

Al-Aqsa

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WE WELCOME

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Contents

VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2 SPRING 2008

RABI AL-AWWAL 1429

Editorial	3
Palestinian-Christian/Muslim Relations: Myths, Propaganda and Realities BEN WHITE	5
Palestinian Women and the Violence of Israel's Occupation SONJA KARKAR	15
Between Boycott and Apartheid HAMMAM FARAH	23
Engaging Hamas and Hezbollah ALI ABUNIMAH	25
Letter to the Editor	29
BOOK REVIEWS	31
Married to Another Man. Israel's Dilemma in Palestine by Ghada Karmi REVIEWED BY MICHEL AUSTIN	
Inside Hamas, The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies by Zaki Chehab REVIEWED BY DR. ANTHONY McROY	
Reinventing Jerusalem, Israel's Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter after 1967 by Simone Ricca REVIEWED BY DR. CLAUDIA PRESTEL	
Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah by Nicholad Noe REVIEWED BY DR. JEANINE PFAHLERT	

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But how many (countless) Generations before them have we destroyed? Can you find a single one of them (now) or hear (so much as a) whisper from them?
 May Allah's blessings be upon all His Prophets from Adam to His final Messenger Muhammad (saw).

Gaza has become a slaughterhouse. The Annapolis Meeting which took place on 27 November 2007 was hailed by the US and its allies as the start of a peace process that would, within a year, bring about a solution to the Israel/Palestine conflict. At long last, the Palestinians would achieve self-determination. At long last, the brutal occupation would come to an end and the Palestinians would be free to begin recovering their land.

As a gesture of goodwill, Israel released approximately 450 Palestinian prisoners in an apparent demonstration to the international community of its determination to bring about peace. However, as Annapolis was underway, and the political leaders posed for their photo opportunity, at least 12 Palestinians were killed by Israeli troops. In the 3 short months following Annapolis, Israel has arrested approximately 1,500 more Palestinians, more than 3 times the number released in its 'gesture of goodwill'. The incursions have continued in both Gaza and the West Bank. Children have continued to be targeted in both places, and the Palestinians face even harsher brutality.

The Gazans have suffered untold misery. Israel's economic blockade has continued for over 2 years. Although this severely weakened Gaza, Israel continued to tighten the noose in order to choke out all life. In September, after Gaza was labelled a 'hostile entity', Israel closed off the prison gates caging in 1.5 million people. The supplies started to be reduced; gas, diesel, medicine, food, raw materials, essential supplies, all being withheld in an inhumane blockade. Gazans have died from lack of medicines, lack of fuel to run ambulances and hospital generators, and lack of access to adequate medical care. Gazans have died due to military raids, missiles, live fire, and rubber coated bullets. Gazans continue to suffer untold psychological trauma, the children frozen by fear, the adults utterly helpless and deeply anxious, and an

entire population beleaguered with no end in site, and it appears, no international assistance on the horizon.

Israel blames Hamas and the continuing rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip for the lack of peace and has declared that a 'holocaust' will take place in order to stop those rockets. These rockets killed one single Israeli between May 2007 and 29 February 2008. In the same time period, hundreds of Palestinians were killed by Israel. It is undoubtedly the case that the rocket attacks are a response to Israeli aggression, and they represent the Gazans' last stand. Homemade crude devices against the country with the 4th largest army in the world, and ever ready to unleash its superior and crushing military force.

The Annapolis meeting was sold to the world as the start of a peace process that would, within a year, bring about peace. Many were sceptical and rightly so. Since Annapolis, Israel has continued in its incursions and disproportionate use of violence against a largely civilian population, and killed hundreds of Palestinians. Over 70 were killed in a single day on 1 March 2008. Of these, a group of 6 boys playing football were targeted with a missile. 4 died instantly, and the 2 who barely survived, did so with horrific injuries to their legs and arms, and witnessed the aftermath of the bombing, describing decapitated heads and amputated limbs. For these children, there will be no recovery as they are rushed to darkened hospitals with little fuel to run generators.

Palestinians have learnt a hard lesson each time they have entered peace negotiations – Israel is prepared to give nothing and will demand more and more. There will be no cease fire, as every attempt to establish one has been rejected or sabotaged by Israel. The Palestinians are being told, in no uncertain terms, that they must give up resistance, give up their land, give up their rights, and live as barely tolerated vermin in what is left of their homeland, or else leave altogether. Since Israel's birth on 14 April 1948, the Palestinians have suffered an inhumane tragedy. 60 years ago, they fled their homes to save their lives. Now, the descendants of these refugees continue to live in misery, and the darkness that began in 1948, has become a pitch black tunnel with no end in sight.



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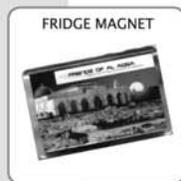
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Palestinian-Christian/Muslim Relations: Myths, Propaganda and Realities

Ben White*

For the last sixty years, the violence in Palestine/Israel has often been presented as a bloody grudge match between Jews and Muslims. This narrative, though appealing in its simplicity, not only disguises the territorial and colonial core of the conflict but also erases the historic presence of the Christian Palestinians. In recent years though the Christian Palestinians have been receiving more publicity, sadly often only because of the community's worryingly high levels of emigration. Approaching the subject of Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine has been complicated by the way in which various parties have sought to manipulate and distort sectarian relations for their own propaganda purposes. On the one hand, Israel and its Western advocates have suggested that Palestinian Christians are the subject of the same 'jihad' being waged against Israel and the 'West' by 'Islamic terrorists'. Some Palestinians and their advocates, meanwhile, have glossed over genuine inter-communal tensions for the sake of national unity.

What this article will attempt to do is to examine some, if not all, of the complexities of contemporary Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine; an interplay of factors that includes Israeli colonisation, regional trends and international relations, religion, cultural traditions, all the way down to the level of family friendship or dispute. Firstly, I will look at how Christian and Muslim Palestinians have traditionally lived and worked alongside each other, with a focus on their united front against the Zionist movement. Noting the shift in the dynamics more recently, secondly, I will examine the Israeli policies of divide and conquer that have directly and indirectly served to fragment Palestinian society and aggravate inter-communal tension. Thirdly, I will look at two additional factors affecting Palestinian sectarian relations, namely the 'war on terror' and the regional rise in prominence of

Islamist political groups. Finally, taking all of this into account, I will also examine whether there are more widely-applicable observations relevant to sectarian relations in Britain.

Christian-Muslim Relations prior to 1948

Many older Palestinians in the West Bank today will tell you that in 'their day', it was never a question of 'Christian' or 'Muslim'; you were just Palestinian. Certainly Christian and Muslim Palestinians have a long history of cooperation, mutual appreciation, and societal unity¹. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that there were no differences between the two communities historically. In the twilight of the Ottoman Empire, many Christian Palestinians had already started to emigrate, tired at the lack of opportunity and development in Palestine. Moreover, owing to the impact of missionary schools and colleges, as well as ties to Western Churches, the Christian Palestinians were disproportionately represented in the middle class and elite. They thus felt the stagnation under the Ottomans more keenly, and were quicker to seek opportunities abroad². On the eve of Israel's declaration of independence in 1948, however, the Christians were very much part of Palestinian society, representing around 10-12% of the overall Arab population. Concentrated in areas such as the Galilee, Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem, there were also several smaller mixed villages where Christians and Muslims lived alongside each other. Once the initially small scale Zionist settlement of Palestine had reached a more threatening and politically significant scale, Christian Palestinians became victims of the same social and personal catastrophe that befell so many thousands of their Muslim compatriots.

it was never a question of 'Christian' or 'Muslim'; you were just Palestinian

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In the First Intifada (1987-93), Christian Palestinians were active participants in their people's uprising against Israeli occupation

Palestinian society traditionally and historically has been known, and continues to be known, as an open, tolerant and accommodating society...

