



palestine NEWS

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Spring 2007

1917...
1947...
1967...
2007



90 years on: **TIME TO CHANGE HISTORY**



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palestine NEWS

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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

A window of opportunity

Hilary Wise
says it is time for
Britain to right
the wrongs of
the past

After 200 years there is, rightly, soul-searching debate about whether the British government should apologise for the heinous slave trade. No minister owns a slave today, but they all have direct and ongoing responsibility for the plight in which Palestinians find themselves. The moral courage to accept that responsibility, and to make some kind of reparation, is a choice which the British government should make today.

For the Palestinian people, 2007 is a year in which anniversary piles on harrowing anniversary, each marking a new milestone in dispossession and duplicity.

The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was an almost casual personal promise, made by the then Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. His letter also stipulated that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities” – the first of many broken promises, and the start of Britain’s long and ignominious involvement.

Twenty years later, the British were busy suppressing Palestinian resistance to the planned Partition of their country, killing 5000 and imprisoning 50,000. Nevertheless, in 1947, the UN passed a Resolution giving 56% of the country to the immigrant minority. Significantly, another resolution from the UN Palestine Committee, calling on Western countries to welcome the survivors of the Nazi holocaust, was never even put to the General Assembly. Better, it seems, to hand over someone else’s land than to open our own arms to the homeless refugees. The Nakba that followed, meticulously documented by Israeli historians like Ilan Pappé (see page 24), set the pattern of Israel’s policy ever since: one of occupation, dispossession and settlement.

In 1967, following Egypt’s defeat, Israel stood at a crossroads. The choice was between withdrawal and peaceful coexistence with a Palestinian state, or endless military expansion. They chose the path that was to strip Israel of every vestige of moral authority and reduce the Palestinians to rage and despair. Many Israelis saw 1967 as a point of no return, and either left the country or stayed to fight a lonely battle. Many Zionist supporters outside Israel also drew the line at this blatant bid for a Greater Israel, and urged restraint. However it seemed that, like Macbeth, Israel was “in blood steeped so far that returning were as tedious as to go further”.

Since then we have witnessed not only the fragmentation of the West Bank and Jerusalem, with many thousands of Palestinian deaths, but also two major wars in Lebanon, the debacle of Iraq, and an outbreak of Western Islamophobia.

Now it is the West that is at a crossroads. The Palestinians have shown themselves eager for democracy – even if they have been savagely

punished for it. Their free and fair elections could stand as a model for the rest of the Arab world. (One wonders, does this suit the Western agenda? Our major allies in the region are those with the most despotic and anti-democratic regimes.) However, with Western support and a lifting of the crippling sanctions, the new government of national unity could rescue Palestinians from turmoil and economic disaster. At the same time, we would show the rest of the world that our professed commitment to democracy and the rule of law is more than empty rhetoric.

The Saudis are following up the Mecca agreement with an Arab summit to discuss the 2002 peace plan, a set of principles offering Israel full recognition and permanent peace with the Arab states, in return for Israel’s withdrawal to 1967 lines, the establishment of an independent Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and an agreed, just solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948.

“We could show the rest of the world that our professed commitment to democracy and the rule of law is more than empty rhetoric”

The 2002 initiative was simply ignored by Israel. This time Olmert realises he cannot do so: his political survival depends upon a new and credible way forward. So he has given the conference a very cautious welcome, while demanding stringent limitations on its scope. However, Israeli attempts to pre-empt the conference discussion by denying the legitimacy of the right of return have been roundly rebuffed by various Arab leaders. It is incumbent on those leaders to maintain support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people around the world, since they themselves have been refused a voice.

Western governments should be ready, for once, to defy Israel. They must lift the sanctions and support the Palestinian government. There are hopeful signs, with Norway already recognising the new government, but Britain is still repeating the mantra of no violence, recognition of Israel and abiding by agreements, without any reference to reciprocal conditions on Israel.

If we let slip this chance, there is a danger that the whole region will begin a downward spiral that could have terrible consequences for us all. While there is still time, let Western governments redeem themselves and, at last, stand up for justice. Let 2007 be a truly memorable date for the Palestinians.

PSC PATRONS

■ John Austin MP ■ Tony Benn ■ Victoria Brittain ■ Barry Camfield ■ Julie Christie ■ Caryl Churchill ■ Jeremy Corbyn MP ■ Bob Crow ■ William Dalrymple ■ Lord Gilmour of Craigmillar ■ Revd Garth Hewitt ■ Dr Ghada Karmi ■ Bruce Kent ■ Karma Nabulsi ■ Corin Redgrave ■ Keith Sonnet ■ Ahdaf Soueif ■ Baroness Tonge of Kew ■ John Williams ■ Ruth Winters ■ Dr Tony Zahlan ■ Benjamin Zephaniah

Israel's dilemma

Ghada Karmi sees Israeli policies leading to a single, binational state

Everyone's attention today is concerned with the minutiae of internal Palestinian politics. Will the Palestinian unity government be able to function? Can it stop the factional fighting? Will Hamas recognise Israel? And the like. In this flurry of activity, Israel's occupation has almost been forgotten and the origins of the conflict have disappeared from view. And yet it is only by returning to the roots of the problem, by reminding ourselves how flawed the Zionist project always was, that a solution can be found.

When the Zionists resolved in

“Israel's policy of creating ‘facts on the ground’ has put the creation of a sovereign, viable Palestinian state out of reach, and thereby spelled the end of the two-state solution”

1897 to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, they were aware that it was already home to an indigenous non-Jewish population. How to create and maintain a state for another people in a land already inhabited? Squaring that circle has been the essence of Israel's dilemma ever since its establishment. It could not have been otherwise, for the project envisaged was bizarre and, on the face of it, unworkable, namely: to set up an ethnically defined, Jews-only collective on a land belonging to another people. Moreover, this new creation was supposed, irrespective of native opposition, to prosper in perpetuity. It was inevitable that the appropriation of a land already inhabited by a people defined as ethnically unacceptable could only be realised by a mixture of force and coercion. Moreover, the

new state thus created would have to maintain itself through constant military superiority and powerful backing by its creator, the West. The corollary to this was that the Arabs would have to remain too weak and disunited to offer much resistance, so that Israel's powerful army could swiftly despatch any that did arise.

This, in essence, is the Zionist project, whose main aims came to be realised with the creation of Israel in 1948, but which was never able to resolve the problem of how to get rid of the Palestinians. Not that the Israelis didn't try in every way they could. In the Nakba, or Catastrophe of 1948 they expelled or caused the flight of three quarters of Palestine's inhabitants. From 1948 onwards, Israel made every attempt to erase all traces of the Arab presence in the country so

as to destroy the Arab character and distinctive history of the old Palestine. Villages were demolished and place names changed throughout Palestine to new Hebrew ones. No Palestinian was ever allowed back to reclaim his home, despite the demands of international law, morality and common humanity. On the contrary, in the last six decades, Israel has taken every opportunity to expel more Palestinians. During the 1967 war, 250,000 people were displaced and more have been expelled from East Jerusalem, through a variety of bureaucratic devices and tricks. Since the second Intifada, Israel has made life in the Occupied Territories a living hell, in the hope that the Palestinians will be compelled to leave.

Yet these unrelenting efforts to eradicate the Palestinian presence in

a country that Israelis consider to be Jewish and wholly theirs have still not succeeded. The number of Palestinians has only grown over time, such that by 2020, according to some estimates, they will form the majority in Israel/Palestine. Though occupied and oppressed, their political presence on the world stage is more firmly established than ever before. The idea that Palestinians should have their own state is universally accepted even though the Palestinian state's exact borders and other features have not been agreed. Israel's only answer to this situation has been more violence and more ‘facts on the ground’. Half the territory of the West Bank is in Israeli hands, Jerusalem is judaised beyond recognition, most of its land expropriated by Israel, and the scope for instability and increasing violence between the two sides is an increasing danger. No one is willing or able to control Israel's behaviour, and so the problem seems to be insoluble.

For decades now the two-state solution has been offered as the only way forward for Israelis and Palestinians. Those who continue to advocate this solution have obviously never looked at a map of the Occupied Territories, or learned anything about the nature of Zionism. Israel's policy of creating ‘facts on the ground’ has put the creation of a sovereign, viable Palestinian state out of reach, and thereby spelled the end of the two-state solution. Israeli colonisation and segmentation of the West Bank proceeds unimpeded and the Palestinian territories supposed to form the state are now a jigsaw of Jewish colonies, bypass roads and barriers. Jerusalem is beyond the possibility of forming a Palestinian capital, and Gaza is stranded in an Israeli sea, unconnected to anywhere.

How to resolve this impasse? There is only one way: the key date in the genesis of this conflict is not 1967, as the two-state proponents imply, but 1948. Israel's occupation of the 1967 territories is a symptom of the disease, not its cause. The obvious way to treat the cause is to create one state in Israel/Palestine, to reverse the damage that Zionism did. Formidable as the difficulties will be of applying this solution, it is undeniably the only equitable and realistic way of sharing a land that both Israelis and Palestinians consider their own.

Ghada Karmi's book, 'Married to Another Man: Israel's Dilemma in Palestine', is published by Pluto Press in June.

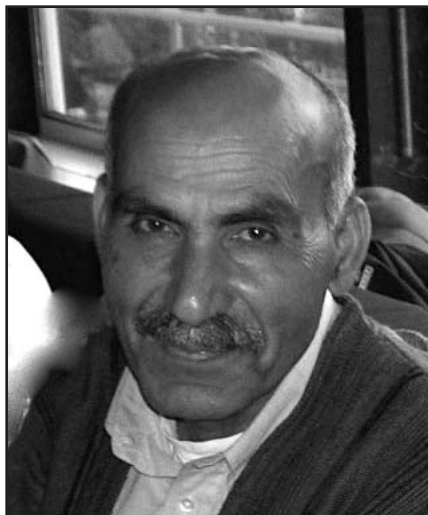
Saving Lifta

Abe Hayeem reports on a campaign to preserve a unique Palestinian village

The 4,000 year-old village of Lifta lies just outside Jerusalem, the nearest Palestinian village to the City walls. Once a thriving little town with its own olive industry, it has remained relatively untouched since the creation of Israel. The Israeli army and the Irgun killed or drove out the last Palestinian inhabitants in 1948. Today, Lifta is more or less a ghost town, frozen in time. However, unlike most of the 530 Palestinian villages and towns seized and then bulldozed during the war, many of Lifta's 450 houses remain intact. The former villagers live mainly in East Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jordan and in exile in the United States.

In its architecture and topography Lifta is a poignant symbol of all destroyed Palestinian villages and towns. Now, however, a 'renovation' project by the architect Gabriel Cartes of the firm Groug-Cartes aims to turn Lifta into an expensive and exclusively Jewish residential area, mainly for Americans. The planned neighbourhood would include three hundred luxury flats, a large hotel, a mall, a synagogue and a large tourist resort. While much of the picturesque buildings and landscape will be retained, any reminder that the area was once a prosperous Arab village will be erased. Architecture is being used to eradicate ethnic culture and memory.

While Israel proudly preserves its biblical heritage and archaeological sites,



Yakub Odeh, a refugee from Lifta



The hillside village, on the outskirts of Jerusalem

the rich Palestinian heritage is allowed to disappear or is deliberately destroyed. Esther Zandberg said in Haaretz in November 2004, when the plan was first proposed: "On such an emotionally charged and politically symbolic site... the plan seems opposed to all common sense, harmful to the interests of all of the parties on both sides of the conflict, and perhaps an attempt to conceal evidence of the existence of a people living in 'a country without a people'." As with the refusal to allow the commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba of 1948, or to debate the Right of Return, there is an ongoing ban on

allowing 'internal refugees' to return to the remnants of their destroyed villages.

The Israeli Or Commission report, which investigated the causes of the riots by the Israeli Arab population in October 2000, actually states: "The role of the state is not reduced to material matters alone... Governing authorities must find ways that will enable Arab citizens to express in public life their culture and identity in an appropriate and respectful manner."

As an alternative to the Israeli real estate plans, it is suggested that Lifta either be preserved as a reminder of its past, or be re-inhabited by survivors or descendants of the original residents. Yakub Odeh, a Lifta refugee says: "Land ..that is designated for residential use should be planned so that it will be appropriate for the housing of the original residents of Lifta and their descendants, whose property was taken from them through no wrong of their own. This would ... constitute a rectification of the wrongs done to the place and its residents, and not just provide land to people of means who never had the slightest connection or link to the place."

