they found that film showings – notably *Paradise Now* and *The Iron Wall* – sparked good discussions and brought in new people.

In advance of the **National Lobby** they met with local MP Hugh Bayley to hand in a petition of almost 700 signatures calling for a fundamental change in Britain's approach to the Middle East and in particular to insist on the dismantling of the Wall.

Hadeel stalls of Palestinian crafts have been held at a regional Church Synod and at a Church service in which Palestine was a focus. One of the larger **Remembrance Day services** in one of the Methodist Churches in York had a Palestinian theme, with a presentation on the Occupation being given, photographs of the Wall and refugee camps on display and Palestinian music being played. Local Methodist Churches also enthusiastically supported a **sponsored Bible reading** by one member, who raised £1280 for Medical Aid for Palestinians. (There was excellent coverage of this in the local York press.)

Nearby **Bradford** hosted a talk by Dr Karen Abi-Ezzi from the Centre for Conflict Resolution at the



Sheffield protest against Beit Hanoun massacre

Must see!

• Many branches have already discovered Mohammed Alatar's brilliant, hard-hitting film, **The Iron Wall**, which focuses on Israel's policy of expansion and dispossession.



The stark facts of the Wall and the settlements, set alongside the international laws they violate and backed with maps and quotations by Zionist leaders, make it clear that ethnic cleansing is the ultimate goal. No longer will apologists for Israeli policies be able to claim that the colonisation of Palestine is motivated by a desire for 'security'.

One of the strengths of the film is that many of those interviewed are Israelis, including a settler who speaks honestly of her initial ignorance, and then growing unease, when she becomes aware that she is a pawn in her government's game.

There is rare footage of settler violence in Hebron – rare because, as we see, they immediately attack anyone attempting to film their rampages.

Despite its dark message, the film somehow manages to end on a note of hope.

We are campaigning for this film (58 mins) to be shown on national TV; but in the meantime it is up to activists to show it at as many public meetings as possible, and pass it on to local MPs, MEPs, teachers, journalists and decision-makers of all kinds.

It is available on DVD from PSC for £10 p&p (UK).

• An excellent video – **Our Sufferings in this land** – made by Bristol activist Ed Hill, is a personal account of a visit to the West Bank by a group of activists, to help with the olive harvest. It shows the devastating impact of the Wall and the settlements on Palestinians and the problems they face in their daily lives. Essential viewing for anyone visiting the Occupied Territories for the first time.

The video (1h 20mins) is available for £15 p&p (UK) from www.BristolComputers4Palestine.co.uk.

17 Department of Peace Studies, about the roots of the Palestine-Israeli conflict, with a specific focus on the pre-1948 period.

Reaching out...

Tower Hamlets had a packed programme this autumn/winter, the centrepiece being a visit by five **Palestinians from Jenin**: a town councillor, the director of the Cultural Centre, and three musicians. They visited schools, union groups, a church, a mosque, and spoke at two big public events, a film and talk – plus a musical evening where three of the visitors performed with two professional London-based Arab musicians.

Council workers, health workers, and teachers all hosted meetings where determined enthusiasm for developing concrete links with workers in Jenin was evident.

The visitors also appeared on the **Islam Channel**, on the BBC World Service and local Bangla TV (note to other branches – ME-oriented channels are always interested to hear of our events).

Similarly, **Birmingham** brought over four guests from **Ramallah** to promote their twinning initiative, including the head of the Palestinian Watan TV channel. They attended about 40 meetings, from schools to trade unions to local universities and MPs. They were successful in getting them exposure on local radio and in the press, as well as the Arabic-language Al-Hiwar TV channel. At the end of their visit, a national **Twinning Conference** brought together the Palestinians with twinning groups from around the country. There are plans for a return visit to Palestine next year...

Over the last few months the **Brighton-Tubas** Friendship and Solidarity Group has become firmly established. In October two members travelled to Tubas in the West Bank, spending some time in Tubas and some in the northern Jordan Valley, which is now 95% occupied by the Israeli Army and settlers.

Whilst there they met with a whole range of organisations, including Tubas Women's Group and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, to plan for a volunteer



York protest in city centre

nurse from Brighton to spend 3 months with them in 2007. They also met with the Prisoners Society, to arrange for members of Brighton Amnesty International to work with them, and organised a phone link between students at the University of Sussex and a university student in Tubas who has to pay for his education by working for Israeli settlements in the Jordan Valley.

Brighton Quakers have now decided to support and become actively involved in the group. Brighton is also working with two local unions and with local schools, with a view to forming links with Palestinian schools. They also hope to organise visits from Tubas next year. The next delegation is planned in April 2007. For more info contact tubas@brightonpalestine.org.

Apart from their regular leafleting, **Bangor** has been holding a series of **Olive Groves Dance Nights**, which have raised over £3,000 to replant olive trees. A delegation will be going to Palestine shortly to co-ordinate the replanting programme.

Meetings included an inspiring and very well attended talk at the university in November, by **Husam Zomlot** from the Palestinian General Delegation.

Bangor found lobbying can pay off, since a local MP recently joined a delegation to the Israeli Embassy protesting at the killing of women and children in Gaza – "quite a turn around compared to her attitude a few years ago!"

Brighton is also the home of the Smash EDO campaign.