The Shared Experiences

From the Arab Revolt in 1936, to the flourishing of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the mid-1960s, Christian Palestinians played a significant role in the resistance to Israel. George Habash, originally from Lydda, founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), while the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was also headed up by a Christian, Nayef Hawatmeh. Other prominent Palestinian Christians include the Fatah-affiliated scholar and politician Hanan Ashrawi, as well as the late Edward Said. In the First Intifada (1987-93), Christian Palestinians were active participants in their people's uprising against Israeli occupation. The majority Christian town of Beit Sahour, a town adjacent to Bethlehem and just south of Jerusalem, became famous for its organised civil resistance to the occupation, and particularly the refusal to pay taxes.

While the shared experience of colonisation and resistance has made a major contribution to a tradition of "excellent sectarian relations in Palestine", Bethlehem University sociologist Dr. Bernard Sabella has identified a further five factors³. Firstly, Christian institutions, often with Western support, have benefited the education and health needs of the population regardless of religion. Secondly, according to Sabella, there has been the recognition by Islam of the importance of Christianity's Holy Places, best embodied in the declaration of protection issued by Caliph Omar in 638 when he took Jerusalem. Thirdly, the urban nature of the Christian population, and its presence in mixed districts or villages, has encouraged cooperation and "communal sharing". Fourthly, the Christian Palestinians have never considered their national identity to conflict with their religious traditions and finally, the Ottoman Millet system of delegating autonomy to ethnic and religious minorities gave the Christians freedom to run their own internal affairs.

Coping with Occupation - Tensions and Misunderstandings

In recent times, however, there has been a noticeably more troubled atmosphere. The anecdotal evidence, when speaking to Christian Palestinians informally, is that there are inter-communal tensions. Before looking at the extent of the problem, and its causes, it is important to realise the precarious state that the Christian population in Palestine as a whole currently finds itself in. The level of emigration has reached such proportions that many commentators and church figures can join experts like Don Wagner

in warning that the Christian Palestinians are "a community whose presence may not survive the next 25-30 years"⁴. Of course, many Palestinians, Muslim or Christian, have emigrated or plan to emigrate due to the intolerable pressures of living under Israeli occupation. Unemployment, restrictions on movement, military operations – there is no shortage of push factors for young Palestinians who despair of a future for themselves in their own land.

Christians, however, have a higher level of emigration. Disproportionately represented in the middle and upper-middle class, Christian Palestinians can quickly grow tired of the limitations imposed by the occupation, and seek better socio-economic opportunities abroad. They also tend to have already established contacts, either through connections with the Western church, or because of the long-established expatriate communities in places like South America. In a survey conducted by Sabeel in the summer of 2006, Christian Palestinians in the West Bank were asked about the reasons for emigration, and the challenges confronting Christians in the Holy Land⁵. Three quarters of those surveyed cited political conditions and employment as the reason for emigration, while the main challenges cited were job and housing issues plus the rate of emigration (81% collectively). Worryingly though, 8% of West Bank Christians cited 'religious fanaticism' as a push factor, while 7% marked it down as a challenge to the community. While 83% also believed that ongoing dialogue between Islam and Christianity was important, the same percentage believed that current relations are characterised by a lack of understanding and frankness needed for fruitful dialogue. Dr. Sabella commented on this trend in his article for the Sabeel survey:

The fact that Religious Fanaticism has received 8% should be cause for concern and for bringing attention to possible remedial action that should be taken in order to minimize the negative effects of this issue. Palestinian society traditionally and historically has been known, and continues to be known, as an open, tolerant and accommodating society... It is in this context and with respect to the rich heritage of Muslim-Christian relations that the heightened religiosity of the public sphere becomes a point for further examination and discussion. An

exclusive religious parameter or preference that can interfere with the history and heritage of a pluralistic, tolerant and open Palestinian society calls for serious reflection not simply by Christian Palestinians but by all Palestinians. Our society is likely to lose if sectarianism becomes a dominant feature replacing the all accommodating national and social agenda so characteristic of Palestine and its culture of openness, frankness and mutual trust and accommodation.⁶

The starting point for understanding why sectarian relations in Palestine have come under strain is Israel's colonisation process. From the Nakba of 1948 to the post-1967 military occupation that now spans five decades, Israeli policies of divide and rule have complimented the general devastation and fragmentation of Palestinian society that some have called 'sociocide'⁷. No analysis of Palestinian society can fail to take into account the impact of the expulsions and dispossession that heralded the creation of a 'Jewish democracy' in Palestine. Around 700-800,000 Palestinians were expelled or fled the fighting, and were forbidden from returning home. Their villages and homes were either demolished to make way for brand new Jewish settlements, or directly repopulated with new Jewish arrivals:

The 1948 expulsion and flight of Palestinians were, by proportion of the population affected, among the largest forced migrations in modern Middle Eastern history. It affected approximately 53 percent of the Arab population of Palestine, 82 percent of the Arabs who resided in the portion of Palestine that became Israel.⁸

Amongst the refugees were around 90,000 Christians, roughly two thirds of whom were externally displaced and a third of whom became internally displaced, the so-called 'present absentees'⁹. Wagner describes how the Nakba hit Jerusalem's Christians particularly hard:

Historian Sami Hadawi estimated that over 50 percent of Jerusalem's Christians were expelled from their West Jerusalem homes, the largest single numerical decline of Christians in Palestine in history. Hadawi's study concluded that in Jerusalem a higher proportion of Palestinian Christians became refugees after 1949, a ratio of 37 percent of

Christians to 17 percent of the Muslims. The higher ratio of Christians was due in part to the fact that the majority lived in the wealthier western Jerusalem districts seized by Israel during 1948-49. Further, approximately 34 percent of the lands seized by Israel were owned by Palestinian Christian churches, and they were simply taken by force with no compensation given to the previous owners.¹⁰

Divide and Rule: The Occupation Policy

During the ethnic cleansing of what would become Israel, the Jewish militias carrying out the military operations and expulsions often varied their actions from village to village, depending on the sectarian make-up. The village of Mghar, for example, which to this day has a mixed population of Druze, Christians and Muslims, was targeted by Jewish military forces that specifically sought to drive out only the Muslims. In the mixed village of Mujaydil, only the Christians were offered the chance to return home, but they "refused to do so without their Muslim neighbours"¹¹. As Israeli historian Ilan Pappé points out:

While Israel's divide-and-rule policy proved effective in the case of the Druze, to whom it promised not only immunity but also arms as rewards for their collaboration, the Christian communities were less 'cooperative' ... In return for a vow of allegiance to the Jewish state, [the Christians] were allowed to return to their villages for a short time. To their credit, most of the Christians refused to participate willingly in such a selection process. As a result, the army soon meted out the same treatment to Christian as to Muslim villages where they did not have a Druze population.¹²

Sowing inter-communal division has always been a tactic favoured by the colonising or occupying power, and Israel has been no exception. Under the post-1967 occupation, for example, Israel has employed a discriminatory system with regards to the granting of travel or work permits, which again serves to foment suspicion and division within Palestinian society¹³. In December 2005, Father Firas, a priest in the mixed Christian-Muslim village of Aboud in the West Bank wrote in the Toronto Globe and Mail how at times:

The starting point for understanding why sectarian relations in Palestine have come under strain is Israel's colonisation process

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This claim, that Christian Palestinians are targets in the 'jihad' of Palestinian 'Islamic fundamentalists', has been a cornerstone of anti-Palestinian Authority Israeli propaganda ever since the Oslo Accords

The Israelis give special treatment to the Christians in our village ... to try to separate us, but, in reality, we Muslims and Christians are brothers.' Firas went on to quote the church organist, who noted that 'Some foreigners believe that Islam is the greatest danger for Palestinian Christians rather than Israel's occupation. This is Israeli propaganda. Israel wants to tell the world that it protects us from the Muslims, but it is not true.'¹⁴

This claim, that Christian Palestinians are targets in the 'jihad' of Palestinian 'Islamic fundamentalists', has been a cornerstone of anti-Palestinian Authority Israeli propaganda ever since the Oslo Accords. This alleged persecution, it is said, is the real reason behind the high level of Christian emigration from the Occupied Territories¹⁵. This approach became even more popular during the Second Intifada, in what became a joint effort by the Israeli government, US and Israeli far-right think tanks, and the major US Christian Zionist organisations. The first time it became a headline issue was the second half of 1997, when Israeli media outlets began reporting a 'leaked' Israeli government report that detailed the persecution suffered by Christian Palestinians at the hands of their Muslim neighbours – often it was claimed with official complicity by the PA.