Lifta has an undoubted claim to be a world heritage site because of its long history and its timeless landscape. Instead, unless action is taken, it will be appropriated and reconstituted as picturesque real estate for a wealthy few that have no relation to the land, under a new, biblical name: "Mei Naftuach". This was the case with "Ein Hod" in the Galilee, now an artists' village bereft of its history.

Abe Hayeem is an architect and Co-ordinator of Architects & Planners for Justice in Palestine.

A number of organisations are involved in the fight to preserve the village. In the UK, Architects and Planners for Justice in Palestine (see apjp.org/) are supporting the Israeli group Foundation for Achieving Seamless Territory (FAST: see www.seamless-israel.org/), in their campaign to get it listed on the World's Monuments Watch 100 Most Endangered Sites or as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. These seek to preserve cultural heritage sites around the world threatened by neglect, vandalism, armed conflict or natural disasters.

Zochrot ("Remembering": see www.nakbainhebrew.org/) is a group of Israeli citizens working to make the history of the Nakba accessible to the Israeli public; they assert that acknowledging the past is the first step to taking responsibility for its consequences.

Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights (see www.bimkom.org/) – was established in May 1999 by Israeli planners and architects, with the goal of strengthening the connection between human rights and spatial planning in Israel. It assists communities and minorities affected by social and economic disadvantage and civil rights' infringements.

See www.saving-memory.blogspot.com/, for more information on the campaign.

The drums of war

Glen Rangwala examines Scott Ritter's assessment of a possible US-Israeli attack on Iran

Scott Ritter is best known as the former UN weapons inspector in Iraq, whose judgment in relation to US and UK government allegations of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction proved correct on every single count. His recent book* comes as a timely warning of how another policy of regime change is being sold to the public, also under the guise of concern over illicit weapons.

Many other commentators have shied away from discussing the extensive role of Israel in the build-up of hostilities. The confrontation between the US and Iran is, according to Ritter, a "conflict born in Israel", since Israel sees Iran as the main strategic challenger to its military dominance of the Middle East.

Drawing upon his own familiarity with key Israeli military and intelligence officials, developed during his time as an inspector in Iraq, Ritter shows how Israeli officials and their lobbyists in the US brought the issue onto the international news agenda from 2002. They have continued to stress, with claims that are dubious at best, the danger (in the preferred terminology of the moment, the "existential danger") that Iran poses to Israel.

Ritter describes how Zionist lobby groups in the US, particularly the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), have tried to steer US policy on Iran. AIPAC's annual conference in March this year turned into anti-Iran rally, with speaker after speaker calling for the US to harden its policy on Iran. Disturbingly, senior US Democrats tried to outflank the Bush administration at the conference by calling for an even more aggressive approach. The willingness of the Democrat-controlled Congress to curtail the Bush's administrations plans is therefore seriously in doubt. In a speech to a US pro-Democrat think-tank in February, Nicholas Burns, the third ranking official in the State Department, called Iran "the most

disruptive, negative force in the Middle East". Al-Qaida, it seems, are old hat for Burns. Blaming Iran for the disaster in Iraq has become standard fare in US policy circles.

In fact, Iran has repeatedly attempted to reach a negotiated compromise with the US. These offers have been rebuffed, most notably in Vice-President Cheney's dismissal of Iran's 2003 proposal for an all-encompassing bargain that traded off Iran's nuclear programme for an end to US-led sanctions. Iran's compliance with international nuclear inspections has been ignored by the US, which has instead just raised the threshold for what it takes as compliance.

By mixing the politics of regime change in Iran with that of nuclear

"By mixing the politics of regime change in Iran with that of nuclear non-proliferation, Iranian concessions on nuclear issues have now been made unlikely"

non-proliferation, Iranian concessions on nuclear issues have now been made unlikely: Iran is not going to remove the nuclear option if it thinks the US is trying to bring its government down, weapons or no weapons. One effect of US inflexibility has been the rise of the radicals within the Iranian political establishment: Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's victory in the 2005 presidential election came on the back of well-known US attempts to foment discontent within Iran.

Ritter speculates persuasively that this was part of a policy not of miscalculation but of intentional provocation. His views on this receive confirmation from a recent speech by John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN, until he was ousted in December 2006. Bolton told an AIPAC meeting a month later that he had hoped that Iran would throw the weapons inspectors out of the country, because "that kind of reaction would produce a counter-

reaction that actually would be more beneficial to us." In other words, what matters to the Bush administration is not the extent to which Iran's nuclear programme is contained, but the degree to which the US can manoeuvre Iran into a position of international isolation, so that military action against it can take place.

Nevertheless, what could the US actually do against Iran? Ritter, for one, thinks the prospect of sustained US military action against Iran is likely. The US has recently moved two aircraft carriers into the Gulf in an overt display of hostility. A spate of articles in recent months has considered the prospect of US or Israeli airstrikes against Iran, with the purpose of destroying nuclear sites there. These articles have mostly been fed by briefings from within the US administration, and are likely to be disinformation, trying to cause fear within the Iranian administration rather than genuine accounts of policy. Iran's

nuclear sites cannot be destroyed by airstrikes, and the only regimes to be destabilised by them would be those of US allies in the Muslim world.

But the raising of tensions, the deepening of US sanctions against Iran, and the increased attempts by the US to cast the conflict with Iran in sectarian terms – pulling a group of Sunni-led states in the Arab world into a coalition against Shi'a Iran – are all highly dangerous and provocative. The prospects for conflict are very real, even if the Bush administration does not intend it at the moment. *Target Iran* shows us not only how we have arrived at this situation, but also what is happening within the US and Israeli governments that could turn the present crisis into an all-out war.

* 'Target Iran: The Truth about the White House's Plans for Regime Change' (London: Politico's Publishing, 2006).

Lost youth

Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj looks at the causes and effects of violence in Gaza

What has become of us? Our people have suffered for 59 years from displacement, homelessness, discrimination, impoverishment and expatriation, but they withstood that suffering and never killed each other; so what happened to us? The late Arafat rejected a plan to kill Abu Nidal [head of a rival splinter group], who had already killed a number of Palestinian leaders, and said, "If we start this series of killings, we will never stop."

So what has happened? I hear stories about new forms of cold-blooded and callous murder, and about Palestinians denigrating other Palestinians or accusing them of heresy and bigotry as a prelude to ostracising or murdering them. I have also heard numerous stories about children who have been traumatised and fallen victim to nightmares, loss of appetite, insomnia and fear of leaving their homes. What is happening to us? How have we reached the point of attacking homes, mosques and universities?

Politics and political difference alone do not provide the answer. There are several additional social and psychological factors for what is befalling this society. A safe and stable environment is one that produces normal children, while the environment we have been living in since the occupation is one in which violence proliferates and becomes rampant.

Torture

After the Israeli occupation in 1967 a legitimate national armed resistance movement emerged, involving multitudes of freedom fighters. I can recall that, while I was working at Al-Shifa hospital in the early seventies, we received several murdered and injured freedom fighters every day. Reacting to that resistance, and in order to contain



A bridge near Rafah, after Israeli bombing

and destroy it, Israeli forces arrested tens of thousands of Palestinians and subjected them to various systematic forms of torture, as documented by research teams of both Palestinian and Israeli institutions acting in the area of defending human rights¹.

“A new form of identity has emerged, provided by Islamic organisations and armed militias, which in many cases has supplanted national and filial belonging”

The effects of torture extend from the individual to his community. Research has found that a high percentage of torture victims become a prey to mental illness, which transforms victims into problems for their own selves as well as for their families. The commonest problem arising from torture is the violence which the victim directs to women and children, which in its turn makes the home a battlefield. The reason for such phenomena is that the torture a young man is subjected to makes him harbour a desire for revenge by violent means and subsequently he

unconsciously resorts to identifying with the Israeli torturer. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the methods of torture used in Palestinian prisons are the same as those used in Israeli prisons; they have at times even been more atrocious and resulted in the deaths of several prisoners in the early years of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)² takeover. In many instances, the Palestinian interrogator was a former victim of Israeli torture. This phenomenon has created a cycle of internal violence. We note here that many Hamas members were tortured in Palestinian prisons. A desire for revenge started to build up, culminating in accusations of duplicity leveled at leaders of security organisations. All of these factors led to a state of polarisation and division, which has been aggravated by Hamas coming to power. Now, it seems, some wish to take revenge on those who tortured them, a desire intensified by the fact that the Hamas government is besieged; the feeling has spread that it is being targeted and conspired against and that some Fatah leaders are accomplices in such a conspiracy.

The first Intifada

Despite the glorification of our “children of the stone”, whom we

7 uphold as examples of heroism, we cannot ignore the fact that they are flesh and blood and that they have been victims of various forms of violence. In our work at the Gaza Community Mental Health Program we conducted research into three thousand Gaza children. The study found that the children had been subjected to several traumatic and violent experiences, including beating, bone-breaking, injury, tear gas and even killing, all of which have left indelible effects on their psyche.

Yet, for many, the most excruciating experience was seeing their fathers, helpless and unable to resist, being beaten by Israeli soldiers. Such an experience will ultimately transform a whole generation, as the second Intifada showed; for the children of the first Intifada are the adults of the second Intifada. Those young men who are pursuing revenge and killing, and at times seeking even their own death, are the selfsame children who cherished so many dreams of a better life, but saw them fade away and fall apart the moment they saw their fathers fall defenceless victims of arrogant force, incarnated in the Israeli soldier. No wonder, then, that the Palestinian child will see his model in that Israeli soldier and that his language will be the language of force and his toys and games will be the toys and games of death.

The effects of ongoing violence

Israel has systematically assaulted the Palestinian people in all aspects of their lives. It escalated its aggressions during the second Intifada, as it resorted to a policy of house demolitions, destruction of the basic services and of farmland, of extra-judicial killings, mass detention of activists and systematic torture. Psychological research worldwide has shown that ongoing armed conflicts result in what is known as “chronic social toxication”, which makes people and children less sensitive and more ruthless, less rational and more impulsive, less communicative and more violent. More significantly, new groups are formed, of individuals who are alien to the family system and to the social fabric and who are powerful and violent enough to be capable of heinous killing. Ultimately, those individuals are viewed as examples to be followed by the disadvantaged and vulnerable. The outcome of this is that brute force, not morality, emerges as the example to be followed.

Another effect of such social

toxication is the phenomenon of social disintegration and disunity which is manifest in the decline of the father's authority, with all the moral values it embodies. It also results in the young men's tendency to search for a new identity, assertive and different from that of their vulnerable and downtrodden parents. A new form of identity has emerged, provided by Islamic organisations and armed militias, which in many cases has supplanted national and filial belonging and rendered many persons alienated from their community.

The performance of the PNA

The behaviour of the Palestinian National Authority has had a tremendous psychological impact on the Palestinians. Throughout its term of office, the PNA regime has been characterised by an absence of law and justice, by violations of human and individual rights, disregard for accountability amounting to rewarding offenders and the spread of favouritism and nepotism, which have created bitterness, exasperation and hatred among the disadvantaged and destitute. All of these factors have made the Palestinian citizen feel that force in its different forms is the only answer.

The PNA added insult to injury as its

“No wonder, then, that the Palestinian child will see his model in that Israeli soldier and that his language will be the language of force and his toys and games will be the toys and games of death”

security organs penetrated families. This in turn allowed families to penetrate security organs, which became controlled by Fatah leaders as well as by the heads of a large Gaza family. This resulted in gross security violations and social disorder, and culminated in numerous instances of law-breaking and aggressions against public and individual rights and property. In all circumstances, the aggressors were backed either by their faction, family or a security organ and sometimes by all of them, which concentrated power in the hands of influential individuals in the Authority apparatus. This eventually resulted in more disunity and division

among those same families, and new armed and rival groups emerged by virtue of official Authority support — only to turn against that Authority one day and assault some of its major symbols.

In this regard, it is noticeable that the Palestinian people's behaviour in the first Intifada was characterised by an overwhelming sense of solidarity, resilience and commitment to moral values. All of these qualities seem to be nonexistent in the second Intifada, which has been dominated by chaos, disintegration and division. Some observers attribute such change to the presence of the PNA and to its inability to assume a leading role, as well as to its acting as a barrier between the resistance and the occupation.