The past months have shown it's even more essential to campaign against these arms manufacturers, as the equipment that EDO have been involved with has been used with devastating effect in Beit Hanoun and elsewhere.

A victory party outside the factory gates on 6 December celebrated the factory's dismal performance in 2006. If you would like to get involved, or to have a speaker on the arms trade, see www.smashedo.org.uk.

Boycott and divestment grow

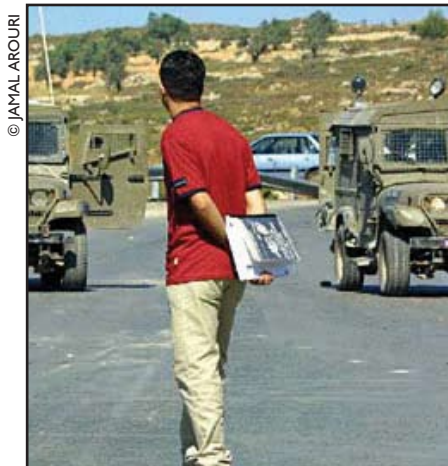
Irish thanked by Palestinian academics

In a letter published in the Irish Times on 16 September, 61 Irish academics called for a moratorium on EU aid to Israeli universities, until Israel abides by international law and basic human rights norms.

In November, in an open letter signed by over 100 academics and 1,000 students of Birzeit University near Ramallah, staff and students thanked the academics warmly for their support and called on universities worldwide to support the campaign.

They pointed out that: "Israeli academic institutions have close links with the state, and the vast majority of Israeli intellectuals and academics either contribute directly to the Israeli occupation through research that justifies or improves the mechanisms of Israeli apartheid, or are complicit through their silence about it."

Two leading Israeli intellectuals, Aharon Shabtai and Tanya Reinhardt, who recently visited Ireland to talk about the Israeli occupation and promote the boycott campaign, reported that many Israeli academics privately acknowledge that the international campaign for academic boycott is having a serious effect.



An Israeli checkpoint at Bir Zeit University

Meanwhile Palestinians face ongoing Israeli attacks on their educational institutions and are increasingly being denied the right to use the Israeli system. There is a growing clampdown in the Occupied Territories that includes the arbitrary detention of students, the prohibition of Gazans from studying in the West Bank and the harassment of foreign students entering the OTs.

• See <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu/news> for more university news.

Consumers shun Israel

According to an article published in The Jerusalem Post on 3 December, Israel came last in a recent survey of 25,000 consumers



asked to rank 36 countries on issues of tourism, exports, governance, investment, immigration, cultural heritage and people.

The study, known as the Nation Brands Index, which has been published four times a year since 2005, showed that "Israel's brand is, by a considerable margin, the most negative we have ever measured in the NBI, and comes in at the bottom of the ranking on almost every question."

The respondents placed Israel last on the list of countries they would want to visit or whom they regarded as having a cultural heritage. It fared slightly better on consumer products but was still toward the bottom.

The Foreign Ministry's Director of Public Affairs Amir Gissin denied the results stemmed from Israel's history of violence and oppression in the region. Rather, he felt that the survey showed the importance of the new 'nation-branding' drive Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni launched this autumn.

"We see the research as an opportunity to increase the awareness of decision makers in Israel to the image problem that Israel has in order to make us more determined to deal with the image problem," he said.

For full report go to: <http://www.nationbrandindex.com>

Dutch bank disinvests from Israel

On 22 November ASN Bank, a Dutch bank based in The Hague that prides itself on its ethical investment policy, announced that it would end its relationship with Veolia Transport, and all companies that benefit from Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory.

Originally the bank was involved in an Israeli project to build a light rail system in occupied East Jerusalem to connect the illegally-constructed settlements with towns and cities in Israel. Veolia Transport, a French multi-national corporation, has faced a barrage of criticism from all over the world, especially following Amnesty International's report on the unlawfulness of constructing the tramline, in March 2006.

After relevant information was provided by a number of individuals and



organisations over the summer, and after meeting with human rights lawyers, representatives of the various pressure groups, and a PLO representative, the bank's directors announced they would end their relation with Veolia.

They stated: "We are of the opinion that Veolia's activities in Jerusalem are in conflict with UN Resolutions. Therefore, on this current information Veolia will be removed from our investment universe."

Questions have also been raised in the Dutch Parliament about Riwal, a Dutch company involved in the illegal construction of the Wall in occupied Palestinian territory.

Belgian company in boycott

In the aftermath of the war in Lebanon, a Belgian company, U2U, which specializes in advising and developing businesses over the internet, turned down an offer to work with an Israeli company.

Wim Uyttersprot, the manager of the company wrote: "I value your interest in my company, but after Israel's destructive war crimes and the inhumanity they showed in Lebanon and also because of your government's apartheid regime in Palestine, it would be incompatible for U2U to associate itself with Israeli products".

The letter ended: "I hope that the political situation in your state will change dramatically and it will be re-established, based on peace and respect to non Jewish cultures."

The Israeli company has threatened to 'expose' U2U in the Israeli and Belgian press, and also to speak to Microsoft, to which U2U is officially licensed.