These claims were thoroughly investigated by the likes of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMG), the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW), as well as by a fourteen member strong team of prominent Western Christians who came under the aegis of Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding (EMEU) and Open Doors International. In their findings, PHRMG concluded that the "Christians of Palestine are not being persecuted at all" and that "many of the stories" are "either out and out falsifications or fantastic exaggerations"¹⁶.

While "the evangelical community has faced disproportionate harassment", this harassment is not "organized from above or represents a PA policy". In fact, "it appears to us to be the result of community hostility to conversions away from Islam and, possibly, the Zionism of some evangelicals".

EMEU concurred, cautioning that "there is an important difference between isolated incidents and coordinated, intentional persecution, especially by governments"¹⁷. The group certainly heard "accounts of tensions common in any culture with majority and minority populations"

but these "stories were few and of little consequence compared to the many practical examples of Muslim-Christian cooperation they witnessed". Delegate Don Wagner later wrote how the origins of the 'persecution' allegations had been a collaborative effort between the Zionist group, the International Christian Embassy-Jerusalem, and the office of Israeli Chief Spokesman for the Prime Minister, David Bar-Ilan, designed as part of the Israeli government's propaganda campaign against the PA¹⁸. This was a tactic returned to during the Second Intifada, when there were fresh attempts at exaggerating and aggravating communal differences in Palestinian society. This time, one particular focus was the alleged policy of Muslim Palestinian gunmen of deliberately drawing Israeli retaliatory fire onto Christian homes in Beit Jala by using these areas as cover for shooting at the nearby settlement of Gilo¹⁹. Writing in December 2000, however, a member of the Christian Peacemaker Teams based in Palestine commented on the controversy:

...the situation in the all-Muslim neighbourhoods being shelled in Hebron is similar to that of the predominantly Christian neighbourhoods in Beit Jala being shelled. In both cases, gunmen who do not live in these neighbourhoods fire into Israeli settlements and military camps, thus drawing Israeli fire into the neighbourhoods. Palestinians in Hebron resent these gunmen every bit as much as the Palestinians in Beit Jala. The Muslims in Hebron never talk about "Christians" in Beit Jala getting shelled by the Israeli military. They view them as fellow Palestinians suffering the same collective punishment.²⁰

Israel's territorial fragmentation of Palestine has always threatened to affect Palestinian society on a wider level and indeed, there are worrying signs that the "sociocide" being practised by Israel has gradually pressurized Palestinian society to breaking point. One such indication is the increase in so-called 'honour killings' in recent years, a phenomenon that has sometimes been presented as part of a Muslim-Christian conflict within Palestine. Even a CNN report however, dating back to an incident in 1995, pointed out that "the roots of honour killing are ancient and pre-Islamic"²¹. In 2005 there

was a string of cases that attracted the attention of the international media. One such story in *The Guardian* contextualised the rise in ‘honour killings’ in the Occupied Territories:

Although honour killings have a long history in Palestinian society, women’s rights groups say the rise in these murders cannot be separated from the resurgent violence of the past four years of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ‘Things are breaking down because of the changing relationship between men and women. Increased numbers of women are the main source of income while her husband sits around. That is the kiss of death for that family,’ said Mrs Abu Dayyeh Shamas. ‘Men feel they have lost their dignity and that they can somehow restore it by upholding the family’s honour. We’ve noticed recent cases are much more violent in nature; attempts to kill, rape, incest. There is an incredible amount of incest.’²²

The Internal Struggle Over Limited Resources

A further consequence of Israel’s colonisation of Palestinian territory is the scarcity of vital resources such as land and water. Possession of and access to land is now the focus of severe competition amongst Palestinians, and unscrupulous individuals in league with corrupt local officials can sometimes target the most vulnerable in a given context. Given that Christian Palestinians nationally are a small minority (around 2%) this can mean that they are more vulnerable to localised cases of exploitation and corrupt transactions, though this is very different to making a case for a specifically anti-Christian ‘Islamic land mafia’²³.

Finally, Palestinian society has also suffered internal tension as a result of the large-scale population movements of the last 60 years. Local demographics have been completely altered, as refugee camps sprang up to accommodate the dispossessed while other Palestinians moved to avoid continued fighting. Some analysts, when seeking to attribute the fall in the Christian Palestinian population to a campaign of ‘Islamic terror’, forget that one of the main reasons for the population shifts in cities like Bethlehem, for example, has been the establishment of Muslim-majority refugee camps, as well as an influx of job-seeking rural-urban migrants. All these population movements stem from Israeli policy, be it direct ethnic cleansing, or indirect ‘transfer’ as a result of an artificially created poverty.

Isolated Tensions: Root Causes and Effects

To be able to take a clear-headed look at Israeli policies of divide and conquer, as well as how Zionist colonisation has fragmented and strained pre-existing social bonds, is not to say that some of the reported incidents of Christian-Muslim tension and conflict are fabricated. Much of Palestinian society, particularly in rural regions, is deeply conservative with tribal affiliation and honour playing an important role²⁴. There are also, as Palestinian Anglican clergyman Naim Ateek makes clear, traditional social taboos that when flouted, can lead to an outbreak of tension:

We do not deny that some inter communal problems exist and many community leaders, both Muslim and Christian, are usually quick to redress them... This does not mean, however, that we can easily gloss over some present areas of concern, such as the problems arising from mixed marriages between Christians and Muslims. At a recent meeting in Ramallah, I was privileged to take part in a panel with two prominent Muslim sheikhs and an Eastern Orthodox archimandrite. The presentations were given with candor and issues of concern were shared and discussed. Admittedly, much more needs to be done in order to address the various needs. But none of these problems come close to being considered persecution.²⁵

Palestinian society, therefore, suffers from social cohesion challenges like many other countries. What is portrayed by those with a political agenda as jihadist anti-Christian persecution is a mixture of family disputes, patriarchal-tribal tradition, and criminality, all exacerbated by the fragmentation and “sociocide” of Palestine that has been central to Israeli policies from the state’s creation to the present day. On the level of popular perception, however, there is a further dynamic to take into account, one which broadens the perspective to take into account regional and international trends of recent times and how they impact sectarian relations in Palestine.

The ‘war on terror’ that was launched by the US and its allies after the attacks of September 11th 2001 has had a profound impact on the entire Middle East, albeit with some countries affected far more seriously

A further consequence of Israel’s colonisation of Palestinian territory is the scarcity of vital resources such as land and water

the 'war on terror' has also influenced Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine, particularly the combined effect of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq

than others. In so far as the US' 'war on terror' related to the conflict in Palestine/Israel, it has been widely acknowledged that the political climate in Washington post-9/11 made it easier for Israel to elicit sympathy as a nation also battling violent, existential threats. Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon once likened Yasser Arafat to "our bin Laden". But the 'war on terror' has also influenced Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine, particularly the combined effect of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as well as a US President who is a famously public 'evangelical Christian'.