Conclusions

The absence of a common enemy on the ground in Gaza, after the withdrawal of the settlers, diverted the enraged desire for revenge from its natural path and redirected it inwards, towards individuals, families and factions contending for power within the Palestinian community. Under deteriorating social, economic, political and psychological conditions, it is only natural, as we have already warned, that violence will prevail. This situation has worsened with the proliferation of arms and funds in the hands of contending parties and militias. Those factors on their own, however, cannot account for those bizarre acts of revenge, torture and killing committed in the recent clashes between Fatah and Hamas and which reflect inveterate grudges and hatred. As we have suggested, other reasons must be considered.

It is tragic that the systematised repression of the Palestinian people under occupation and the lamentable performance of the PNA have led our youth to seek and cling to a new identity, holding that brute force is the only means to avenge themselves for what they have suffered.

Dr El-Sarraj is founder of the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme. For more information see www.gcmhp.net

¹ For example, Adalah (www.adalah.org), B'Tselem (www.btselem.org) and the Public Committee Against Torture in Israel (www.stoptorture.org.il/eng)

² The PNA is the interim administrative organisation that has nominally governed parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since 1994.

Strange bedfellows

Mike Marqusee reveals an unholy alliance between Zionists and Hindu supremacists

During a visit to India in February, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, met with right-wing Hindu supremacist notables at the home of former Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani, currently leader of the BJP (the official opposition) in the Indian parliament.

In the 1980s, Advani launched and led the “Rath yatra”, a provocative nation-wide tour aimed at mobilizing support for replacing the five hundred year old Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, north India, with a Ram Temple. The upshot was the violent demolition of the mosque in December 1992 by Hindu fanatics, an act of communal aggression which led to riots across the country and the loss of 2000 lives.

Along with other leaders of the Hindu right, Advani was charged by police with making “inflammatory speeches to spread communal hatred”. The legal case against him, reopened in 2005, is still pending.

As Home Minister in the BJP-led government of 1998-2004, Advani was complicit in the anti-Muslim pogrom in Gujarat in 2003 which took the lives of 2,500 Muslims and left at least 150,000 homeless.

But for Metzger, Advani is a hero. “It is seldom that I go to somebody’s residence to participate in a reception,” he said. “Our custom does not allow this. But, here, I came to Shri L.K. Advani’s residence, as if I were going to my own home... As India’s Internal Minister, he was the first Indian top official to visit Israel. He played a major and sustained role in furthering and cementing the relations between the two countries. We immensely value this gesture.”

The reception led to the signing of an anodyne “Hindu-Jewish” declaration against terrorism and religious violence; its real import was made clear by Metzger to the Jerusalem Post: “Several Hindu leaders expressed their dismay at Muslim violence. They told me that both Judaism and Hinduism were the mothers from which all other religions suckled. But sometimes the offspring bite the breast that feeds them.” Rabbi David Rosen of the American Jewish committee, who was also present, drove the point home: “Although Muslim extremism was not singled out, it was at the forefront of many participants’ minds.”

Political, commercial and military ties between India and Israel have steadily intensified over the past decade. The Hindu supremacists of the BJP have long found common ground with Zionism (with no contradiction between that and their earlier admiration for Nazism); sadly, the Congress-led government that took power in 2004 has also adopted their predecessor’s enthusiasm for the alliance with Israel. Both Congress and BJP leaders happily join with Israeli representatives to celebrate what they like to call “common Hindu-Jewish values”. Metzger’s visit, widely publicised in India, is part of an Israeli effort to consolidate that mythology.

Two months before Metzger’s visit, in November 2006, 218 members of the Bnei Menashe, from Mizoram in north-east India, arrived in Israel and were promptly settled in the northern Galilee as part of a drive to strengthen the Jewish presence in the area

after the war against Lebanon.

The Bnei Menashe are a Tibeto-Burman linguistic group who claim to be descendants of one of the Ten Lost Tribes of ancient Israel (hence the name, “Sons of Manasseh”), but their link with Judaism is in fact of recent origin. Like other tribal peoples in north-eastern India, they had been converted from indigenous religious practises to protestant Christianity in the late 19th century. In 1951, a local Pentacostalist leader named Challianthanga announced that God had ordered his people to return to their pre-Christian religion, Judaism, and to their original homeland, which he claimed was Israel. He attracted a band of followers who adopted some Jewish customs while retaining faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

In 1979, an Israeli organisation dedicated to locating the lost tribes learned about the group and made contact with them. Over the following decades many were converted to Orthodox Judaism and some began settling in Israel and the Occupied Territories, principally Gaza. Significantly, much of the funding for this operation came from the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, a body that solicits Christian support for Israel and is effectively an arm of the powerful right-wing Christian evangelical lobby in the USA.

“In pursuit of the common strategic hostility to Islam, religion is a mere plaything for those who most loudly profess its social centrality”

The search for the lost tribes has been a theme of Christian messianism for at least three hundred years. At various times claims have been made that Native Americans, groups in China and sub-saharan Africa are descendants of the tribes – who perished in the Assyrian conquest of the Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.

But with the emergence of the Zionist state, these claims have taken on a new import. In Israel, champions of the Bnei Menashe openly describe their immigration as part of the solution to “the demographic problem”, i.e. the numerical preponderance of non-Jews in Palestine. Of course, for the Bnei Menashe to be eligible to immigrate under Israel’s Law of Return, they must be accepted by the Rabbinate as Jewish, which means they must undergo formal conversion. This has caused controversy in India, where the issue of mass conversions is extremely sensitive.

It’s likely that Rabbi Metzger discussed the conversion issue with his Hindu hosts, who, while stridently opposed to Christian and Muslim proselytising in what they regard as “Hindu India”, welcome the Jewish variety, even though it automatically transforms Indian citizens into potential citizens of a foreign state. All of which shows not merely the inconsistency of the parties involved, but more significantly that in the pursuit of the common strategic hostility to Islam and support for the US “war on terror”, religion is a mere plaything for those who most loudly profess its social centrality, in both India and Israel.

In Brief

HOME DEMOLITIONS

continue on Palestinian land on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Israel has demolished over 18,000 homes in the OPTs since 1967; the trick is to require Palestinians to obtain a licence to build on their own land – licences which are virtually impossible to obtain and exorbitantly expensive (tens of thousands of dollars). So people build without licences, and the Israeli authorities use this as an excuse for illegal demolitions. To further dispossess Palestinian residents, over half of East Jerusalem has been classified as “open green space” and another 34% is zoned for Jewish settlers only. Palestinian landowners pay rates and taxes, and yet receive almost no services from the municipality, except the omnipresent bulldozers. 18,000 demolished buildings represent probably over 200,000 Palestinians made homeless over 40 years, in a slow, relentless policy of deliberate displacement and “judaisation” of East Jerusalem and other parts of the West Bank.

The same ploys are being used to drive the Bedouin from their homes, both to the east and the west of the Green Line. In February, the Israeli military destroyed seven huts and tents belonging to Bedouin living near a settlement in Hebron, in the southern West Bank. Another group of Bedouin living further east in the Jordan Valley have been given two months to leave their homes near an Israeli military base and an illegal Jewish settlement.

For further details contact Meir Margalit (0544 345 503) or angela@icahd.org.

AL-AQSA MOSQUE THREAT: UNESCO INTERVENES

There is worldwide concern about the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, where in January Israeli bulldozers began demolishing a hill, a wooden bridge, and structures at the foot of the hill, which are the property of the Islamic Waqf.

The Israeli archeological authorities stated that the destruction was preliminary to building a bridge connecting Al-Buraq area with the mosque.

On 14 March UNESCO called on



House demolition at A-Tur, near the Eastern ring-road

Israel to stop excavations and consult on a final plan with Muslim religious authorities and other parties, following a UN experts' report.

The report also called on Israel to comply with a decision taken by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee last July, calling for all relevant

information on new buildings planned and work in the area to be submitted to them. (Israel began the work in January without communicating with UNESCO.)

ISRAEL IN THE POLLS

In March the World Service of the BBC released the results of a worldwide poll they commissioned in November. More than 28,000 people in 27 countries responded. When asked to rate 13 countries – Britain, Canada, China, France, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, North Korea, Russia, the USA, Venezuela, and the European Union – as having a positive or negative influence, Israel topped the poll, with a 56% negative rating, vs. 17% positive; next came Iran (54% negative, 18% positive), then the US (51% negative, 30% positive), then North Korea (48% negative, 19% positive).

In the US, unsurprisingly, a majority of Americans say their sympathies lie with the Israelis. There has however been a shift in the past year, with support for Israel falling from 68% to 63%, while favorable views of Palestine increased slightly, from 11% to 16%. Another recent Gallup poll, again unsurprisingly, revealed that Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to rate Israel favourably: 73% vs. 58%.



Bridge under construction near the Al-Aqsa mosque

Eye on the Web

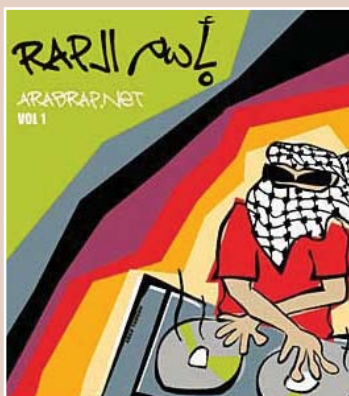


You tube is a site where anyone can post their home videos – yes, you've guessed it, 90% rubbish, but with the occasional gem. One of these, **Burning conscience** — **Breaking the silence**, is a half-hour interview with two Israeli refusniks, who simply report what they have witnessed: the arbitrary demolition of homes, a 'shoot-to-kill' policy as collective punishment, targeted killings, and blatant misrepresentation of IDF actions in the Israeli media. In his closing words one ex-soldier addresses the US public directly: "It's about time you knew what you're enabling". Watch it on www.youtube.com/watch?v=37MFa7ZKQWo.



[www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Palestine will](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Palestine+will)

take you to a very mixed bag of clips and short films on Palestine, including the rap group Dam, and www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yi00GYsyR4A&NR carries an interview with a young girl in Nablus, forced to act as a human shield by Israeli soldiers.



The next motion in the BBC's series '**The Doha Debates**' is: "This house believes the Palestinians should give up their full right of return." It will be broadcast on BBC World on 14 and 15 April. For exact times see: <http://www.thedohadebates.com/output/Page27.asp>



Congratulations to Channel 4 news on an uncompromising report by Inigo Gilmore, on 25 January, from the **West Bank village of Bil'in**, which

is being cut in two by the Apartheid Wall. It shows how Israeli agents provocateurs try to stir up violence among the protesters, while olive trees are uprooted and bulldozers clear more stolen land for illegal settlements.

See www.channel4.com/player/v2/player.jsp?showId=4482 (8 minutes).



You can hear an interview with **Tanya Reinhart**, academic, activist and author, who sadly died suddenly in March (see page 13), as a podcast on the website of the campaigning Israeli-Palestinian organisation 'Alternative Information Centre'. Go to www.alternativenews.org/podcasts/index.html and scroll down. Reinhart discusses some of the apparent contradictions between the Israeli public's electoral choices and their views as revealed in opinions polls.



For the **latest news** from the Occupied Territories, with photos and clips, see the official Hamas website: www.palestine-info.info.



Defence for Children International
Palestine Section

Children Behind Bars



In its most recent report, the Defence for Children International condemned Israel's long-standing policy of arresting and imprisoning Palestinian children.

No child shall be deprived of his or her liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily. The arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be in conformity with the law and shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest appropriate period of time

Article 37b, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

It states that in 2006 about 700 Palestinian children (under 18) were arrested by Israeli soldiers. Of these, around 25 children were

held in administrative detention, that is, without charge or trial. The overwhelming majority of those arrested were boys; there were just eight girl child prisoners who served sentences during the year.

At any given time, there were between 340 and 420 Palestinian children held in Israeli prisons and detention centers in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Of these, around 300 were held in central prisons, either pending trial or after having been sentenced. The remaining 80 were held in interrogation and detention centers. The number of children arrested in 2006 brings the total number of Palestinian children arrested by Israel since the beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000 to approximately 5,200.