Graffiti, art and

By **Salma Tuqan**

Anyone who visited the recent 'Word into Art' exhibition at the British Museum will have seen that the Arabic script — central to Arab and Islamic culture — remains a source of fascination and inspiration for modern artists, who have interpreted and adapted traditional styles of calligraphy with increasing freedom.

In the West there has been much debate concerning the status of graffiti as 'art'. Skill, novelty, even beauty, are all characteristics of some of the huge decorative 'tags' which lay claim to many of our public spaces, and which often have an illuminated manuscript quality. With the advent of performance art and installation art it would surely be churlish to deny graffiti, a priori, the status of art.

The rise of Palestinian graffiti

Whatever its aesthetic qualities, the motivation behind the use of graffiti is very different in the streets of Gaza than, say, in the New York subway. In Palestine it has been used to develop a kind of dialogue within the community, with many different voices participating. It was also a response to the censorship of popular Palestinian art imposed by the Israeli authorities, from the mid 1970's to the mid 1980's. Exhibitions were closed and paintings were confiscated for containing political material. Significantly, paintings were classified by military ruling as leaflets and were thus subject to the same censorship regulations as any other printed matter. 'Military Order No.101, Article 6' prohibits residents of the West Bank from printing or publishing any publication, advertisement, proclamation, picture, or any other document which contains any article with political significance except after obtaining a licence from the military commander.¹

Although the First Intifada (1987-92) inspired the growth of graffiti in Gaza, the first, most famous instance of 'revolutionary graffiti' came from Acre Prison, presumed to be by the Palestinian Awad Nabulsi of Nablus, before his execution by the British Mandatory government in 1936. The black charcoal scrawls of the poem he addressed to his family and homeland have evolved into the revolutionary song 'From

Acre Prison', now handed down from generation to generation.

During the First Intifada the United Front of Palestinians included children, teenagers and women, most with no previous experience of political resistance. Resistance took many forms, particularly stone throwing. But there were also massive demonstrations, general strikes, refusal to pay taxes, boycotts of Israeli products, and the establishment of underground schools. (Regular schools were closed by the military as reprisals against the uprising.) Lastly, there was the aggressive political graffiti. It came, particularly in Gaza, as a result of the ban on all forms of communication, plus the curfew imposed by Israeli troops. The new graffiti fashioned itself as a notice board or daily newspaper, with regular writings creating a multi-layered dialogue of messages.

Denied access to an uncensored print media, people took to the walls to claim their own public space. The graffiti addressed three separate publics: the occupying forces, the Palestinian community, and the international media. It served as a method for passing on messages, for warning of collaborators and for issuing directives for acts of rebellion, such as strikes, boycotts and demonstrations. It recorded significant events, registered political power and commemorated martyrs (Fig.1). Most importantly, it worked towards galvanizing the resistance. For some, graffiti became a rite of passage into the resistance movement, a sign by which a youth demonstrated his willingness to gamble his life in the name of Palestine.

For in Palestine writing graffiti incurs the risk of being shot at by the Israeli Defence Force. The graffiti necessarily takes the form of hasty, rushed writings, mostly in black, that express their sentiments regarding the occupation. The occasional use of colours on the walls mocks the Israeli banning of the colours of the Palestinian flag; green, white, black and red. Placed in the most visible areas, these images demand the community engage in political activity, and have the power to induce a strong sense of duty. This is especially true of the graffiti telling of sacrifice and martyrdom, evoking powerful sentiments of community and loss. Remembering the dead is of paramount importance.

One significant aspect of graffiti in Palestine is the creation of signatures of political factions — often revealing inter-factional

tensions despite their united opposition to the occupation. The signatures are frequently in the form of well known icons such as the red hammer and sickle of the Palestine Communist Party, or the map of Palestine representing the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and also Islamic symbols such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. After 1990 the graffiti increasingly indicated competition between the various parties, and acted as a recruiting station for new supporters who might share their beliefs.

Sometimes the graffiti take the form of humorous bravado, a means of preparing young boys for the likelihood of imprisonment, as well as cocky retorts denying the occupation's ability to wear down the resistance. Graffiti is also directed at the Israeli audience. It challenges Israel's claims to surveillance and its attempts to control every aspect of life. Although most of the Israeli soldiers cannot read the graffiti, its pictorial presence registered as a threat in their eyes. Erasure became imperative. Young Palestinian boys have been marched at gunpoint to paint over the graffiti, and any



Fig. 1: Remembering child victims among the political slogans

resistance

found on private property led to a large fine being levied on the owners of that property.

The Second Intifada inspired a new directness. Images appeared everywhere across Gaza in the form of posters, heroically depicting martyr figures or fedayeen (freedom fighters), also boldly printed copies of symbols that stood for Palestine, in particular the keffiyeh (Arab head cover), the allegorical female figure of Palestine in her embroidered dress, the olive tree, and the cactus (a symbol of the resilience of the Palestinian race and its ability to survive).

The Wall as canvas

The 8-metre high Wall, built largely on Palestinian land, is reminiscent of the Walls of Berlin, Nicosia and Northern Ireland, all testifying to the capacity of barriers to heighten paranoia and fear of the 'other', through segregation. The most famous of these, the Berlin Wall, also attracted a wealth of pictorial graffiti.