Although there have been repeated public relations efforts by top level officials within the US – and UK – governments to distance the 'war on terror' from the rhetoric of a 'war against Islam', or a 'crusade', Arabs in the Middle East see a Christian 'commander-in-chief' initiating an invasion and occupation of Muslim countries with thousands of soldiers – many of whom pray before battle and display Christian paraphernalia or Scripture when fighting²⁶. Moreover, the bedrock of political support for President Bush's foreign policy has come from the well-organised and deep-pocketed Christian Right – often the same pastors, churches and lobby groups that also demand unconditional US support for Israel²⁷. As even the Iraq war's apologists admit, the occupation has set in motion a chain reaction placing the Middle East's Christian minority in grave danger²⁸. Perceived as the co-religionists of the Western aggressors, and given the (short term) unassailability of US military dominance, indigenous Christians represent a tempting easy target for a minority of armed groups²⁹.

no religious-driven or sectarian friction or riots in Palestine during the lifetime of Hamas that could be linked directly to the movement

A second regional trend, that started some time prior to the 'war on terror' but has been accentuated since then, has been the Islamisation of anti-colonial resistance movements. Islamist rhetoric has replaced the slogans of pan-Arabism, secular nationalism and the broad Left. While this phenomenon can hardly be given justice in such a short space, it is sufficient for the purposes of this article to note that this trend has not bypassed Palestine. Since its inception in 1987, Hamas (which emerged from a Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood) has gone from strength to strength as a respected grassroots social provider, national liberation movement, and finally, as a political party. Hamas is not alone either; Islamic Jihad and certain factions within Fatah consciously embrace a religiously-framed approach to resisting Israel³⁰. The increased religiosity of the Second Intifada in comparison with the First left a number of Christians, as

well as more secular-minded Muslims, uncomfortable. Despite the best efforts of the Islamist leadership, some Christians in particular can not help but feel excluded at best, and intimidated at worst:

There are some views and research which argue that the rise of Hamas in Palestine has put extra pressure on the Palestinian Christians, causing an increase in the rate of their migration abroad. But in general, there have been no religious-driven or sectarian friction or riots in Palestine during the lifetime of Hamas that could be linked directly to the movement.³¹

Since coming to power, Hamas has been very careful not to alienate the Christian Palestinian community. In the Palestinian Legislative Council elections of January 2006, Hamas supported various Christian candidates, the group picked up Christian votes, and a Christian was appointed to the cabinet. When a handful of Christian Palestinian churches were targeted following international incidents such as the Danish cartoon controversy or Pope Benedict's speech about Islam, Hamas politicians have been quick to denounce the attacks and organise protection for churches under its jurisdiction³².

Comparative Analysis of Sectarian Relations in Britain

All of this may sound very far from sectarian relations in the UK, even taking into account the heightened tensions and polarised positions that have become increasingly prevalent since 9/11 and the London tube bombings in July 2005. Despite the obvious differences, however, there are some comparisons that can be made between Palestinian communal relations and those in Britain. Firstly, it is vital to remember just how many complex factors contribute to sectarian relations in any given society. In Britain, just as in Palestine, there is no monolithic 'Muslim community' but rather a web of interconnecting, overlapping and often contradictory affiliations to family, culture, sect, nationality, socio-economic status and political leanings. Secondly, sectarian relations in Britain are heavily influenced by the 'war on terror', the government's foreign policy, and events in the Middle East. Despite the best efforts by some to prove otherwise, British Muslims who decide to use violence against their own

state and fellow citizens have been principally influenced by the UK's role in foreign policy decisions such as the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq³³.

Finally, relationships between Muslims and the rest of British society (Christian or otherwise) are hardly served – as is the case in Palestine – by either politicised demonization that accentuates division, or by a naïve evasion of genuine problems and tensions that crop up in various localised or national contexts. A way forward for Christian-Muslim relations in Palestine also has something to offer for sectarian relations in Britain too. Christians and Muslims must be seeking to work together at every level, whether it is barrier-dismantling and understanding on an individual level or co-operation at the level of community and national leadership. Dialogue is essential, real, honest dialogue that builds from commonalities and trust to the place of tackling differences and conflicts. There can be inter-sectarian unity in confronting the policies of division, whatever their source, as well as pooled resources when it comes to resisting colonialism and injustice. We are living in a time where sectarian relations are under severe strain, whether in Palestine or Britain, and it will require much courage, honesty and wisdom to avoid the ‘clash of civilisations’ that many seek to both predict and create.

Notes

- In the vast majority of cases, this continues to the present day: “In the villages of Beit Arik near Ram Allah, this harmony takes on a cordial partnership. According to Hanna Issa, when the Muslim community at the village sought to build a larger mosque to accommodate the growing number of worshippers, Christians at the village insisted on paying our share of the costs. Eventually, the two communities shared equally the costs of the new mosque, a testimony and example of inter-religious harmony.” Khalid Amayreh, ‘Sharing a vision: Palestinian Christians’, 2/12/03 <http://www.jerusalemmites.org/jerusalem/christianity/50.htm>
- For excellent historical overview, background and context, see the following: Bernard Sabella, ‘Palestinian Christians: Challenges and Hopes’, <http://www.al-bushra.org/holyland/sabella.htm>; Don Wagner, ‘Palestinian Christians: An Historic Community at Risk?’ <http://www.palestinecenter.org/cpap/pubs/20020312ib.html>; ‘The Sabeel survey on Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and Israel, Summer 2006, Sabeel, http://www.sabeel.org/pdfs/the%20sabeel%20survey_.pdf
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- Bernard Sabella, ‘Palestinian Christians: Historical Demographic Developments, Current Politics and Attitudes Towards Church, Society and Human Rights’, Sabeel survey 2006, pp.39-83 (66-67)
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- Wagner, ‘Palestinian Christians’
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- Pappé, p.182
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- <http://www.leicester-holyland.org.uk/Aboudies%20interviewed%202005.htm> For more on the mixed village of Aboud, see my piece, ‘Annexation Wall Ensures Bleak Future for Aboud’s Christian and Muslim Residents’, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, July 2006, http://www.wrmea.com/archives/July_2006/0607020.html
- One typical example is the following, published by the far-right Zionist think tank, the Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs (JCPA): David Raab, ‘The Beleaguered Christians of the Palestinian-Controlled Areas’, Jerusalem Letter / Viewpoints, No. 490, 1-15 January 2003, <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp490.htm>
- http://www.phrmg.org/PHRMG%20Documents/Moslim%20_christian/text.htm
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- Don Wagner, ‘Reagan and Begin, Bibi and Jerry: the theopolitical alliance of the Likud party with the American Christian ‘right’’, Arab Studies Quarterly, 9/22/1998, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-54895469.html>
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Information on Palestine

www.aqsa.org.uk

Journal – Referenced articles from previous issues of *Al Aqsa*.

Newsletter – Quarterly printed by Friends of Al Aqsa.

Publications – History of al Masjidul Aqsa and Guide to al Masjidul Aqsa.

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Palestinian Women and the Violence of Israel's Occupation

Sonja Karkar*

Women and survival

Women in any conflict bear the brunt of men's decisions to go to war. They are expected to send their sons and daughters to fight for honour, cause and country and some have no choice but to raise their families in the midst of death and destruction. This is what Western feminists call the negative force of patriarchy, but for Palestinian women, the negative force is Israel's military tyranny. In other words, Palestinian women lay the oppressive conditions under which they and their families live, right at the door of Israel's occupation of their homeland.

In truth, occupation and oppression have affected the lives of both men and women. There is simply no liberty under occupation: it then becomes a question of survival, and for Palestinian women, there is nothing more important than the survival of their family and their people. That means when men are killed, imprisoned or exiled, the women must take on the male roles of their patriarchal society. It also means finding ways of resisting the occupation. But, while those acts of resistance have in a sense liberated women from the traditional societal norms, they are also sensitive to the daily humiliations endured by men, acts intended by Israel to weaken the structure of Palestinian society. For this reason, women are loath to pursue a feminist agenda for their own individual rights, especially if it puts in jeopardy the national cause, and that is what Western feminists find so hard to understand.

Feminism and family

Palestinian women have a long history of political activism, born out of a legacy of colonialism that has not been experienced by Western women. Their mother-role has been critically important in challenging the oppression under which they live because it strengthens community and connectedness as opposed to "Western feminist identification of motherhood as the 'origin' of women's oppression."¹ This Western atti-

tude subscribes to a privileged white woman's view of what feminism should be like and fails to take into account the experiences of Palestinian women forced to cope with circumstances out of their control, or their own view that motherhood enhances their status as women. In fact, it has been far more comfortable for Western women to focus on cultural oppression and what they perceive as "backwardness" in non-Western countries – evidenced by the almost lascivious interest in books recently written on the veil, domesticity, seclusion, subordination, clitoridectomy, honour killings – than political oppression from Western-approved colonial ventures and exploitation schemes. There is in particular a notable silence from Western feminists on the oppression suffered by Palestinian women as a consequence of Israel's inhuman occupation, and as Chilla Bulbeck rightly notes,

"If we refuse to speak for others, we may refuse a powerful platform from which to support struggles against oppression . . ."²

More than likely, this silence is indicative of the prevailing political forces influencing even the women's liberation movement which has until now shown itself unable to champion women's issues in a truly global context.