The report continues: "Palestinian child political prisoners routinely face violations of their human

rights during the arrest through the imprisonment process. They are exposed to physical and psychological abuse, often amounting to torture. They are denied prompt access to an attorney and often denied contact with their families and the outside world. Many are held without charge or trial. They face substandard, often inhumane, conditions of detention, both in the facilities where they are initially held and interrogated and in those where they await trial and serve their sentence. Moreover, they are frequently denied access to proper medical care. In many cases, the arrest, interrogation and imprisonment experience has psycho-social effects that extend far beyond the period of detention."

For the full report, and info on their activities and publications, see www.dci-pal.org.

Trade unions take up the challenge

Over the last few years increasing numbers of trade union members have gone from Britain to visit their counterparts in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to learn more about what is happening and to build practical links.

On their return many of these delegations report back to their respective unions. Frequently their reports are published in trade union journals and are read by many tens of thousands of members and make a significant contribution to changing people's perceptions about Palestinians, the occupation and the actions of the Government of Israel. Undoubtedly such initiatives have made a significant contribution to developing PSC's work in the trade union movement. Some six or seven years ago not a single national trade union was affiliated to the PSC. Today 18 national unions with a total membership of over 5 million – or 80% of the organised trade union movement – are affiliated to the Campaign.

Among them are some very large unions, such as Amicus with over 1.2 million members, UNISON with 1.2

million, Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) with 800,000 and the GMB with more than half a million. In the next few months Amicus and TGWU are set to merge, bringing into being the largest trade union in Britain and one of the largest in the world. Of course this does not mean that every single member of an affiliated union signs up to the views adopted as policy; for everyone who supports PSC there is a task to be done, to bring the issue of Palestine to the membership, whether in a local union branch, a region or at the national level.

The affiliated unions made a major contribution in putting forward the motion for TUC Congress in September 2006 (see the Winter issue of Palestine News). This saw the unanimous adoption by the British trade union movement of an explicit policy of recognition of and support for Palestinian rights. Every affiliated union is a member of the PSC Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC), which meets on a regular basis to discuss how that Congress decision can be built on.

This summer, many of the union conferences will have discussions

on Palestine and be addressed by Palestinian trade unionists. Many unions are backing the Enough! Coalition and will be circulating information about the 9 June demonstration. In addition, the TUAC has begun a project to develop an education pack which can be used by trade unionists at training events. This will include a powerpoint presentation which has been trialled on a number of occasions, including the National Union of Miners weekend school, the Northern Region TUC International Day School and at a number of local branches of the NUT. It also received a positive reception when used with students in both schools and universities. In addition to the presentation, the pack will contain a range of valuable resources such as key documents and maps, that can help stimulate discussion and information for everyone.

Following an official delegation to visit the Palestinian trade unions, the TUC has put forward a set of proposals for joint work between the TUC and the PGFTU. In recent months, the TUC has been calling for the release of monies by the government of Israel and the European Union, in order to pay the salaries of the 160,000 public sector employees who have not been paid as a result of the withholding of these funds. The TUC meets regularly with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and will undoubtedly be pursuing the matter, especially in the light of the establishment of the Unity Government.

Bernard Regan

We say Enough!

To mark 40 years of Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem, a broad coalition of charities, trade unions and campaigns have formed the *Enough!* coalition. *Enough!*'s founding statement says "we have come together because we want peace for Israelis and Palestinians alike. This can only be built on justice, equality and freedom. In order to achieve this goal governments like the British government must stand up for international law and human rights."

Members of *Enough!* include PSC, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, trade unions including UNISON and the TGWU, the Muslim Council of Britain, Pax Christi, and War on Want. Actor Miriam Margolyes chaired its parliamentary launch, and Israeli ex-pilot Yonatan Shapira spoke of the need for

Europe to take action to ensure the end of occupation.

At the evening launch meeting, two speakers from Gaza, Dr. Mona el-Farra and Zakaria Abu Harbid, were unable to attend the launch because of border closures imposed by the Israeli army. However, Mr. Harbid's prize-winning film of the slaughter of a family on the beach in Gaza was shown.

Sharif Omar, a farmer from Jayyous in the West Bank, spoke

of how the land is being expropriated by the Israeli separation wall, and how Israeli restrictions, on farming, harvesting and selling the produce, are destroying the agricultural economy in Palestine. Professor Manuel Hassassian, Palestinian General Delegate to the UK, said: "What we want is our right to self-determination because we are a world nation fighting for our existence. It is ludicrous to see the international community imposing collective punishment on the Palestinians because we are practising our right to democracy." Tony Benn welcomed the launch, saying: "The Palestine question is the central, long-term question in the Middle East and there will be no peace in the Middle East until the Palestinians have their rights."

Enough! is organising major events this year including a demonstration on Saturday 9 June and a lobby of parliament on Wednesday 28 November. Contact the PSC office for leaflets, posters, and badges.



Miriam Margolyes

Independent Jewish Voices

The launch of Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) at the beginning of February created a massive media furor, with Melanie Phillips describing IJV as 'Jews for Genocide', and accusations that they represented only a small and marginal group of individuals. However, the response proved otherwise: a deluge of articles and debate in the media, and a packed founding meeting, in Hampstead Town Hall.

At the meeting, Tony Klug talked about the issue at the heart of IJV – the need to challenge the view that the position of the Board of Deputies of British Jews on Israel is shared by the whole Jewish community in Britain.

“The lessons we have learned from our own history compel us to speak out”

The IJV statement, which attracted over 400 signatures, affirmed that human rights are universal and indivisible and should be upheld without exception; that Palestinians and Israelis alike have the right to peaceful and secure lives; and that peace and stability require compliance with international law. The statement also opposed all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, anti-Arab racism or Islamophobia, and asserted that the “battle against anti-Semitism is vital and is undermined whenever opposition to Israeli government policies is automatically branded as anti-Semitic. These principles are contradicted when those who claim to speak on behalf of Jews in Britain and other countries consistently put support for the policies of an occupying power above the human rights of an occupied people”. The statement ends by saying that IJV reclaims “the tradition of Jewish support for universal freedoms, human rights and social justice. The lessons we have



Jacqueline Rose

learned from our own history compel us to speak out”. Israel’s war against Lebanon and Gaza in the summer created further fractures in the image presented of unquestioning support for Israel amongst the Jewish community. As Jacqueline Rose told the meeting: “We were concerned by Olmert’s declaration that this was a ‘war being fought by all Jews’, and by the Chief Rabbi’s statement at the Trafalgar Square rally that British Jews were ‘proud’ of Israel, as the IDF, in the words of then Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, proceeded with its plan to “bomb Lebanon back 20 years”.

With over 1000 entries on the week-long debate over IJV in the Guardian Comment is Free website, Brian Klug commented: “It’s the issues, not the IJV as such, that count. As one email writer put it: ‘Judging by the enormous response, it is clear that these issues have been smouldering beneath the surface for some time’.”

Similar initiatives have been taking place in the US, Germany, Australia and elsewhere. As Brian Klug summarised: “IJV has struck a chord – hence the degree of support we have received, and hit a nerve – hence the scale of the hostility. Things are changing, at home and abroad, and this is just the beginning.”



Brian Klug

Sarah Colborne

For more information see www.ijv.org.uk

Her voice lives on

Tanya Reinhart, a distinguished Israeli academic, died suddenly on 17 March, aged 63. She wrote widely on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and was a tireless activist, one of the few Israeli academics



to support an academic boycott of her country. It was the analogy between Israel and South Africa’s apartheid that she used in justifying a boycott, saying: “What Israel is doing...far exceeds the crimes of South Africa’s white regime. It has been taking the form of systematic ethnic cleansing, which South Africa never attempted..”

She was born and educated in Israel, and in 1976 gained a PhD in linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where her supervisor was Noam Chomsky. On hearing of her death, he paid tribute both to her academic work and her political writing, which “drew away the veil that concealed criminal and outrageous actions and shone a searing light on the reality that was obscured”.

Reinhart taught at Tel Aviv University for more than 20 years, and held a chair as professor of linguistics and cultural studies. But she also found time for much political writing, both books and journalism (she was a columnist for the Israeli paper Yediot Ahranot and for the online magazine, Counterpunch).

As an activist, she made countless visits to the West Bank in support of her Palestinian colleagues at Birzeit University, and participated in protests against the building of the Wall and against the expropriation of Palestinian land.

Like Ilan Pappé (see page 22), she decided regretfully, after years of harassment to leave Israel, and emigrated to the States, to take up a teaching post at New York University. Like Pappé, she was branded a traitor by many compatriots, but affirmed that open criticism of Israel “is the best act of solidarity and compassion with the Jews that one can have”.

The trip of a lifetime

Stephen Bolt suggests just some of the many ways you can visit Palestine

It may not figure in many glossy travel brochures, but a trip to Palestine will prove far more memorable than island-hopping in Greece or trekking in New Zealand could ever be. And nowhere else in the world will your visit be more appreciated, whether you go for a week or commit to a long-term stay.

Before you go

However you plan to visit, a decent guide book is a good place to start. The excellent Alternative Tourism Group (ATG) guidebook '*Palestine & Palestinians*', with wonderful colour pictures and useful maps, gives loads of information on sightseeing, accommodation, restaurants, shops and markets, renting a car – everything you would expect from a Rough Guide – plus helpful tips on how to handle border crossings and checkpoints. For up-to-date information on culture, sport and entertainment in Palestine there is an illustrated 50-page weekly brochure, available online at www.thisweekinpalestine.com.

The commonest questions asked by the first-time visitor are: Is it dangerous? What route should I take? Do I run the risk of being turned back at the border or airport? Will I be able to travel around when I get there?

Direct violence by the IDF or Israeli settlers against Western visitors is uncommon – that is why our presence is so useful – but of course it is not unknown.

If you travel with an organised tour, or are working for a local organisation, they will know what the current situation is like in different areas; the ubiquitous taxi drivers are also an excellent source of information, constantly networking by mobile phone.

Getting there

The most popular ways of getting to the Occupied Palestinian Territories are via Ben Gurion airport in Israel or via Jordan, using one of the three bridges to cross the river, which is the border with the West Bank. Some people combine their visit with a trip to Egypt. (It is relatively easy to cross into Israel from Sinai – though not via Gaza!)

Security checks at the bridges are not as bad as at the airport and can be a lot more pleasant at exit (expect a grilling about where you've been and who you met, at the airport). However, it can be a bit more expensive to fly to Jordan, and you need to take an extra couple of days. Once across the bridge you can get a shared taxi to Jerusalem

British passport holders do not need a visa to visit Israel, and once there you can, in theory, cross into the OPTs via one of the checkpoints. If you are a first time visitor, you are less likely to have a hard time; if you are a known activist, you may well be turned back at the airport. According to regular visitor Aisha Ahmed, Muslim and non-white people especially should expect some kind of grilling about their intentions. To avoid hassle, visitors arriving at Tel Aviv often declare their itinerary to be entirely within Israel. If you are a British national of Palestinian origin you may face major difficulties (see My Right to Enter Campaign, page 21).

or other parts of the West Bank.

The Israeli authorities have been threatening generally tighter controls on entry to the Territories, so check before you go. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office have up-to-date information on current regulations that you can view on line: go to www.fco.gov.uk and then to Travel Advice by Country.

Organised tours

Joining an organised tour offers you the simplest and safest way to see a lot in a short time.

The Palestine-based **Alternative Tourism Group** (www.patg.org) offers trips ranging from the historical to the political. You can visit not only ancient biblical sites but also an Israeli settlement or a Palestinian refugee camp. The ATG work closely with the UK-based **Olive Co-operative** (www.olivecoop.com), which offers a wide range of study tours to allow visitors to see at first hand the current situation in Israel/Palestine. Each includes the opportunity to meet Palestinians and Israelis who are working for peace and justice. In addition, each tour has a theme to allow visitors with particular interests (education, women's rights, history, architecture) to meet organisations and visit sites that are of most relevance to them.

The **Amos Trust** do 'alternative pilgrimages' following the route of traditional pilgrims – Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth – but spending time with people in every place to meet Christian, Jewish and Muslim peacemakers, and ensuring that you get to see the facts on the ground. The next available trip will be in June 2008 (see www.amostrust.org).

Rediscovering Palestine (www.rediscoveringpalestine.org) also offer regular trips combining visits to historical sites with meetings with Palestinian and Israeli peace activists and human rights organisations.

Activist and international observer groups

A number of organisations exist to encourage direct action and to undertake monitoring and reporting of the situation, in support of Palestinian human rights.