In places where the Wall is not flanked by trenches and barbed wire, graffiti artists often have the time and space denied them in their earlier, hastier work, carried out at great personal risk (Fig.2). Graffiti is almost exclusively on the Palestinian side, although on the western side at Gilo, just south of Jerusalem, an idyllic landscape has been painted, complete with picturesque Palestinian village; but the mural is empty of people. A subconscious realisation of the dream of ethnic cleansing?

Where the Wall passes through the built up areas of villages such as Bethlehem, Qalandia and Abu Dis, graffiti and murals are displayed, many written in English and other foreign languages, and featuring internationally recognisable symbols. Much of the graffiti has been produced by an international contingent of activists and tourists – although some of the writing in English is carried out by the Palestinians themselves, hoping to communicate their objection to the wall through international media coverage.

For example, in October and November 2004 a group of Mexican artists, active in the Zapatista independence movement, travelled to Bethlehem to paint murals on the Segregation Wall. Their stencils announced the formation of the new ghetto of Bethlehem, created by the Wall, and drew parallels with the ghettos of Warsaw and Nazi Germany.

In 2005 the famous British graffiti artist Banksy travelled to the Occupied Territories to leave his impression on the Wall, stealthily executing nine stencilled images in all three locations (see Palestine News, Autumn 2005). At the Bethlehem checkpoint, although his images (Fig 3) are not overtly political, they allude, ironically to idyllic spaces untainted by human destruction. He tackles the wall as both artist's blank canvas and restrictive barrier. Banksy is quoted saying: 'Palestine is now the world's largest open air prison and the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti artists.'

Qalandia, in Northern Jerusalem, intersects the route between Jerusalem and Ramallah, where passing traffic has invited abundant



Fig. 2: Allegory of the conflict on the Wall



Fig. 3: The Wall round Bethlehem (Banksy)

graffiti. One of the key images sprayed onto the Wall there is the iconic cartoon figure of Handala, originally the work of the Palestinian cartoonist Naji al-Ali. It depicts the image of a barefoot ten

Singing for Palestine

This winter has seen the release of some great CDs, all with a clear message of hope and resistance...

- **Salaam**, from Palestinian singer and 'oud player **Nizar Al-Issa** is the first to be released in the UK following his earlier **Akhbarak**, available only in the Middle East. Here he goes back to his roots, supported by the crisp tabla playing of Kayed Hussein performing four traditional Palestinian songs plus two of his own compositions. The singing is passionate and beautifully articulated, as in his recent live performances in London, so that you can hear every word. It is a very good introduction to those many Palestinian songs that express longing for the homeland – you will find yourself humming along to the melodies from the start. Available from PSC at £8 (for more details see www.red-desertproductions.com).

- **Mishwar** gives us music conceived as a pilgrimage that takes the listener through a variety of songs highlighting the themes of freedom and resistance. Both traditional Arabic songs and Western-style songs are featured, giving the listener an experience of the musical melting pot that characterizes modern Arabic music, as well as raising awareness of Palestinian concerns. An accompanying booklet contains the notes and the lyrics in English: £7, from PSC.

- Those who have heard **Garth Hewitt** playing and singing his compositions, inspired by the indomitable spirit of the Palestinian people, will be delighted to know that his best loved songs are now on CD: **Stealing Jesus Back** includes the poignant 'Death of Trees', 'Towards a Promised Land' and 'Humans Too' – all with wonderful singalong choruses perfect for solidarity gatherings. (The title song is a gentle challenge to Christian fundamentalists and their misguided support for Zionist doctrine.) A contrasting centrepiece is **Reem Kelani** singing a wonderfully lyrical, traditional Palestinian lament. Obtainable from Amos Trust at £12.99. Contact info@amostrust.org or 0207 588 2638.

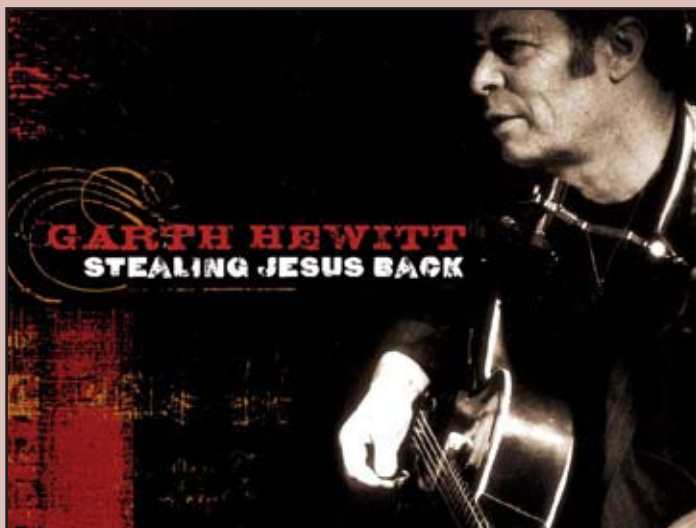


Fig. 4: Handala pisses on the Wall

21 year-old refugee with his back to the viewer, hands crossed behind his back in a sign of rejection. According to al-Ali, he will remain forever ten years old until allowed to return to his homeland. This patriotic symbol has been brought up to date, showing Handala urinating on the wall in disgust (Fig.4).