Palestinian women, however, have been adept at creating a space for themselves within which they are free to speak out, take action, and help each other to stop the oppressive conditions of occupation from dividing their families and communities. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea has described this as "family feminism"³ – a female perspective that unites rather than divides the genders, and which actually is better for everyone. This stance is most important for a society under extreme attack and where no one has rights – men, women or children. Palestinian

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families who have suffered most from the violence of occupation have particularly benefited from the social welfare projects that have been run by women to combat the worst excesses of Israel's rule. Dr Talhami describes it thus:

“ ... the objective of these women has always been physically the survival of other women and the survival of society, because ‘women’ indeed has meant ‘the family’ and what women stand for within the family.”²⁴

The beginnings of political activism

Although Palestinian society was largely secular during the British Mandate years, women could see the benefits of abiding by a unifying Islamic culture that particularly defines the whole Arab world. There was a great feeling of solidarity between the educated and elite Christian and Muslim women against an encroaching foreign enemy, and together they organised petitions and demonstrations to stop mass Jewish immigration and British and Zionist policies aimed at pushing aside established Palestinian society to make way for a Jewish state.

The first Palestine Arab Women's Congress held in 1929 in Jerusalem, discussed ways of preventing what no other people would willingly accept. It “issued a revolutionary declaration for women to leave aside their other duties and ‘support their men in this [national] cause.’”²⁵ Efforts became focused on increasing women's literacy skills and running self-help programs, embroidery workshops and health clinics - meetings which provided women with the perfect training ground for political activism. Such concentrated centres of activity saw the beginnings of the Palestinian women's movement.

Little did Palestinian women know then that their activism would become absolutely critical when they - along with 90 percent of the Palestinian population - would be forcibly expelled from their homeland in 1948 by the new UN-sanctioned state of Israel. Almost overnight, Palestinian women found themselves on the run with their families in tow, as they became refugees in a world hostile to their plight. Palestinian society was virtually destroyed. The Palestinians had not been asked to negotiate the terms of their own destiny and it is most unlikely that they would have willingly accepted the decision to divide their land in favour of immigrant European Jews. But, there was little they could do to combat the heavily financed, emotionally-charged and organised campaign

launched against them. Not even the surrounding Arab countries combined - fractured by their erstwhile colonial masters - were able to stop Israel's military advances. Yet, despite their defeat, the Palestinians did not ever imagine that they would be prevented from returning to their homes and properties. It was, and has always been, the thought of returning home that has helped Palestinian women endure the catastrophe of their enforced exile.

The roots of violence

The 1948 waves of dispossession, displacement and expulsion truly shocked Palestinian society into a state of disbelief. Even more so, that the world was allowing it to happen. Hundreds of thousands of women and children were left without a roof over their heads and were forced to make their homes in tents, until years later they were replaced by some makeshift hovels. There was nothing temporary about these arrangements: almost sixty years later, the Palestinians are still waiting to return to their homes.

The enormity of this mass human uprooting would be unimaginable for women in the West where the sanctity of home is protected by law. No such laws came to the aid of Palestinian women who saw their homes razed to the ground or taken over by Jewish immigrant families. It is still mind-boggling to think that any Jewish woman fresh from the horrific experiences of the Holocaust could have contemplated setting up home amongst the still-warm belongings of a Palestinian family. Even today, no such laws come to the aid of Palestinian women as they again have to watch bulldozers tear apart their houses and their private memories to make way for the Jewish settlers coming from abroad. In just the last seven years, some 5,500 family homes, and also vast tracts of farming land, have been destroyed for Israel's illegal housing developments high on the hills of Palestine. Palestinian women can see these brand new housing complexes rise up on the rubble of their own homes and stolen land while they must struggle to survive in pitiful circumstances below.

Three, even four generations of women have had to raise their children and provide for them single-handedly when husbands and fathers have been killed or imprisoned. Many more have had to care for physically and psychologically crippled and maimed family members while they themselves have

been constantly subjected to punishing controls, abuses and deprivations. And, far too many pregnant women have been forced to give birth at military checkpoints, in the backs of cars or behind bushes leading to needless deaths when grave complications occur. For Palestinian women to be denied even the right to safe childbirth and motherhood shows the depths to which Israel's perpetual war on the Palestinians has sunk, as Israel rushes to rid itself of the people whose very existence threatens its own exclusivity. It moved Israeli journalist Gideon Levy to say, "These are disgusting times ... when a Palestinian woman in labour no longer has a way to get to a place of sanctuary."⁶

Grassroot resistance

By the time Israel had taken even more Palestinian land in the 1967 war and forced more Palestinians into exile - some tragically for a second time - women were firmly intent on protesting against Israel's occupation and began taking part in peaceful marches and demonstrations. The 1970s saw women not only undertake the usual social and charity work in the refugee camps and give support to political prisoners and their families, but also begin to engage in political activities through the *Women's Committees Movement*, an umbrella organisation for the women's work committees, the original four of which were attached to the four major Palestinian political parties.⁷ Their increased activism led to the mass political protest of 1984 when hundreds of Palestinian women and children broke through the Israeli checkpoints and barricades erected to stop Palestinians from moving between the West Bank and Jerusalem.⁸

As the savage Zionist colonial enterprise intensified and the oppressed Palestinians found their situation simply intolerable, all their frustrations erupted in the First Intifada of 1987 and women were at the forefront of many of the demonstrations. Often they risked their own lives to save their children from arrest, beatings and gunfire and threw stones and staged boycotts and sit-ins to vehemently protest the indiscriminate attacks on their families. The Israeli military retaliated by beating and killing them and hundreds of women were imprisoned in Israeli jails where they suffered humiliating violations, and even rape. Many more suffered miscarriages or died from tear gas canisters thrown into their homes as punishment by Israeli soldiers.⁹ Despite the dangers of non-violent resistance, women began to feel just how empowering political engagement could be, even though their experience of resistance was different from the armed conflict undertaken by men.

While women's involvement had a widespread impact, it was not without sacrifices. Women found themselves having to juggle their political activities with the day-to-day running of family life, which was made even harder as fathers, husbands, brothers and sons were arrested in droves by the Israeli military. Volunteers then began village subcommittees in the rural areas, in order to create networks such as the nursery schools. Children were cared for whilst their mothers worked in menial jobs in Israel to support their families. These were long and tedious days - waiting endlessly at checkpoints to cross into Israel and to get back home again. The luckier ones were bussed in and out. Nevertheless, there was a camaraderie amongst them that helped cement their common struggle and gave them courage to support any political action for the national cause, even if they could not organise it themselves.

One woman stood out - Samiha Khalil otherwise known as Um Khalil (Mother of Khalil). She was a school teacher who in middle-age decided to establish a training and employment centre *In'ash al-'Usra* for disadvantaged women so that they could acquire skills in trades like dressmaking, food preservation, and hairdressing. She wanted them to work in Palestine, not Israel because she did not want Palestinian women depending on Israeli products and services. She even encouraged women to work at home on embroidery pieces which the Centre then sold on their behalf. In what for many women were desperate circumstances, Um Khalil's initiatives helped women maintain their dignity and resist yet another of Israel's measures to subjugate the people.

There were others like her: strong women who refused Israeli and foreign incentives rather than betray the cause. They were not prepared to compromise as long as their human rights were not respected. Their most enterprising campaign was the boycott initiative against Israeli products that they hoped would force the Israeli military to re-open the schools it had shut down. It meant that the women had to provide alternative local products that would help sustain Palestinian families - and they did. They also taught the children in underground community-run schools in the interim. It was this kind of grassroots activism that really empowered the women involved - probably more than if they had been in the higher level leadership positions that were open only

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to a very few. These services made the women indispensable to their communities “when conditions were creating new and pressing needs”¹⁰ and there were few objections to their political involvement. It was all part of the national struggle and these women inspired others to follow their lead.