Perhaps the best known is the **International Solidarity Movement** (www.palsolidarity.org), which has a UK branch (www.ism-london.org.uk). ISM organise non-violent direct action (NVDA) activities – trying to disrupt the construction of the Wall, acting as witnesses to restrictions on movements at checkpoints, taking part in demonstrations, etc. ISM provide two days of training in NVDA techniques and its history within the Palestinian context.



Volunteers help with the olive harvest



© WWW.ICAHD.ORG

The **Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions** (www.icahd.org/eng/) organises a two-week 'Rebuilding Experience' – a summer camp where you help in the rebuilding of Palestinian houses destroyed by the Israelis, and take part in demonstrations against demolitions.

For people wishing to commit to a longer stay,

there are organisations that train volunteers to do specialised work, such as the **Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme**. This was set up in 2002 by the World Council of Churches, after the US had vetoed three attempts to pass resolutions in the UN Security Council to send an international force to protect Palestinian civilians. They protect through presence, solidarity and advocacy work, and commit to speaking publicly of their experiences as widely as possible on their return to their home country. PSC member Ann Wright, who worked for four months in the OPTs as an Accompanier produced a blogspot which gives a very clear impression of what the work entails: see www.palestinejournals.co.uk. For more information on the organisation, see www.quaker.org.uk/eapp/. (You do not have to be a Christian to volunteer.)

A similar organisation is **Christian Peacemaker Teams**, who work in hotspots in several countries, including Palestine. They have been particularly active for years in Hebron, where Israeli settlers are very aggressive and disruptive of daily life. See www.cpt.org or www.cptuk.org

Studying

Birzeit University offers a year-round programme of **Palestine and Arabic Studies**, including the option of an intensive summer semester. As part of the course students hear first hand from young Palestinians about the challenges they face and witness the realities on the ground. Birzeit also organises two fortnight-long summer workcamps which give international students the opportunity to work alongside Palestinian students on community-orientated projects all over the Occupied Territories. For more information see London-based www.fobzu.org.

AlQuds University in East Jerusalem (see www.alquds.edu), runs an International Summer School designed to enable university students or professionals to study the region's culture, language and history. For students, it offers credit courses that are transferable to their universities.



Students enjoying a barbecue at **Birzeit University**

The **Holy Land Trust** organises a very good summer camp (not solely for Christians), where people can stay for a month or two in summer with local families, learning the language if they wish, or doing volunteer work in Bethlehem. In addition they run fact-finding tours and pilgrimages (see www.holylandtrust.org).

Similarly, the **Olive Coop** can help place you in an intensive spoken Arabic course in Bethlehem (from beginners to advanced), while you stay with a local family.



Children take a break at a **Project Hope** centre

Branch links

Many PSC branches have links with communities in the OPTs, and strengthen these ties with organised visits and exchanges. **Oxford, Birmingham** and **Sheffield** all liaise with communities and institutions in the Territories, and you can get involved at home and/or in Palestine. **Cheltenham** PSC organiser Joanne Moston takes groups to Palestine two or three times a year, focusing on Holy Land sites, but also visiting Deheisha camp in Bethlehem, with whom the branch has special links.

Gill Kaffash from the **Camden** group is currently in Abu Dis for the second time as a volunteer English teacher: "I have learned something from every visit. Visiting Palestine increases your motivation in solidarity work and also deepens your understanding of the situation in a way that reading about it cannot."

Volunteering

The Olive Coop, together with ATG, can arrange for you to help out with the olive harvest in late autumn or place you with one of the many NGOs or charities operating in Palestine.

One of the most thriving is **Project Hope**, an educational charity for young people, based in Nablus. They are always looking for good teachers of English, but say: "If you aren't sure of what to do, we will find something that matches your skills!" (see www.projecthope.ps.)

A general word of warning from Aisha, who spent six months last year teaching near Nablus: "Everyone will be very welcoming, and invite you to sumptuous meals, but many people are really on the breadline and you can, quite unwittingly, be a drain on their scarce resources."

Finally, if you simply want to have a holiday – with sun, great food, wonderful handicrafts, multi-layered history with picturesque villages and historic cities, and, above all, friendly people – you will still be making a real contribution. You will be putting money into an economy that desperately needs it, and giving the Palestinians a sense of normality. The welcome will be warm and the friendships lasting.

Back home

All the organisations and individuals involved in visits to Palestine make the point that the major strength of visiting is that it can increase your solidarity work back home. Document your trip with photos or videos, offer to speak at meetings in your area or on local radio, write for your local paper. And keep in touch with the people you have met.

Seeds of solidarity

John Gee remembers the founding of PSC, 25 years ago

Protesters were being shot on the streets, universities closed and the elected mayors of several West Bank towns had been dismissed by the Israeli 'civil administration'. In response, a group of activists met in London as the Palestine Solidarity Liaison Committee, which they wisely renamed the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC).

A gradual build up of activity and organisation was planned, but, in June 1982, a few weeks after that first meeting, Israel's invasion of Lebanon radically altered the basis for PSC's work. For the first time, a public appalled at Israeli actions generally saw the Palestinians not as terrorists, but as a courageous people fighting for their rights against a powerful and brutal enemy.

We worked on a crisis basis. Weekly meetings were held in a basement room in Bethnal Green, East London. There were usually around 20 to 25 people present, including Palestinians, Lebanese, an Iranian and one or two Israeli anti-Zionist Jews. The British participants were left-wing, but mostly not in political groups. We discussed the latest events, planned activities and answered the many requests that came in for speakers. Perhaps it was a way of dealing with the stress of the situation, but I thought that the members of the group had a particularly keen sense of humour.

The first branches outside London were established in Swansea, Brighton and Bradford.

Palestine and Lebanon faded from the news headlines after the Sabra and Chatila massacres in September 1982. We knew then that we would have an uphill struggle to sustain PSC. In the past, Palestine groups had folded in such circumstances, but we determined to go on.

We launched a bi-monthly printed bulletin, 'Palestine Solidarity', which came out regularly for nearly ten years. A London-centric imbalance in the campaign was gradually overcome. In those difficult times, the foundations of branches that still campaign today



A youthful Ken Livingstone joins in a dabke at a PSC meeting in 1985

— in Manchester, Sheffield, North-East England and South Wales — were laid. A trickle of members went over to Palestine on visits or to work with Palestinian institutions, building people-to-people links.

We organised many activities, but arranged one major event each year as a focal point of work and publicity.

In 1983, this was a campaign for the release of Palestinian and Lebanese prisoners held by Israel. It started with a vigil and fast outside St Martin's in the Fields, London, on what turned out to be one of the coldest weekends of the year: after little rest, we awoke with frost on our sleeping bags two mornings running.

In the following years, we held a labour movement conference, a conference on anti-Arab racism and a conference and speaking tour on human rights and the Palestinians. This was very timely, coming a few months before the outbreak of the Intifada in December 1987.

“Our commitment to sustain PSC in the lean years of the mid-1980s meant that there was an organised network already in being and prepared to act in solidarity with the popular uprising”

In the past, when there was an upsurge in the Palestinian struggle, solidarity groups were built from scratch in response, but our commitment to sustain PSC in the lean years of the mid-1980s meant that there was an organised network already in being and prepared to act in solidarity with the popular uprising. A similar determination just about got us through the Oslo 'peace process' years.

PSC was self-reliant and independent. We tried our best not to be drawn into inter-Palestinian quarrels, though that did not save us from accusations of being aligned. Working to change public opinion and grassroots campaigning, we believed, were the best ways of establishing a firm base of popular support in Britain for the Palestinians.

My main regrets on this anniversary are that the Palestinian people are still denied the right to live in freedom in their own homeland and that a solidarity campaign is therefore still needed.

I'm impressed by how far PSC has come since our early years: the scale of the organisation today, its resources and its outreach are far beyond what we achieved fifteen or twenty years ago, but I like to think that we did something to pave the way.

My respect for all those who contributed to the campaign over the years will never fade. I am confident that the great majority have maintained their commitment to the cause of Palestinian freedom. Some continue to be members of PSC to this day, while others, wherever they are, still do what they can to further the beliefs and ideals of the campaign.

John Gee was General Secretary of PSC for many years. He has worked as a freelance writer in Singapore since 1999 and still writes and gives interviews on Palestine. Photos courtesy Helen Stollar.



Plus ça change: An early PSC fact sheet

Campus watch

Student support snowballs

At a packed Union General Meeting, students of the **London School of Economics** voted to twin with **Al Najah University**, in Nablus, and to affiliate to the Birzeit University Right to Education campaign (see below).

The text of the motion noted the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights statement that: "Everyone has the right to education". Supporters of the motion argued that that right was being denied to Palestinian university students, who face Israeli military occupation.

Three amendments to the motion fell after they failed to gain a majority vote. (They proposed twinning the LSE Student Union with an Israeli university as well as Al Najah, and backing the Global Campaign for Education in addition to the Right to Education campaign.)

A full report of the meeting can be found on <http://thebeaveronline.co.uk>.



On 7 March students of **Manchester University** also passed a motion to twin with Al Najah in Nablus. They noted both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in relation to the right to education and the stipulation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, that "the occupying power shall, with the cooperation of the national and local authorities, facilitate the proper working of all institutions devoted to the care and education of children". Since the Israeli authorities pose major obstacles to education at all levels in the Occupied Territories, the Union resolved to invite Al Najah University to twin with them, and to lobby Manchester University to provide at least three scholarships for Palestinian students who wish to study here. They also resolved to press the University to drop International Fees for all Palestinian



students and to support the Birzeit Right to Education campaign.

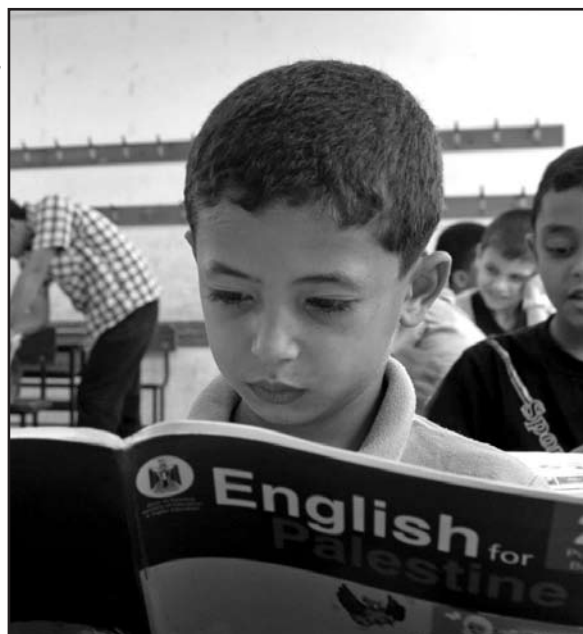


These initiatives follow last year's vote by **Leeds University** students to twin with **Birzeit University**, and **Sussex** students' decision to support Birzeit's Right to Education campaign (see <http://right2edu.birzeit.edu>).

Picture this

This winter hundreds of people visited an exhibition featuring photographs by Palestinian students, during a successful two-week showing at Foyles' landmark Charing Cross bookshop. Speaking at the private view, one of the photographers, Al Najah University graduate Muthanna Al-Qadi, described the experience of the group travelling together to different parts of the West Bank to take photographs, while confronting the barriers imposed by the occupation.

The exhibition and accompanying book are based on the work of eight student photographers from Birzeit University and Al-Najah University in the West Bank, who came together in 2005 to document student life and the obstruction of Palestinian education under military occupation. The exhibition was launched at Birzeit University in 2006 and is now touring Palestine,



Longing to learn: Askar refugee camp, Nablus

Friends of Birzeit University is organising a tour of universities, conferences and other locations throughout the UK, including the **London School of Economics, Haringey Library, Kings College London, SOAS, Edinburgh**, and the **PSC Sheffield Rally for Palestine on 12 May**. Please email fobzu@fobzu.org or call 020 7832 1340 to book the 38-photo exhibition or order a copy of the accompanying book (£12 including P&P).

Britain and America.

As well as capturing the major obstacles to education in the occupied West Bank – the routine harassment and arrests, the daily struggle to reach school and university under a regime of military checkpoints – the photographers reflected on the less visual aspects of student life under occupation. The photographs touch on themes as diverse as isolation, poverty, resistance, absent classmates, military barriers, student prisoners – and determination.

"The photograph that you take will not be a single moment in your memories... it is a moment in history; it is a moment in our time as Palestinian students, that tells the world our truth."