A source of inspiration

Laila Shawa is one Palestinian artist who has drawn inspiration from the graffiti of Gaza, where she was born. She adopted photography as the most effective way of recording the fluctuating nature of graffiti and of projecting the urgency and transience of its scrawls. Her works focus on the spontaneous graffiti of the First Intifada until after the ill-fated Oslo agreement (Fig.5).

In most of her pieces Shawa superimposes geometric shapes over the image: 'Ultimately, they provide a sense of order that I hope will prevail in our chaotic, torn, and divided existence and lead us to our aspirations as a nation.'



Fig. 5: 'Target', by Laila Shawa

For the inhabitants of the Occupied Territories, artists or not, graffiti have given the community a chance to think out loud, to create relationships and to record, in however transitory a fashion, a fundamental part of Palestinian social history.

¹ Tina Sherwell, 'Palestinian Art: Imagining the Motherland', Fran Lloyd (ed.), *Displacement and Difference: Contemporary Arab Visual Culture in the Diaspora*, Saffron Books, London, 2001, p.65.

New Patrons for PSC

We are delighted to welcome four new Patrons, all long-time supporters of the Palestinian cause and of PSC.

• **Benjamin Zephaniah**, rasta performance poet, musician, novelist and playwright, has spoken out strongly on Palestine, one of the many political causes to which he is committed. He has been awarded a number of honorary doctorates by British universities for his outstanding social, cultural and political work.



• **Barry Camfield** is the Assistant General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union and is widely recognised as a leading figure in the trade union movement. He is a member of the General Council of the TUC and has spoken at a range of PSC events including the trade union conference in March, the TUC in September and at the Lobby of the House of Commons of Parliament in November.

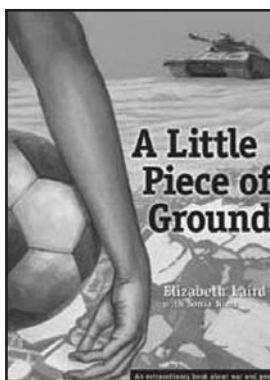
• **Dr Tony Zahlan** was born in Haifa and has had a distinguished career as an academic. He now divides his time between London and Beirut, and is a consultant on science, technology and development in many parts of the Arab world.

• **Ruth Winters** is the President of the Fire Brigades Union, which has had a long record of active solidarity campaigning in support of the Palestinian people. Ruth moved the motion on Palestine at this year's TUC which was passed overwhelmingly (see page 12) and has spoken at many PSC events, including the trade union conference in March 2006.



Elizabeth Laird's *Little Piece of Ground* selected for US literary award

Well-known author Elizabeth Laird worked with Bir Zeit lecturer and writer Sonia Nimr to produce a moving book about teenagers growing up under occupation in a West Bank refugee camp (reviewed in Palestine News, Winter 2004). It was published in the UK by Macmillan, despite Zionist pressures, and finally found a publisher (Haymarket Books) in the US last year.



It has just been selected for the prestigious Outstanding International Books award, a cooperative project of the United States Board on Books for Young People (USBBY) and the Children's Book Council.

The selected books will be heavily promoted in the US by CBC and USBBY in various meetings and conventions throughout the year.

Visit <http://www.cbcbooks.org> for more information.

10 it very difficult for us to market the fruit and vegetables we do produce. Since 2000, it's been impossible to take produce to our traditional markets in the West Bank, towns like Nablus and Tulkarim. 130 trucks used to go daily from our area. Now the Israeli soldiers oblige the driver to unload at the checkpoints. This means taking down 400 -700 crates per truck, each weighing 15 kilos — then reloading.

Israeli trucks of course go through unchecked. So in Nablus the people are obliged to buy Israeli produce. (This also means the Israelis can keep the price up.)

We can't sell to Israel, in the west, either, although there is no barrier between our land and Israel. If we try, the goods are confiscated, we're fined, and the truck is impounded for one month.

Also, the Israeli army sometimes imposes three-day curfews, and sometimes announces our land is a military zone, so that we are not allowed to enter.

So what happens to your produce?

Often we give it to our sheep and goats — they are really well fed, you can imagine!

Sometimes we have to throw it away — but even that takes a lot of labour. Some Israeli peace groups have helped us a lot in this kind of activity. They've also helped us replant olive groves that have been uprooted. But the settlers come and pull them up again.

I believe our stolen olive trees fetch good prices, especially the really old ones; often they are used to make the new settlements look well established.

We can see Israel's long-term aims. Apart from settling our land they are also building 'industrial zones' along the Green Line. They hope that we will be obliged to work in them, when we can no longer farm.

What hope do you have for the future?

The land has been in my family for generations, and of course I want to hand it on to my sons. Israel is doing all it can to make the farmers simply give up. If people around the world know what is happening, then there will be pressure on Israel to stop. But whatever happens, we will never give up.

Simply keeping working on the land is my form of resistance.