The endless peace process

The Oslo Accords changed this vital grassroots activism. Suddenly, the struggle for liberty became diluted as agreements were made to begin normalising Palestinian society through a self-rule government while still living under occupation. It was a bizarre notion because none of the final status issues – Jerusalem, borders, water issues, settlements, refugees – that were essential for a just solution, were resolved. Yet, there were enough Palestinians, buoyed by this manufactured hope for better times, who were willing to replace the grassroots struggle for liberty with foreign-backed NGOs whose work was focused on humanitarian issues. Much of the work that had been done by the women’s committees was now taken over by the well-funded NGOs with independent and salaried staff and they certainly had no brief to educate Palestinian women to resist the occupation.

Despite the changes, there was no let up in Israel’s suffocating occupation and many women were once again struggling to survive in the mind-numbing and deadly living conditions of curfews, military incursions, movement restrictions, systematic land razing and confiscation and home demolitions. Women, who had succeeded in developing local products to stop Palestinians buying Israeli-produced goods, were suddenly plunged into extreme poverty by the mass-produced and cheaper products coming from the new factories set up under Oslo by wealthy Palestinians. The women now found themselves struggling to survive with no time to build the networks that had been so successful during the First Intifada.

Desperate resistance

A feeling of failure permeated Palestinian society as it became apparent that Israel had again succeeded in suppressing Palestinian initiatives with dire consequences for ordinary families. More desperate means of resisting were inevitable because no people want to be annihilated, driven out or subjugated: their right to resist is enshrined in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The Second Intifada erupted in 2000 and while the means were often desperate and not always palatable, Israel’s air bombardments and armoured tank assaults

against a largely unarmed people have never been the stuff of heroic campaigns - especially not when pitched against the stones of resistance from the hands of children. Suicide bombings escalated Israel’s military responses and painted an ugly picture of Palestinian resistance. As a consequence, honourable grief was denied Palestinian women: the world turned their martyrs into terrorists and their children into nameless statistics in a grossly unequal war.

After almost six decades of oppression, the psychological strain on the women cannot be overstated. They stare at death and violence every day: soldiers firing at youths, planes dropping bombs on cars and residential buildings, husbands roughed up in front of them and then handcuffed, blindfolded and taken away, children caught in cross-fire or deliberately shot. The daily humiliation of waiting endlessly at checkpoints, interrogations, body searches, watching their olive and fruit trees being uprooted, their homes demolished, their land razed, having their identity cards revoked. Worse still is knowing that their legal existence is barely recognised, that their national aspirations are considered unworthy of respect and that in the eyes of the world they are seen as morally diminished. No wonder Palestinian women have put their people’s liberation from Israel’s escalating oppression before any demands for equal rights in their own society.

The way of faith

The success of the Islamic Hamas party in the January 2006 democratic elections shocked not only the power players of the Middle East – Israel and the US – but also the main secular Fatah party long-used to running and negotiating Palestinian affairs. So many Palestinians had become disillusioned with the lack of progress since Oslo and the intolerable conditions that were worsening by the day that many were ready to try alternative ideas to ending Israel’s iron rule. There was no doubt that Hamas had already shown itself capable of providing sympathetic social reform amongst the disadvantaged and this brought Hamas much support during the elections. Women struggling to survive and who needed all the support they could get, found its programs a godsend, even if other less needy groups did not.

Turning to God is not unusual in any society stricken by violence, oppression and

hopelessness, and although Palestinian politics had been traditionally secular, Palestinian women seemed prepared to accept an Islamic agenda if it would improve their lot. That it might bring a much more conservative attitude to their role in society was something they were prepared to tolerate in the interests of their people's liberation. However, Hamas never had a chance to show if its policies would positively reorient the Palestinian struggle for liberation or repress Palestinian society even more. The deliberately hyped-up and false worldview of extreme fundamentalist Islam threatening democracy and Christian liberalism was creating terrible divisions within Palestinian society itself, and again, women found themselves the victims of an enemy without – Israel – and an enemy within – the warring factions of Palestinian politics.

Interestingly, six women from the Hamas party were elected to parliament and one of them – Huda Naem – told *The Guardian* that

“Women are closer to the problems of the society. They are the ones who feel the unemployment. They are the ones who have to look after the children when their husbands are in prison. They feel well treated by Hamas institutions. Now these women are looking to us, the women in parliament, to change other things.”¹¹

One of those “other things” said Professor Jameela Shanti - another elected member of parliament - is discrimination.

“We are going to show that women are not secondary, they are equal to men. Discrimination is not from Islam, it is from tradition.”¹²

This was hardly the image of submissiveness and meekness that the West has been trying so hard to portray in women showing outward adherence to the Islamic faith.

Indomitable courage

Only months after Hamas was elected and Israel had begun the worst of its terror attacks on Gaza, Palestinian women demonstrated their extraordinary courage by breaking the siege of Beit Hanoun. Some 30 freedom fighters had taken refuge in a mosque after trying to defend the town of 28,000 residents from invading Israeli tanks and troops. All water and electricity had been cut off, and despite the rising death toll, no ambulances were allowed in to attend to the injured and dying. The Israeli army had

imposed a curfew and had begun taking away all males over 15 years of age, stripping them down to their underwear, blindfolding them and then handcuffing them. A harrowing account of the siege is given by Jameela Shanti as she explains

“It is not easy as a mother, sister or wife to watch those you love disappear before your eyes. Perhaps that was what helped me, and 1,500 other women, to overcome our fear and defy the Israeli curfew ... we faced the most powerful army in our region unarmed ... we had nothing, except each other and our yearning for freedom... The soldiers of Israel's so-called defence force did not hesitate to open fire on unarmed women. The sight of my close friends Ibtissam Yusuf Abu Nada and Rajaa Ouda taking their last breaths, bathed in blood, will live with me forever.”¹³

It was a Ghandi-esque gesture that so many peace movements talk about and constantly urge the Palestinians to adopt. But, there were no international cries of outrage and horror, no media stories of valour and sacrifice, no galvanizing of world support for the women of Gaza. The silence was palpable. No one in their right mind could condone these tyrannical actions: only Israel seemed to have carte blanche to perpetrate such dreadful outrages without fear of condemnation.

Today, the killing in Gaza goes on – sometimes with bombs and shelling, but even more malevolently through the sanctions that deny the Palestinians any contact with the outside world. Enough human rights organizations have reported on the impending humanitarian disaster to give credence to the desperate cries for fuel, water, medicine, electricity and food and it is in such impossible conditions that Palestinian women have to raise their families with no surety of a better future than one coming from their belief in a merciful God. As Jameela Shanti points out “Nothing undermines the West's claims to defend freedom and democracy more than what is happening in Palestine.”¹⁴

A violent world

In any study of violence against Palestinian women, the focus must fall on Israel. The occupation taints everything because the society it imprisons cannot develop freely

It was a Ghandi-esque gesture that so many peace movements talk about and constantly urge the Palestinians to adopt. But, there were no international cries of outrage and horror

Western feminists could show the genuineness of their championing of women's rights and liberation by a global sisterhood campaign of boycotts, protests, sit-ins, petitions and demonstrations to protest Israel's violence

as it should. Neither can the society of the occupiers. Just like in a prison, the system damages the inmates as well as those administering it. A posting on The Guardian's *Comment is Free* reported that "Between 2000 and 2005, there was an almost 300% increase in the number of Israeli women murdered by firearms, almost half of whom were killed by partners who were soldiers, security guards or policemen."¹⁵

Domestic violence against Palestinian women has also risen in the Occupied Palestinian Territories although there are no reliable statistics. An in-depth report by Amnesty International¹⁶ examined the intensity of the violence that consumes their lives, and while it detailed increased incidents of domestic violence, such as sexual abuse, rape and "honour" killings and the failure of the Palestinian Authority to stop these crimes, by far the greater emphasis was on the violence of Israel's occupation. That violence has been documented over and over again, and despite that, "Israel has consistently disregarded its obligations."¹⁷

Israel's ruthless US-backed colonialist enterprise is the negative force of political patriarchy in action. Its incarceration of Palestinians in their own land is the worst kind of oppression because neither men nor women nor children are free. It has institutionalised apartheid with a wall, citizenship laws, zoning regulations, and land seizures. Ethnic cleansing and transfer are openly spoken about. A slow genocide is happening in Gaza – they have no clean water, no electricity, no fuel, no medicines, and barely enough food rations and Israel is raining down mortar shells on them with daily reports of deaths and injuries. But, there is no global women's movement speaking out against this kind of militarised violence that terrorises Palestinian women and their families.