Fadwa Basha, Journalism and Politics student, Birzeit University.

Watch this space:

Last year the Association of University Teachers and NATFHE amalgamated to form the **University and College Union**, becoming the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, researchers and academic-related staff working in further and higher education in the UK. The first annual Congress of the Union will be held on 30 May, and it is rumoured that a number of motions supporting the Palestinians' right to education will be tabled. Since NATFHE has in the past shown more bottle on such issues (AUT backed down on its support, following intense Zionist lobbying), it will be an interesting debate to watch... See www.ucu.org.uk.

Spring into action!

Branches all over the UK are bursting with ideas on how to raise public awareness of Palestine. April ushers in a wave of events, in tandem with the **Vanunu Freedom Ride**. It sets off from **Faslane**, the UK's nuclear weapons base near Glasgow, on 7 April and ends at the Israeli Embassy in **London** on 21 April – marking 21 years of Mordechai Vanunu's captivity in Israel. It is also the annual date on which his inhumane restrictions come up for review.

This year the cyclists will ride through **Glasgow, Edinburgh, Berwick, Alnwick, Newcastle, Durham, Thirsk, Menwith Hill Spy Station, Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, Peterborough, Lakenheath USAF base, Cambridge and Hertford** to **London**. Branches in these areas will be holding joint events to raise awareness of Vanunu's situation and of Israel's nuclear weapons, which uniquely have never been subject to international inspection. For more details, go to www.vanunufreedomride.org.uk.

Cyclists are also sending a message of mutual support to the international women's peace movement **Follow the Women**. Women will be cycling through Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine – see www.followthewomen.com. The cycle of peace continues with the launch of the first ever **Palestinian Cyclist Club (PCC)**. The club, set up in February 2007, was partly inspired by the experiences of Mohammad Fayege, a student at Birzeit University, who joined the 2006 Peace Cycle from London to Jerusalem. See www.sirajcenter.org/cycle.

Northern branches set the pace

On 12 May a **coalition of Northern PSC** branches is holding a major rally and festival calling for an end to 40 years of occupation and for justice in Palestine. The **rally and festival of Palestinian culture** will take place in **Sheffield city**

centre and will combine a political rally and march with a variety of events and displays celebrating Palestinian culture and resilience.

The rally will feature a broad spectrum of speakers, including **Haim Bresheeth**, film maker and anti-Zionist, **Prof. Manuel Hassassian**, Palestinian Delegate to the UK, **Ismael Patel**, writer and Chair of Friends of Al Aqsa, **Betty Hunter**, PSC, **Nahella Ashraf**, Stop the War Coalition and **Clare Short MP**. Other features include Palestinian dabkeh dancing, a fake checkpoint, at least two Apartheid Walls,

Palestinian food stalls, samba bands, a cyclecade and photographic displays. A marquee situated in Sheffield city centre will ensure the day catches the attention of Saturday shoppers. The branches also plan a boycott market stall featuring 'forbidden fruits and vegetables' and a display about Palestinian football, which will promote the boycott campaign against Israel's inclusion in the World Cup. The initiative will be supporting the Enough! campaign and has been stimulated by the steady growth in branches and branch activity in the north. If you'd like to be involved go to www.sheffieldpsc.org.

Newcastle held a trade union event at St James' Park with **Laila Mahmoud Ahmad Qasem**, from the Palestinian Textiles Union and Foreign Office minister **Ian McCartney MP**. For full details of their events see their highly professional website – www.newcastlepsc.org.uk – where you can also view the **Slingshot HipHop** promo, about Palestinian rappers in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel.

Manchester hosted meetings with author Alan Hart, Bishop of Jerusalem Riah Abu el-Assal and journalist Jonathan Cook. On International Women's Day, the branch showed The Iron Wall at the Pankhurst Women's Centre in Manchester. The monthly stall, which is usually in the city centre, is on the move. The branch has taken it to **Bury** and in April they will leaflet in **Stockport**.

Jonathan Cook, whose book 'Blood and Religion: The Unmasking of the Zionist State' was reviewed in the Autumn issue of Palestine News, continued his tour at a well-attended meeting in **Halifax**. Jonathan, an English journalist based in Nazareth and married to a Palestinian, is a hugely respected commentator on the nature of Israeli society, a fierce critic of Zionism and champion of Palestinian rights.

In February **Durham** had a successful meeting at **Teesside University**, where they hope to set up a student branch. The branch had a stall in the city's fairtrade market in March, with Palcraft goods and Zaytoun oil, and will host the **Vanunu freedom ride** in April (see above).

Joined-up thinking

Exeter branch is in contact with **Bristol** and the newly established **Plymouth** branch, in a move towards a regional hub. Other joint initiatives included events with churches, universities and



Vanunu greeting peace cyclists at Jerusalem, 2006

the *Enough!* coalition. **Exeter cathedral** and other churches plan an exhibition on Jerusalem in the run-up to Easter. Exeter University Friends of Palestine kicked off **Palestine cultural week** with a fashion show of Palestinian material and embroidery, there was a film and talk by Ed Hill, an activist from Bristol and a Middle Eastern Music night. The branch has also linked with the Green Party and local Quakers.

A lively public meeting with south west **MEP Graham Watson**, on the role of the EU in Palestine, attracted a wide audience via the Lib-Dem network. Chair of the **Lib-Dem Friends of Palestine**, Trevor Cope, joined the debate. To get involved, contact fuad@exeterpsc.org.uk.

Branches boost solidarity

Sheffield continues to combine fundraising events such as Falafel nights and olive oil sales with informative talks, lectures and other activities. Fundraising for the four **Gazan children's projects** has been very successful. Unfortunately the continuing siege of Gaza means no members of Sheffield PSC have been able to visit the children's centres. But a series of talks have encouraged members to consider solidarity visits to Palestine. Talks by a returning Sheffield peace cyclist, two locals who joined a study tour organised by the **Olive Co-op** and a local Christian activist, Deacon Dave, have stimulated the branch. Dave gave a very moving talk at a Falafel night fundraiser on his experiences as a volunteer with the ISM in Hebron during the olive harvest. Sheffield also support the **Palestine Women's Scholarship Fund**, which is helping four young women from Gaza through university (see Winter issue of PN).

Another initiative has been the setting up of a highly successful Workers' Educational Association course on Palestine/Israel, which Sheffield PSC has supported with speakers and resources. Any groups interested in sharing ideas are welcome to contact Sheffield PSC: enquiries@sheffieldpsc.org.uk. The **Leicester** branch teamed up with the *Enough!* coalition in March, and this April will be showing **Arna's Children** at a public screening. In the summer the **Leicester-Bethlehem Link Group** will again be hosting a Dabkeh children's dance troupe from the **Ghirass Cultural Centre** in Bethlehem (see www.ghirass.org). The Link Group is also organising a children's art competition

on the theme of St. George/Al Khader with the support of the **Arab Education Institute** (www.aeicenter.org) in Bethlehem. In Palestine, Saint George is linked to the Islamic figure Al Khader and is a symbol of Christian-Muslim harmony. All Leicester schools will be mailed with an invitation to participate and a copy of the book *St. George — the Palestinian who became Patron Saint of England*.

The ripple effect

Oxford's Israeli Apartheid week is making waves across the world. Similar events have been held in the US and Canada, and this year, Cambridge and SOAS in London. The Israeli media covered the talk by **Dr Jamal Zahalka**, member of the Knesset, on Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Racism and Marginalisation.

Other talks featured **Yitzhak Laor**, a distinguished Israeli poet, playwright and journalist, on European Racism and its Magic Mirror: Israeli Apartheid and **Salim Vally**, a lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, on Apartheid in Israel and South Africa. Their most recent meeting was For Freedom and for Justice: The Role of International Solidarity with **Professor Jacqueline Rose**, a prominent literary theorist and critic, and **Dr Karma Nabulsi**, a Fellow in Politics at St Edmund Hall, Oxford University, and PSC Patron. Fundraising is beginning for a children's visit this summer. The **Oxford-Ramallah Friendship Association** (ORFA) plan to bring over eight kids from Al-Amari refugee camp in Ramallah, following the successful 2005 trip. To find out more, go to www.oxford-ramallah.org.

Fifteen months ago, Janet Michael was elected as the first woman mayor of Ramallah. She is an independent, and a Christian, but won support from Hamas councillors. Ms Michael was warmly received by Oxford 'town and gown' at ORFA's invitation. Dr Eugene Rogan, head of the Middle East Centre, St Anthony's College, supported her call for an end to the Israeli occupation so that people

in Ramallah and the whole of Palestine would be able to live a normal life. Ms Michael described how Palestinian women coped with traumatised children and told of lives made worse in the past year by the economic blockade. She also spoke at PSC's AGM in March, where she said how vital solidarity work is to the embattled people of Palestine.



Mayor of Ramallah Janet Michael, at Oxford

Music Without Borders

A unique collaboration between Palestinian and Welsh musicians, Music Without Borders, was held in March at the Gate Arts Centre in **Cardiff**. Tareq Rantisi and Mohamed Najem from Bethlehem joined critically acclaimed Welsh musician Gwilym Morus and Luke Evans from Bangor. The result was a fusion of traditional Palestinian music with the Welsh ballad form – *canu penillion* – in a contemporary context. (In 2005, Gwilym visited Bethlehem where he wrote two songs with Palestinian musicians and produced a CD, From Bethlehem to Bangor.) This is part of a tour across Wales – see www.gwilymmorus.com for dates and venues.

Welsh branches were also out in force for the 24 February march in **London**. A coachload from **Caernarfon, Bangor, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl and Chester** marched through the city.

The **Llandudno** group hosted a talk from Palestinian representatives of the Islamic Solidarity Movement in March, while **Chester and North Wales** Friends of Palestine will be holding their AGM in April and will screen the award winning film *The Olive Harvest*. The branch will also have a stall at the **Wales TUC conference** in **Llandudno**, 23-25th May

Strengthening ties

The **Bishop of Jerusalem, Rt Revd Riah Abu el-Assal** visited **York**, where around 300 people attended a public meeting organised by the branch. He emphasised the part we all have to play in campaigning for an end to the



Wall and checkpoint in York

injustice faced by the Palestinians and of the need for church divestment from the Occupation. The Bishop also spoke at York Mosque. At both meetings, money was raised towards the Bishop's project of a fully integrated school in Palestine. He also spoke at other Northern branches, and at the House of Commons.

Students from the **University of York** joined the weekly stall in the centre of York and performed an excellent street drama of an Israeli checkpoint. They set up large polystyrene blocks to represent a 2 metre high wall, a revolving checkpoint and soldiers with machine guns and simulated delays and mistreatment of Palestinians. Some of the crowd asked them to move as they were an obstruction – the point was made.

Palestine Week events included a talk by **Alan Hart**, who spoke about his book "Zionism, the Real Enemy of the Jews" and **Rabbi Ahron Cohen**, who spoke on Anti-Zionism is not Anti-Semitism to an audience of about 200 people.

In the run-up to Easter, one of the Churches Together groupings near to York will be holding a 5-week Lent course on the situation in Palestine/Israel; a member of York PSC will be leading one of the sessions.

East London PSC and the Twin Jenin Campaign are hosting a musical event in Tower Hamlets on 20 April, in commemoration of the battle of Jenin. The line-up will include Nizar Al-Issa, renowned Jordanian 'oud player and singer, familiar to PSC branches from earlier visits.

In February the Deputy Mayor of Jenin issued a formal invitation to Tower Hamlets councillors, to

strengthen links between the two communities, following his visit in December. He awaits a reply.

A packed meeting in Blackheath heard **SE London PSC** members report back on recent visits to Palestine and funds raised for projects in **Beit Furik** in the West Bank, which has a link with the branch.

Camden's **Britain-Palestine Twinning Network** held a musical celebration in **Highbury** on International Women's Day, dedicated to Palestinian women and featuring speakers **Terry Boullata** and **Mayor Janet Michael** from Ramallah, musicians **Liz Shirley**,

Debbie Fink, Nancy Elan, Camilla Cancantata, Nizar Al-Issa and the **Al-Zaytouna Dabke** group.

Branches block Carmel

Branches turned out in force to block the depot of **Carmel Agrexco**, the largest exporter of flowers from illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank, on Valentine's weekend. (Agrexco is the largest exporter of settlement produce for sale overseas; much of this produce comes from colonies in the Jordan Valley.)