*1 dunum = 1000m2

For more information see: www.stopthewall.org and www.btselem.org

Understanding Hamas

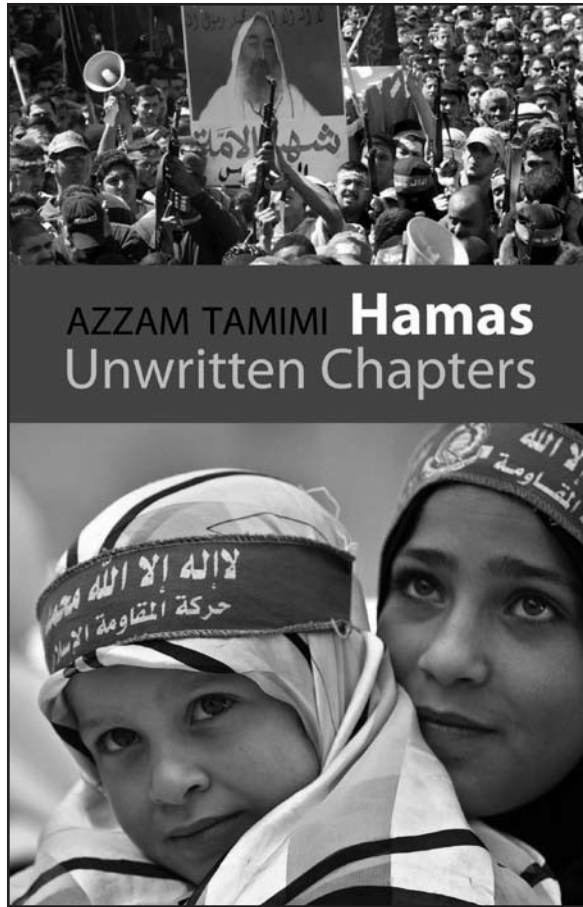
Hamas, Unwritten Chapters, Azzam Tamimi, Hurst;

Hamas, A Beginner's Guide, Khaled Hroub, Pluto Press

The American and European response of cutting aid to the Palestinians when Hamas won 74 seats to Fatah's 45 in the January 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, was profoundly anti-democratic, and illustrated the deep misunderstanding of the West about Hamas — its capacity and its standing.

The idea was, presumably, that the Hamas government would collapse under the Western pressure, and that there would be a backlash against them from a desperate population, which would then elect a new government ready for more compromises with Israel and the US. With Israel also withholding about \$600 million of tax revenues, it is not surprising that the UN has warned of a grave economic crisis, with two thirds of the Palestinian population below the poverty line.

Azzam Tamimi's *Unwritten Chapters* is an excellent history and analysis of Hamas which puts into perspective how this is just the latest very serious crisis the organisation has had to surmount from both internal Palestinian and regional policy upheavals in the last 40



against the background of failing Arab nationalism; then the setting up of a prosperous network from Kuwait; the slow move towards armed struggle;

‘For Tamimi the primary reason for Hamas’ success at the polls in 2006 was “Hamas’s fidelity to the Palestinian dream”’

years. If Western policy makers had read this book perhaps they would have taken a different attitude and not sought the current confrontation.

The story is dramatic, and Tamimi tells it well. The book is deeply researched, with 34 pages of footnotes which allow the reader to trace the many interviews Tamimi has done with all the key players in Hamas, who clearly gave him their trust. It gives access for a non-Arabic reader to a wealth of fascinating detail not available in English before.

In these pages the organisation comes to life.

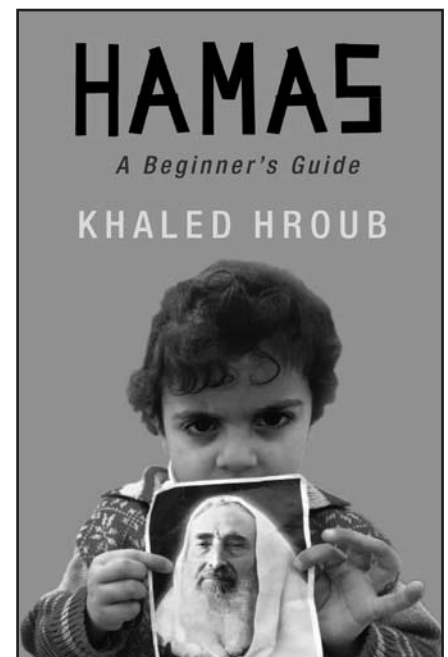
The book traces the years of formation through education and social work, in Egypt and inside Palestine,

the waves of mass arrests of Hamas members in 1988, ‘90, ‘91 and ‘92 inside Palestine; the good years for the leadership in Jordan when King Hussein had a warm and pragmatic relation with the organisation (and saved its leader Khaled Mish'al from death by poison at the hands of Mossad and engineered the release of Sheik Yassin); followed by the souring of relations after the US-led Wye River meeting in 1998 between Yasser Arafat and Binyamin Netanyahu, and the ratcheting up of US pressure on the Jordanian government as the King became iller, which finally resulted in Hamas' expulsion.

Tamimi's account of Sheik Yassin's 1998 four month tour of the Islamic

world and the immense prestige of the slight figure in his wheelchair is just one part of the book which gives an insight no Western media has ever conveyed. "Speaking privately, where their words would not be reported to the US administration, most Arab and Muslim leaders, though they could do little, would express sentiments of the utmost respect for Hamas." He goes on to write of Hamas leaders' reputation for "asceticism, altruism, dedication and honesty". Much has been written elsewhere of the contrast with Fatah's reputation for corruption. But for Tamimi the primary reason for Hamas' success at the polls in 2006 was "Hamas's fidelity to the Palestinian dream."