A challenge to feminists

While there may be the temptation by Western women to view the Palestinian women's struggle through critical feminist lens because they have allowed the national cause to override their "rights" as women, they should bear in mind that "national identities are as salient for women as they are for men."¹⁸ And all the more so because their very existence as a people was even negated by the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir who said "there was no such thing as Palestinians...they did not exist". It was a statement that insultingly ignored the very real presence of a Palestinian population even as it suffered under the crushing stamp of the Israeli jackboot.

Today, the only thing that has changed is that conditions are much worse than anyone could ever have imagined. Not only has Israel's political, military and economic domination of the Occupied Territories intensified, it has increased its illegal land acquisitions as well, leaving some four million Palestinian people with barely enough room in which to survive. In that contracting violent space, the only hope for Palestinians is to remain steadfastly determined to preserve the foundations of their culture and identity against their enemy. Palestinian women have shown only too well how that can be done. The national struggle for liberty is their right and their duty and there is time enough for social reform when the occupation ends and statehood is achieved.

In the meantime, Western feminists could show the genuineness of their championing of women's rights and liberation by a global sisterhood campaign of boycotts, protests, sit-ins, petitions and demonstrations to protest Israel's violence against Palestinian women. It could really make a difference to their lives already in extreme jeopardy.

Dead-end legal processes

In a 2006 resolution adopted by the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC),¹⁹ Israel was unanimously affirmed as the major obstacle to Palestinian women advancing and having any quality of life because of the dire humanitarian situation in which they live and the crisis they face. Concern for the women's situation was even noted by the two countries voting against the resolution: the United States and Australia. Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence on the ground, they still claimed the resolution presented "unbalanced and inaccurate facts about the Palestinian women" and "politicised humanitarian concerns in a way that was unhelpful." They, therefore, rejected the resolution.

Such deliberate neglect to act makes a mockery of the 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which recognises the impact of war on women and women's contributions to conflict resolution and peacemaking.²⁰ Australian peace activist Felicity Hill²¹ saw through the resolution's adoption, but seven years later, women are still suffering heinous violations in conflict zones all over the world and Felicity Hill was moved to say at the 2007 anniversary that "we should no longer focus on women and peace, but on men and war."

Peacemaking without justice

The truth of the matter is that for all the peace talks, peacemaking and peace dialogues, nothing has changed for Palestinian women or men that might suggest a breakthrough from Israel's intransigence. These talks just go through the motions while Israel continues its oppressive colonialist policies and the world wallows in its craven silence. Sama Aweidah-Liftawi, director of the Women's Studies Centre was well aware back in 1999 that "negotiations do not necessarily equal peace"²², particularly if there is no bona fide interest in making substantive changes to the status quo and Israel has already made it very clear that it will not budge on final status issues.

Clearly, peace on its own is no magical panacea to the conflict: it needs justice. A Palestinian peace activist Hanan Awad defined peace "...as a tool for justice"²³ and justice is oftentimes the missing ingredient that makes dialogue between some Palestinian and Israeli women so difficult. The nuances of language often create their own barriers as happened at a conflict-resolution seminar in 1999, when Gila Svirsky explained that Israeli women in her organisation Bat Shalom believed that the Palestinians "deserved a state of their own."²⁴ She was corrected by Sumaya Farhat-Naser, director of the Jerusalem Centre for Women: "not deserve, we have a right to a state of our own."²⁵

This *prima facie entitlement* to their land permeates the discourse of Palestinian women peacemakers much as it does the collective discourse of Palestinian nationalism and most women equate their role as peacemaker with the aim of achieving political and national rights. They are, therefore, reticent to engage in dialogue with Israeli women without Israel first ending its oppressive policies and practices. According to Nahla Abdo, Israeli women "hold a different moral orientation, based primarily on care rather than on justice."²⁶ For Palestinian women, who are still part of an ongoing painful narrative, forgiveness and tolerance can only come once their rights are respected and they can emerge from any peace agreement with dignity as equals.

Palestinian women peacemakers have shown that they are "more concerned with survival issues overall"²⁷ as their activities are concentrated on the grassroots community processes rather than the state-centric security solutions that have dominated all the peace talks so far. A better option would be the pursuit of individual security through the disbanding of Israel's occupation and the oppression that it

has wrought on Palestinian society. Women are very well placed to do just that if they are prepared to speak up against all forms of violence and oppression and also if they are willing to vigorously question the obstructions that prevent genuine peacemaking between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators and their US interlocutor.

There is still no sign of that happening and so it is not surprising that peace talks post-Annapolis are looking very shaky. If anything, Israel is ramping up its military control. This brings to mind a comment made by a former battalion surgeon in the Vietnam War – now a well-known authority on spiritual healing – about "the incredible seduction of war for males"²⁸ which explains in a nutshell just why peace is so difficult to achieve in our patriarchal societies. It is no wonder that a militarised society like Israel becomes "dependent on or controlled by the military and its values, beliefs and presumptions."²⁹ And it is no wonder that Palestinian women see Israel's military occupation as the prime cause of all the violence shattering their lives and their society.

Notes

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4. Ghada Hashem Talhami at a Palestine Center briefing in Washington DC on 8 March 2006 entitled "The Evolution of the Palestinian Feminist Movement".
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talks just go through the motions while Israel continues its oppressive colonialist policies and the world wallows in its craven silence

13. Jameela Shanti, "We women of Beit Hanoun overcame our fear", *The Guardian*, 10 November 2006. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/israel/Story/0,,1942942,00.html>
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19. ECOSOC/6234 of 25 July 2006
20. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of 31 October 2000 (S/RES/1325)
21. Felicity Hill is the Director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in New York
22. Sama Aweidah-Liftawi interview with Nahla Abdo, 24 July 1999, referred to in Chapter 3: Palestinian Women and Peacemaking, Nahla Abdo and Roit Lentin (eds) *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2002, p. 324
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24. Nahla Abdo and Roit Lentin (eds) *Women and the Politics of Military Confrontation: Palestinian and Israeli Gendered Narratives of Dislocation*, Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2002, Chapter 3, p. 324
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26. Ibid.
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28. ABC National Radio, Host Michael Toms interviews guest Dr Larry Dossey on "Obvious Healing" for the *New Dimensions* program, 24 March 2006
29. Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Police Reactions to Violence against Palestinian Women in Israel", *Femmes & Mondialisation*, 12 June 2005.



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Between Boycott and Apartheid

Hammam Farah*

After passing a motion in May 2007 that called for the circulation and debate of the Palestinian call for the academic boycott of Israel, Britain's University and College Union (UCU)'s strategy and finance committee unanimously accepted a recommendation from its Secretary-General, Sally Hunt, that not only is the call to boycott apparently unlawful under discrimination legislation, but even debates on the issue at the union's meetings should be silenced "to ensure that the union acts lawfully." Consequently, the union also cancelled a UK speaking tour in which Palestinian academics would discuss the academic boycott of Israel with their counterparts at UK universities. There is ample reason to doubt the claim that the union and its members are at risk. After months of trepidation over the boycott due to its alleged violation of academic freedom, the irony lies in the fact that the sole violator of academic freedom is the leadership of the UCU. One is forced to question whether they were driven by genuine concern for justice and the importance of the boycott for achieving it, or bitter resentment at their own membership's democratic decision to discuss the boycott. As Amjad Barham, head of the council of the Palestinian Federation of Unions of University Professors and Employees, stated, "by muzzling debate and free discussion on the boycott, the [Israeli] lobby and its supporters within the UCU are suppressing academic freedom in the most crude manner." In addition, the opacity of the UCU statement further compounds the perception of hypocrisy felt towards the leadership of the union. The fact that academic unions in the UK are discussing the issue of academic boycott is a big step in the right direction, but it seems like the activists in the UCU will have to continue this uphill battle against apartheid, and we can expect them to keep fighting.