120 activists joined the Boycott Israeli Goods Campaign at the Middlesex depot, at one of their busiest times of the year. The following day 13 activists shut the depot down for several hours by chaining themselves to the factory gates.

Previously there have been three blockades of this company, stopping work at the factory. The company is unwilling to press charges against the activists because they are scared of having to prove the legality of their business in open court.

In the UK Agrexco is known under the Carmel, Coral and Jaffa brands. The UK is the most important foreign market for Israeli fresh produce, including peppers, tomatoes, strawberries, herbs, spices, flowers and avocados, as well as flowers. Buyers beware!



A Valentine's Day message to Agrexco

Action now

My Right to Enter UK is a new grassroots campaign for the protection of British passport holders residing in or visiting the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Since April 2006 Israel has instituted a policy of denying entry to the OPTs. Foreign nationals, especially those of Palestinian origin, are being arbitrarily turned away at Israeli ports of entry and people who have lived there for many years are now being denied visas. Over 120,000 British and other foreign nationals are victims of Israel's post-2000 freeze on family unification. Many 'illegal' spouses have continued to live in the OPTs, but do so in constant fear of arrest and expulsion. Not only are families being forcibly separated but businessmen, students, lecturers, health-care and humanitarian workers are also being affected.

Why Israel has chosen to continue this vindictive policy is a matter of speculation. Is it for reasons of security? Fear of the "demographic threat"? A

punishment for the election of Hamas? Or a wish to remove articulate critics of Israel?

On 21 March this year **Amnesty International** issued a swingeing report on the effects of Israel's policies: "Violations by Israel of the right to family life have persisted for decades and have worsened over the past six years. By 2006 at least 120,000 families were affected. Moreover, since 2006 the restrictions on family life, and the number of families affected by such restrictions, have increased – the right to enter the OPTs is now also denied to spouses from countries for whom advance visas are not required to enter Israel." For more details see www.RightToEnter.ps.

If you:

- have been denied entry and would like to share your story
 - would like to join the UK My Right To Enter group
 - would like to help in any other way
- please contact aimee.shalan@btinternet.com.

Kick racism out of football

Despite nationwide protests to the FA and UEFA against the England-Israel match in Tel Aviv on 24 March, it went ahead, resulting in a 0-0 draw. The planned return match in Wembley (8 September) gives the British public a much greater chance to make it clear that the kind of racism practised by Israel, both against its own Palestinian citizens and against those under military occupation, will not be tolerated.

Write to the Football Association to complain about Israel's inclusion in Euro 2008: at info@thefa.com or call them on 020 7745 4999. Copy in UEFA at info@euro2008.com and FIFA at contact@fifa.org.

Please write also to Kick Racism out of Football about the inclusion of Israel, while Palestinian footballers are excluded from international football: info@kickitout.org; or email their chairman Lord Herman Ouseley at hermanouseley@aol.com.

Background info:

- For article on travel ban affecting Palestinian players see www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/788528.html.
- Goal Dreams – a powerful film about Palestine's national football team. Why not show it at a local meeting? See www.goaldreams.com for trailer and details of how to buy the DVD.



15 April this year marks the **5th anniversary of Palestinian MP Marwan Barghout's kidnapping from Ramallah** by the IDF. For information on his case and on the international campaign to secure his release see www.freebarghouti.org.

Has your MP signed?

Two recent Early Day Motions relating to Palestine have attracted an impressive number of signatures.

EDM 709 (22 Jan) expresses great concern for the safety and welfare of the many Palestinians trapped amid the sectarian violence in Iraq, or stranded in temporary refugee camps, with little humanitarian aid (75 signatures, to date).

EDM 913 (20 Feb) calls on the government not only to resist Israel's calls for closer economic ties, but to back suspension of the EU's special trading arrangements with Israel, until it desists from at least some of its unlawful activities in the Occupied Territories (66 signatures).

To see who has signed so far, go to <http://edmi.parliament.uk/edmi/>, type in the EDM number then click on the title. If your MP hasn't signed, go and see them armed with plenty of reasons – maybe in the form of PSC fact sheets and maps – why they should!

Pappe in Exeter

Ilan Pappe is well known in the UK as an eloquent and fearless speaker on Israel/Palestine and the author of numerous, meticulously researched books on the history of the region (see Review section, page 24).

After many years of challenging the official myths about the founding of the state, and questioning the ideology of Zionism, he is about to leave the University of Hailfa, where he was a senior lecturer in history, to take up a post in the University of Exeter.

He was born in Israel of German parents, and at first did not question the official version of history. He even served in the Golan Heights during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War.

It was at Oxford University, under the supervision of Albert Hourani that he wrote a doctoral thesis that became his first book, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. "My research debunked all of the lessons about Israel's creation that I had been raised on," Pappe says.

In 1996 Pappe joined Hadash, the anti-Zionist communist party and began organising events to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Nakba. He faced tremendous opposition from the academic and political establishment, which has since intensified.

Although he won a victory, in that the ethnic cleansing of 1948-49 is no longer contested in many quarters, he sees open and growing support for the very policy of ethnic cleansing as an insurmountable barrier: "The fact that denial has disappeared is even more worrying. It means that my outlook and theirs is unbridgeable. This is a basic problem of morality and ethics now."

Last summer's war with Lebanon, and the public response to it, finally convinced Pappe that his voice will no longer be heard in Israel. "It strengthened my conviction that I have very little to do here anymore," said Pappe.

Israel's loss is our gain!

People and places

At last! A café in London that serves genuine Palestinian food, in cosy surroundings: a taste of nostalgia for connoisseurs, and a foretaste of pleasures in store, for those thinking of visiting Palestine.

The clientele ranges from serious foodies to students sipping a cappuccino as they work on their laptop (the café has wireless access); and local resident David Cameron (pictured) has been known to pop in with his family for a light lunch.

The café is run by Mohammed Zomlot, from Gaza, though the family was originally from Askalan (now Ashdod), and his wife Rula, who does most of the cooking, with help from her mother-in-law Roweida. The menu is carefully designed to include dishes from all parts of historic Palestine. For example, the *mosakhan* (pastry stuffed with chicken and onion) is from the North of the West Bank while the *fatayer* (baked filo pastry with a minced beef and herb filling) is a peasant dish from central Palestine.

On a cold day there is nothing like the *frikae* (roasted wheat broth) or the hearty lentil soup, to start with. Then sample Rula's *mabshoura* (fine layers of potato with eggs, onion and parsley), *shakshoka* (onions, sweet peppers and tomatoes baked with eggs) or the traditional chicken with rice. Round it off with some sticky *basbousa* or Nablus-style *koneifa*, and a glass of mint tea.

If you try nothing else, you must experience the *falafel* as cooked in Jerusalem – light and crisp and simply the best in London. This is the perfect place for vegetarians, though carnivores are certainly catered for.

The name – **Maramia** – is itself redolent of Palestine, as it means 'sage',



Sunday brunch for David Cameron and family

the aromatic herb growing wild on the slopes of Jabal Al-Assur or Mount Scopus. Associated traditionally with the Virgin Mary, it is used in infusions to treat colds and sore throats, as well as featuring in many recipes.

Maramia Café,
48 Golborne Road, London W10.

Tel: 020 3132 3431;
www.maramia.com



Gossip and debate with authentic Palestinian food

PSC is delighted to welcome our new Director, Jenny Najar, who took up her post on 12 March.

Jenny previously worked for the charity Mines Advisory Group, working with the UN, government bodies and NGOs to reduce the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance on communities in Lebanon and Iraq. Prior to this, Jenny volunteered as an English teacher with UNIPAL in Bourj al-Barajneh refugee camp in Beirut.

She has a Masters in Middle Eastern Politics from Durham University and a Masters in Business Administration from the Open University.

Jenny first joined PSC in 1993, and in 2001 was Chair of the London PSC branch.



Jenny Najar

Words are my weapon

Mohammed Omer, 22, born and raised in Rafah refugee camp, has forged an international reputation for outstanding writing and journalism. He recently toured the United States under the auspices of the magazine, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (www.wrmea.com). For his articles in this magazine, he was honoured by New American Media as Best Youth Voice for 2006. He showed his video presentation and photographs at the National Press Club in Washington DC, the Audre Lord Room in San Francisco, Rutgers University in New Brunswick and the Denver Press Club, also appearing in New York, Princeton, Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Diego and Sacramento on his 22-stop tour.

Mohammed began supporting his family from the age of six while his father was inside an Israeli prison. He hustled odd jobs selling beans and popcorn in the street. At 17 years-old he began translating for foreign reporters

“Mohammed’s 17 year-old brother, Hussam, was murdered by an Israeli sniper as he walked to school; days later the family home was crushed by a D-9 bulldozer while his family was inside, severely injuring his mother”

and delegations to Gaza and, a year later, was writing his own material for the international media, publishing dozens of articles worldwide. His photographs are regularly used by the Agence France Press wire service. He makes frequent appearances on BBC News 24 TV, Norwegian national NRK TV and stations in Australia, South Africa, Ireland and New Zealand. His blog, RafahToday.org, which grew out of his e-news letter ‘We Are Getting Killed’, is read worldwide.

In 2003 Mohammed’s 17 year-old brother, Hussam was murdered by an Israeli sniper as he walked to school; days later the family home was crushed by a D-9 bulldozer while his family was inside, severely injuring his mother. Several of Mohammed’s siblings have been disabled or injured by Israeli attacks.

“Words are my weapon against



injustice, hate, starvation and oppression,” Mohammed told WRMEA.

This example of the beautiful writing that won him the Best Youth Voice Award is from, ‘Sharon, Why Did You Destroy My House?’:

“The Israelis called it ‘Operation Rainbow’ — and insisted the name was generated at random by a computer.

To the men, women and children of Rafah who endured the slaughter, however, it was a bitter footnote to a week of horror. In Greek mythology, the rainbow was a bridge between earth and Olympus, between men and gods. In the Old Testament, after sending a flood that destroyed the world, God set a rainbow in the sky as a sign of peace and renewal. But in May of 2004, the shells and bombs in the night sky over Rafah brought only death. ‘Operation Rainbow’ is an appropriate name in only one way: a year later, the images are still vivid, their evidence of Israeli terrorism against a civilian population undimmed...

“The ceaseless din of explosions and gunfire couldn’t drown out the human chorus of despair — children crying for a piece of bread, for a cup of milk, for a drop of water, the laments of parents who had nothing to give them, the wails

of the newly widowed and orphaned, the screams of the dying and dismembered. But sometimes there was only stunned, disbelieving silence, as friends and relatives tried to identify their loved ones from scattered body parts — a leg, an arm, a piece of a torso — that was all the ambulance drivers could gather.

“A year later, the pictures from that time — mere pixels on a computer screen, after all — are still sickening. For the first time, I was writing warnings and apologies for the overwhelming gore of my photos. Nevertheless, the images are easier to bear than the flesh and blood reality of standing next to a hospital gurney full of bits and pieces of what were recently living human beings.”

Diane Langford

Mohammed looks forward to a time when he can make a similar tour of the UK, perhaps with the aid of sponsorship. To view his work, please go to www.rafahtoday.org or to watch his presentation in Washington DC, go to www.wrmea.com.



Half-buried: a Palestinian prisoner in Gaza, by Mohammed Omer

Views from the US and Israel

The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

Ilan Pappé

Oneworld, 2006

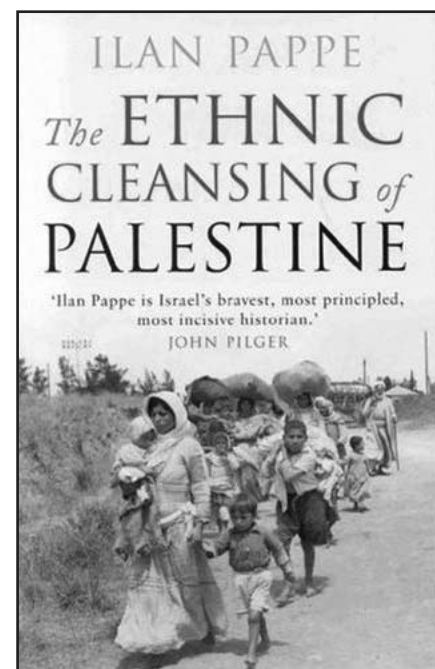
This book tells the story of the dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants of the land that is now the state of Israel. It not only describes and analyses the events of 1948 but also the persistence in Israel of policies of Jewish exclusivity. In its closing chapters the book suggests that the denial of the Nakba, and of the moral and legal claims of Palestinians, is symptomatic of a chronic sickness at the heart of Israeli society. This is the tendency to see all opposition to Israel as an existential threat, that is, both as a threat to the Jewish character of the state and to the lives of its Jewish citizens – thinking which Pappé characterises as the ideology of Fortress Israel.