Both Tamimi and Hroub write of the out of date Hamas Charter as a false image of a matured organisation. Tamimi includes as appendices several articles written recently by Hamas leaders which spell out their current political positions.



Hroub's book is a very different style, with rather less research and substance. It is written in a simple question and answer format which makes it very accessible to the most casual reader. Together these two Palestinian academics and journalists offer a new view of Hamas past and present, and its collective leadership, which is essential to understanding the current dynamics of resistance to occupation in Gaza and the West Bank.

Back to basics

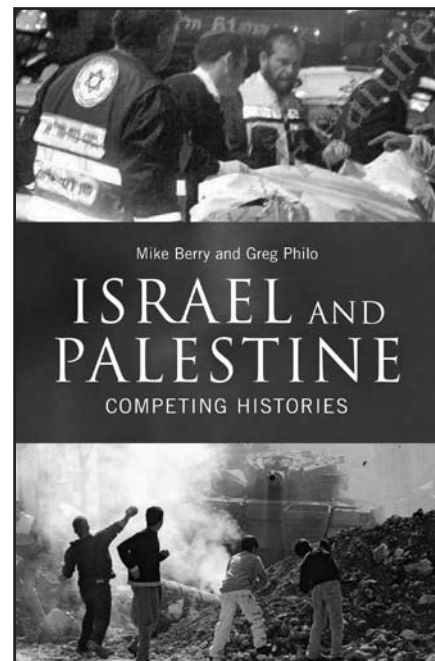
Israel and Palestine: Competing Histories, Mike Berry and Greg Philo, Pluto 2006
The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction, Gregory Harms and Todd M Ferry, Pluto 2005

A stumbling-block for many sympathisers and potential activists in this field is surely the fearsome complexity of the Israel-Palestine question: in particular, if you want to engage in debate with convinced Zionists it is vital to be sure of your facts. Which is why Berry and Philo's book is a key resource. The team that brought us 'Bad News from Israel', the meticulously researched study of bias in the media, has produced a very readable, coherent and well-sourced account — giving both the Palestinian and Israeli viewpoints. This is not to say that it gives equal credence to both narratives; myths and skewed versions of history are wherever possible tested against well documented facts. Crucial issues like the expulsions of 1948, the complexities of the Oslo Accords, the Israeli claims that their sole concern in the Occupied Territories is security, are

examined with scrupulous impartiality.

Harms and Ferry's *Basic Introduction* is a good deal longer — but this is largely due to the fact that a third of the book is devoted to the history of the region from pre-historic times to the First World War. Since they make it clear that they believe present-day territorial claims cannot, rationally or legally, be based on certain (disputed) interpretations of ancient texts, this lengthy historical prologue nevertheless implies there is some degree of relevance. The book's publication date means that Hamas — not expected by anyone to carry off a resounding victory — gets only a brief mention.

While the *Basic Introduction* is generally a work of sound scholarship, there are some curious lacunae: in particular, the maps stop at the year 2000. There is no map showing the route of the 'Separation Barrier' (presented and commented on in some detail by Berry and Philo), and only about a page of text is given to the implications of the barrier and its effects on the lives of Palestinians. This is perhaps due to the authors' provenance as US writers and



academics, with an American rather than a European readership in mind. A touch ironically, they lament in the closing paragraph that "[US?] media agencies seem unwilling or unable to provide coverage that educates instead of mystifies."

Nevertheless, both books constitute well-signposted guides, with ample suggestions for further reading. Between them they achieve a good deal of welcome 'demystification'.

Hilary Wise

In God's name

Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics and the Israel-Palestine Conflict. Eds. Naim Ateek, Cedar Duaybis, Marine Tobin, Melisende 2005

This compilation of lecture transcripts, from the Jerusalem-based Sabeel Liberation Theology Centre's International Conference on the same theme, held in 2004, ranges from complex theological argument to broader reflections on political issues. As such, it is a book to dip into rather than read in one sitting, but it is nevertheless a very valuable resource.

Some of the writers have been closely involved in other liberation struggles — notably Damu Smith of the National Black Environmental Justice Network in Washington, Praful Bidwai

of the Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament, and Jenny Plane Te Paa from New Zealand, who presents a Maori perspective.

The late Michael Prior, whose important book 'The Bible and Colonialism' demonstrated the link between a number of imperial adventures and 'biblical' justification (Christian and Jewish), here makes a further important contribution to understanding the forces behind Christian Zionism. The book ends with a piece by the Archbishop of Canterbury, sent when he dropped out of the conference at the last minute and not well received by the delegates. Critiques of his statement are provided. One is a letter to the Archbishop from Palestinian lawyer Jonathan Kuttab, which to my knowledge has never had a

response, and which still raises the most fundamental questions about Christian Zionism as a theology, naming it as the heresy it is and as having an inevitable outcome — an apartheid state.

Christian Zionism is enormously influential in the USA. Although it is less dominant in the UK, it is still a powerful tool used in churches to justify the Israeli Government's racist, apartheid actions against the Palestinian people (described of course in prophetic religious language). The reality that the Palestinian people include Christians descended from the first church escapes these believers — a fact that continues to wound the Palestinian Christian community, as they perceive the church to be supporting their oppressors. This book is invaluable in challenging this mindset and in reminding Christians of the need instead to be on the side of the oppressed and to be involved in their liberation.