Pappé shows how the violence in British-ruled Palestine, which followed the adoption by the General Assembly in November 1947 of the UN partition plan, was used by the Zionist leadership as a cover for implementation of their ethnic cleansing blueprint. The Zionist rationale was clear: only if there was a substantial Jewish majority could a Jewish state be established against the wishes of the indigenous non-Jewish population.

Pappé describes the evolution of Zionist planning, culminating in the infamous Plan Dalet, which laid out the geographical parameters of the future state of Israel (78% of Mandate Palestine) and the methods by which its realisation was to be achieved. In rural areas, villagers were to be expelled and their villages destroyed to prevent them returning. Similar operational orders were given for the expulsion of Palestinians from towns and cities, save that their homes were not to be destroyed but taken over by Jewish immigrants. At the beginning of April 1948, the 50,000 troops of the Hagana, with support from Zionist para-military groups, began in earnest the military campaign of ethnic cleansing. Pappé records that between 30 March and 15 May 1948, before a single soldier of the surrounding Arab states' armies had entered Palestine, 200 villages were occupied and their inhabitants

expelled. The mass Palestinian exodus from cities such as Haifa was prompted by the threat of a Jewish attack which was preceded by loudspeakers urging Palestinian women and children to leave before it was too late. The expulsion of Jaffa's entire population of 50,000 followed its capture on 13 May.

The book powerfully evokes, through photographs and contemporary eye-witness accounts, the suffering of those who survived and were driven into exile. It records the destruction of a society and a way of life. But for proponents of Fortress Israel, according to Pappé, what happened in 1948 cannot legitimately be discussed as part of any solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, because to attach moral weight to the plight of Palestinian refugees is to put in question the Jewish character of the state of Israel. Pappé's riposte to this is: "The problem with Israel was never its Jewishness – Judaism has many faces and many of them provide a solid basis for peace and cohabitation; it is its ethnic Zionist character. Zionism does not have the same margins of pluralism that Judaism offers ... [Palestinians] can



never be part of the Zionist state and space."

For Pappé, the only possible solution lies in a pluralistic state which has both physical and legal space for all those with a legitimate claim to live in Palestine – including the 1948 refugees and their descendants.

Robert Robinson

The Other Side of Israel: My

Susan Nathan

Nan A. Talese, 2005

On the surface, Susan Nathan's book is a gripping account of her life in Tamra – a town of 25,000 Israeli Arabs situated in the Galilee between Haifa and Nazareth. On a deeper level, Nathan transforms her daily experience into a polemical discourse, expressing her anguish and disillusion with the realities of the Arab-Israeli divide.

Nathan made 'Aliya' (Hebrew for 'ascending to Israel') in 1999, taking up the Law of Return which grants automatic Israeli citizenship to Jews from all over the world. Having been "raised on stirring stories of the great and glorious Jewish state", she was shocked to find that 20% of the population were Israeli Arabs, remnants

of the Palestinian inhabitants driven out in the 1948 "War of Independence". Through her work in Mahapach – a student organisation caring for disadvantaged communities in Israel – she came into contact with Palestinian families in the Galilee. Having seen their plight she decided to move to "the other side of Israel", where "the roads are not signposted ... a place you rarely read about in your newspapers or hear about from your television set. It is all but invisible to most Israelis". She comments: "It is the height of irony, given our history, that the Jewish State has so little concern about the ghetto living it has forced on its Arab citizens".

The living conditions in these ghettos are chronicled in detail, starting with the military administration established by Israel

Palestine: peace not apartheid

Jimmy Carter

Simon and Schuster, 2006

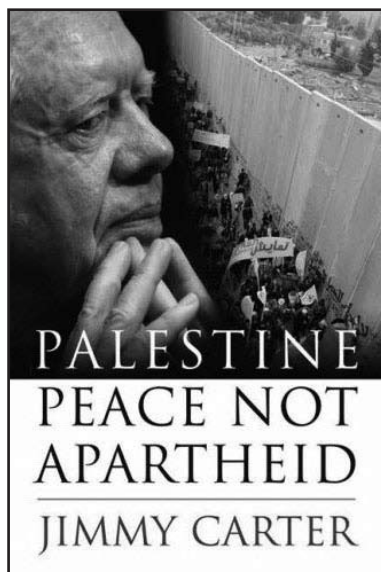
Jimmy Carter's bestselling book is continuing to create a stir in the US, due to a torrent of attacks by pro-Israeli groups and individuals. It is provoking far-reaching discussion on how US policy towards Israel has not only caused intense suffering to the Palestinian people, but also destabilised the entire region.

The attacks started even before the book was published, with Nancy Pelosi distancing the Democrats from Carter's views, and articles in mainstream broadsheets calling it 'foolish and unfair', 'dangerous' and 'anti-semitic'. Attacks on Carter have focused on his linkage of the words 'apartheid' and 'Israel'. In this, he is not isolated, but joins Desmond Tutu, prominent human rights experts such as John Dugard, and Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, which has described elements of Israeli policy as bearing "striking similarities to the racist Apartheid regime".

The book also exposes the myth, particularly strong in the US, that the lack of progress to peace can be blamed on the Palestinians, by explaining how the various agreements have benefited the Israelis and not the Palestinians, and how Israel has consistently failed

to honour its part of the agreements. He also criticises the many attempts by both the US and Israel to destroy Palestinian democracy, pointing out that just before the results of the January 2006 parliamentary elections, Israel announced that for Hamas to take even a minority of seats would be enough reason to "preclude any initiation of substantive peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians (already absent for the past five years) and could terminate humanitarian aid and other funds that had been channelled through the Palestinian government".

His description of what Israel has been doing in the Occupied Territories is damning: "Israeli leaders have embarked on a series of unilateral decisions, bypassing both Washington and the Palestinians. Their presumption is that an encircling barrier will finally resolve the Palestinian problem. Utilizing their



political and military dominance, they are imposing a system of partial withdrawal, encapsulation, and apartheid on the Muslim and Christian citizens of the occupied territories... The Palestinians will have a future impossible for them or any responsible portion of the international community to accept".

During his presidency, Jimmy Carter was seen as a friend of Israel through his negotiation of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, which comprehensively broke Arab unity against Israel. As he admits in his book, "with the bilateral treaty, Israel removed Egypt's considerable strength from the military equation of the Middle East and thus permitted itself renewed freedom to pursue the goals of a fervent and dedicated minority of its citizens to confiscate, settle, and fortify the occupied territories".

But his previous role in strengthening Israel in the region makes the plea that ends his book even more powerful: "The United States is squandering international prestige and goodwill and intensifying global anti-American terrorism by unofficially condoning or abetting the Israeli confiscation and colonisation of Palestinian territories. It will be a tragedy – for the Israelis, the Palestinians, and the world – if peace is rejected and a system of oppression, apartheid, and sustained violence is to prevail."

Sarah Colborne

journey across the Jewish/Arab divide

(1948-1966), in order to restrict the movement of Israeli Arabs. She then describes the "personal status laws" which discriminate against non-Jews, rendering inter-faith marriages and ethnic integration virtually impossible.

She also describes the effects of the "Present Absentee" status, whereby Palestinians who were absent for a brief period from their property during the 1948 war were denied the right to their homes, land and bank accounts. (Nowadays about 250,000 Israeli Arabs still live in Israel under this status). Some of them live in "unrecognised" villages, in constant fear of demolition orders and denied public utilities and services such as water, electricity, sewerage, telephone lines, schooling, and medical services.

Perhaps the most overt

discrimination against Israeli Arabs is the recent (2002) law which denies citizenship status to Palestinians from the Occupied Territories who marry Israeli Muslims. Above all, Nathan's book details the blatant discrimination against Israeli Arabs in distribution of resources, access to education, jobs, the media, housing, land and property ownership.

Nathan also discusses the impact of the occupation on Israeli society. In a section entitled *A Traumatic Society* she describes, through her conversation with young Israeli soldiers, the mental shock they face in serving as a force of occupation – a traumatic experience which has led many to take drugs and to be pushed "over the edge". A significant number of young soldiers who were raised on

the doctrine of "purity of arms" have started to question the morality behind the occupation and in 1982, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon, the Refusenik movement was established. Today the movement has more than 1,600 members.

Nathan concludes that the Israelis have to "face tough moral questions raised by the way Israel was founded in 1948... They have to be reconciled to their past and be prepared to apologise for it". Only then can they begin to aspire to be a democracy which is committed to "uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex" (Israel's Declaration of Independence, May 1948).

Ruth Tenne

Challenging invisibility

Dreams of a nation: on Palestinian cinema

Ed. Hamid Dabashi, Preface by Edward Said.

Verso 2006; £14.99

Despite the success of Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* and Hany Abu Assad's *Paradise Now*, to many, the notion of a Palestinian cinema comes as a surprise. But these films did not appear from nowhere; as Dabashi points out in his introduction, the beginnings of Palestinian cinema pre-date the dispossession of their historical homeland. Perhaps the real question, he says, is: "How exactly is it that a stateless nation generates a national cinema – and once it does, what kind of national cinema is it?" Hamid Naficy adds to this: "Palestinian cinema is one of the rare cinemas in the world that is structurally exilic, as it is made either in the condition of internal exile in an occupied Palestine or under the erasure and tensions of displacement and external exile in other countries." Omar al-Qattan, in his thought-provoking article, raises a further question: "What, though, is a Palestinian?"

Edward Said's preface focuses on what he sees as the defining contradictions facing Palestinian filmmaking: firstly, the necessity of making visible what the Zionists/Israel have unceasingly striven to make invisible – the Palestinian people, their history and land – and secondly, to counter the stereotype of stone-throwing youths and suicide bombers, these being accretions to the long-standing image in the West of the evil Arab. The issue, Said writes, is that not only a people but its *culture* (my italics) has to be invisible. Joseph Massad's piece on Palestinian cinema in the liberation struggle refers to Amilcar Cabril's contention that "...as long as part of that people can have a cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation." The Israelis clearly recognise this – their bombing of city and cultural institutions is the reverse side of the coin of trying to ensure that no Palestinian cultural event or artefacts reach international audiences – but as



Director Elia Suleiman in *Divine Intervention*

Massad shows, over many decades Palestinian filmmakers have defied the onslaught.

There are two chapters dedicated to Michel Khleifi, one written by himself, the other by Bashir Abu-Manneh. Khleifi has a rightful place in world cinema history and his importance as a filmmaker and pioneer is unchallengeable. After making documentaries, his 1987 feature film, *Wedding in Galilee*, proved to be not only a masterpiece of political filmmaking but the first Palestinian film



From Michel Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee*

to be screened in Cannes and become an international landmark. Central to his politics is the recognition that "...our weakness does not stem from Israel's strength but rather derives from Arab society's archaic structures: tribalism, patriarchy, religion and community life, where there is no recognition of the person as an individual nor of men's, children's and, above all, women's rights." This coincides with Ella Shohat's chapter on gender, nation and diaspora, in which she points out that "...the subject of the Third World nationalist revolution has been covertly posited as masculine and heterosexual." She contends that "...the image of the bride who deflowers herself in *Wedding in Galilee* allegorises the failure of an impotent patriarchy to lead towards national liberation." Further chapters include Hamid Dabashi writing on Elia Suleiman, Anne-Marie Jacir on curating a Palestinian film festival in New York and Nizar Hassan's highly ironic take on trying to have his film classified as Palestinian in an Input conference.

The only national cinema lacking a state and fixed borders, it is perhaps inevitable that Palestinian cinema raises more questions than answers. But surely it contributes not only to challenging the endless images that come out of Palestine with, as al-Qattan points out, "...rarely a corresponding understanding of what lay behind [them]...", but also to a global recognition of Palestine, in all its complexities and specificities: that is, to making the invisible visible.

Sheila Whitaker

Every home should have one

... and every school
... and every MP



Palestine Solidarity Campaign



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