Sue Plater

The Persistence of the Palestinian Question — Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians

Joseph A. Massad, Routledge 2006

Joseph Massad is Professor of Modern Arab Politics at Columbia University, and this thoughtful book of essays, written over the last decade, will be required reading for students who want to deepen their understanding of both the actual history and the intellectual constructions built around the creation of Israel as a Zionist state. The themes of the book are encapsulated in its covers: a tiny picture on the back of the book shows Palestinians driven into the sea at Jaffa Harbour, in April 1948, and the front cover shows just the massive apartheid Wall now under construction.

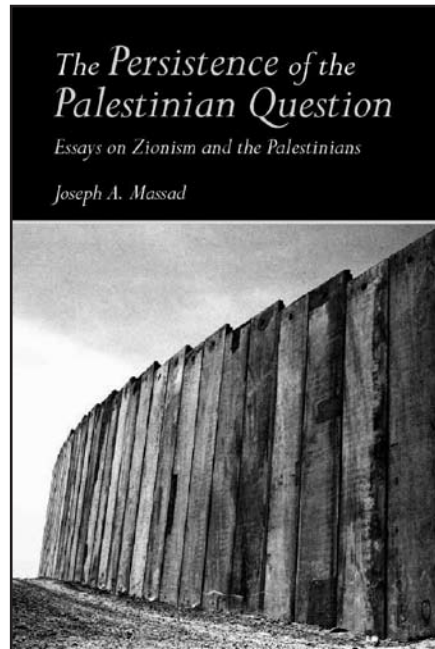
The book is complex and needs slow and careful digestion. Among the main themes are an examination of the “predatory Zionist colonial project” of the Israeli state, and its parallels with apartheid South Africa. His insights into Israeli psychology, and his range of historical references on this, are written

“His description of Yasser Arafat as having been transformed from a Nelson Mandela to a Gatsha Buthelezi gives a flavour of his style”

with bitter clarity. His descriptions of the history and consequences of the Israelis’ wish to be Europeans are subtle and extremely thought-provoking.

None of this makes for comfortable reading for most of those involved, including most of those in leadership positions among the Palestinians, many of whom he accuses of striving for personal acceptance from a white, Western audience. His description of Yasser Arafat as having been transformed from a Nelson Mandela to a Gatsha Buthelezi gives a flavour of his style.

Massad’s analysis of the 1993 Declaration of Principles, in Washington, is very similar to that of the late Professor Edward Said. Both, he writes, considered the Israeli/Palestinian agreement as an



“instrument of Palestinian surrender”. He writes that, “The Palestine Liberation Organisation will come down in history as the only Third World liberation movement which has sought

liberation through selling the resources it expects to “liberate” to international capital before it even “liberates” them.” The grim history of the so-called peace process since then, and the continuing pressure for more Palestinian concessions, shows how prescient he was.

The reprinting here of the 2002 debate by telephone between Massad and the Israeli historian Professor Benny Morris, mediated by Andrew Whitehead, for the History Workshop Journal, is an extremely interesting and sobering illustration of how the gulfs of perception in academia are as deep as those among politicians. There is no common ground here, nor any optimism for a way forward.

Victoria Brittain

Education under Occupation: Learning to improvise

Nick King, *Discovery Analytical Resourcing*, 2006

This fascinating analysis of the current Palestinian education system combines a historical account with images and statistics to illustrate the impact of the occupation. Nick King visited Palestine in 2002 – 2003 to research the book and he includes testimonials of the absurdities of life that students, teachers and educationalists are forced to endure under military interventions.

“The very act of pursuing an education became a way of directly challenging the Occupation”

Addressing higher education in Chapter 2, ‘A Rough Guide to the Landscape’, King describes the Palestinian National Authority’s governance and structure and the challenges they face, such as ongoing funding crises. As Helen Murray says, in the September 2005 issue of *Education and Freedom*, the *Adalah Newsletter*, “... the very act of pursuing an education became a way of directly challenging the Occupation ...”. You can indeed only marvel at the resilience of the Palestinian students mentioned in the chapter ‘Study by Stealth’.

In an interview, Dr Sami Al-Kilani, Director of Public Relations at An-Najah University states that the Israeli administration’s pressure to change the content of the courses was resisted by the teachers, who said they were prepared to close the university rather than have anybody interfere with what they were teaching.

King warns of the shattering consequences of military occupation on Palestinian education with exhaustive recording of how the policies implemented by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territories interfere with students’ daily routines. These include the physical destruction of institutions, vandalism, closure and raids on institutions. Obstacles to physically prevent students attending classes include cases of killings, serious bodily harm, checkpoint closures and prohibitions on passage, curfew and the Segregation Wall built on a university playing field. To add to this list there are incarcerations, deportations, eligibility vettings and intimidation of family members. These are just some of the chronicled acts of belligerence by an occupying power involving grave violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

For campaigners, the book is an excellent resource which should certainly stimulate support for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (see www.pacbi.org).

Maha Rahwangi

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2007 marks the 40th anniversary of the Six Day War, during which the Israeli army took military control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Since that time, Israel has encouraged its citizens to move into these Occupied Territories and colonise Palestinian land, in violation of international law and in defiance of numerous UN resolutions.

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