It appears we have been put on the defensive, consumed more with rebutting the allegations of violating academic freedom and singling out

Israel than with providing a thorough elaboration of the appalling ways in which Israel has been systematically violating Palestinian academic freedom and students' right to education for the past 60 years: Schools and universities have been closed for hundreds of days by the military government; students shot and left to bleed in their classrooms; violent crackdowns on student non-violent demonstrations; thousands of arrests and detainments of students and faculty members are common; permits to study abroad, even from Gaza to the West Bank, are regularly denied. Just recently, Israel's High Court rejected a petition by students from Gaza to transfer to the West Bank to study occupational therapy because the universities in Gaza do not provide the program. This process of academic destruction has driven Palestinian education underground, where classes are held secretly in teachers' apartments, in local churches and mosques, and in refugee camps.

Perhaps more importantly concerning the academic boycott, however, is not only the Israeli government's actions, but the active participation of Israeli academia itself in discriminating against Palestinian students, and here I mean Palestinian citizens of Israel since Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are not even allowed to physically access Israeli universities to take admission exams, let alone go to class. Here are just some of the examples of Israeli academic institutions' role in perpetuating apartheid, above and beyond the fact that they have failed to condemn Israel's colonial/apartheid policies.

While 25% of Haifa University's students are Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel, they make up 80% of the students facing disciplinary action, a clear disproportion. Recently, students were brought in front of a disciplinary committee for demonstrating against a university-sponsored conference

by muzzling debate and free discussion on the boycott, the [Israeli] lobby and its supporters within the UCU are suppressing academic freedom in the most crude manner.

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Many of the universities have also played a role in the theft and confiscation of Palestinian land

entitled “The Demographic Problem and the Demographic Policy of Israel.” The “demographic problem” alludes to the racist fear of the high Arab birth rates that threaten Zionism’s obsession with maintaining Israel’s Jewish majority at any and all costs. Can you imagine the uproar that would ensue if Black students were brought in front of a disciplinary committee in the US or Canada for demonstrating against a conference addressing the population growth “problem” of Blacks? Furthermore, Haifa University’s official guide for foreign and exchange students includes a warning entitled “Special Security Instructions” cautioning against visiting Arab-Palestinian towns and villages in Israel. These are only a few of many Haifa University discriminatory practices. At Ohalo College, the only Palestinian student candidate running for head of the student union was disqualified on the day of the election. At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Arab-Palestinian visitors are required to carry a “certificate of integrity” if they wish to enter the university.

Many of the universities have also played a role in the theft and confiscation of Palestinian land. Hebrew University began expanding its housing and offices in 2004 over the destroyed and depopulated Palestinian village of Lifta – and of course, the Palestinian refugees do not have the right to return, which means that the people whose land the university is built on are not allowed to study at the institution, let alone reclaim their land. Professor Margaret Aziza Pappano of Canada’s Queen’s University informed us recently that “Hebrew University has a long and deleterious history of appropriating Palestinian land. In 1968, in opposition to a UN resolution, the university evicted hundreds of Palestinian families to expand their campus in East Jerusalem. This history of confiscation continues, as October 2004 saw more evictions of Palestinian families and destruction of their homes for another campus expansion.”

Tel Aviv University was built over the destroyed and depopulated village of Sheikh Muwannis. The former home of the village Mukhtar (mayor) has become the faculty club/cafeteria. To add insult to injury, the university refuses to allow the posting of a sign that would explain the origins of the building – perhaps it would spoil the faculty’s appetite. The university plans to ironically build a new Faculty of Archeology as an expansion of its campus further into the lands of the destroyed village. Last but not least, in perhaps the most infamous

case, the Ariel University Centre of Samaria (AKA “the settler university”), an extension of Bar Ilan University, was built inside the illegal settlement of Ariel inside the West Bank. The village of Salfit endured massive land confiscations to make way for the settlement and its residents will soon be displaced to the other side of the illegal Wall that is being erected inside the West Bank (separating students from their universities) to cage in Palestinian communities and to eventually annex the illegal settlement blocks where this University will operate.

This is only a glimpse of the long list of Israeli academia’s participation in the colonization of Palestinian land and in the discrimination against Palestinian students. If we are to build on the case for the academic boycott of Israel, we must dedicate more time to disseminating the painful details of this academic apartheid that is part and parcel of the wider apartheid system imposed by Israel on the Palestinians.

In light of this, it is a fair demand on behalf of the British Committee for the Universities of Palestine that the leadership of the UCU publish the ‘legal advice’ for examination and tell us who provided it, tell us whether any other sources were sought out for advice, and what the nature of that advice was. Furthermore, it is vital to obtain an explanation about why it was ‘heroic’ for British academic unions to lead the academic boycott of South Africa, but ‘illegal’ to even discuss the academic boycott of Israel. Indeed, a fundamental component of academic freedom is academic transparency.

Lastly, it is important to note that academia, perhaps more than any other sector of society, should be at the forefront of the boycott campaign because of its long professed commitments to anti-oppressive and anti-racist ideals. Just as dangerous or hate-speech is ideally exempted from the right to freedom of speech, so should academic practices that perpetuate and entrench racism and apartheid be exempted from academic freedom. All around the world, academics have begun to take principled positions against Israeli apartheid, and history will remember this. Conversely, history will also remember those academics and university presidents who stood on the side of apartheid, oppression, and colonial domination. So, to Sally Hunt and her ‘legal’ team, the lines are drawn – which will it be?

Engaging Hamas and Hezbollah*

Ali Abunimah**

Nothing could be easier in the present atmosphere than to accuse anyone who calls for recognition of and dialogue with Hamas, Hezbollah and other Islamist movements of being closet supporters of reactionary “extremism” or naive fellow travellers of “terrorists.” This tactic is not surprising coming from neoconservatives and Zionists. What is novel is to see it expressed in supposedly progressive quarters.

Arun Kundnani has written about a “new breed of liberal” whose outlook “regards Muslims as uniquely problematic and in need of forceful integration into what it views as the inherently superior values of the West.” The target of these former leftists, Kundnani argues, “is not so much Islamism as the appeasing attitudes they detect among [other] liberals.”³

Such views are now creeping into the Palestinian solidarity movement. MADRE, an “international women’s human rights organization,” presents one example. In the wake of the Hamas election victory and takeover of Gaza from US- and Israeli-backed Fatah warlords, MADRE declared that the challenge for Palestine solidarity activists is “how do we support the people of Palestine without endorsing the Hamas leadership?” Calling for what it terms “strategic solidarity” as opposed to “reflexive solidarity,” MADRE defines Hamas as a “repressive” movement “driven by militarism and nationalism,” which “aims to institutionalize reactionary ideas about gender and sexuality,” while using “religion as a smokescreen to pursue its agenda.”⁴ Similarly strident and dismissive claims have been made by other pro-Palestinian advocacy groups.⁵

Some of these attitudes may arise from confusion, but there may also be an effort to scare us off from attempting to understand

Hamas in Palestine and Hezbollah in Lebanon outside any paradigm except a “clash of civilizations” that pits allegedly universal and superior Western liberal values against what is represented as medieval oriental barbarity.

It is essential to note that the Islamist movements under consideration, although they may identify themselves as being part of the *umma* (the global community of Muslims) are heterogeneous; each emerged in a particular context. Their ideologies and positions are moving targets - changing over time as a result of fierce and ongoing internal debates and their encounters with external influences. These points may seem obvious as they apply to an analysis of any social or political movement, but they have to be restated here because of the constant effort to portray all Islamist movements as being inflexible, rooted in unchanging and ancient views of the world, and indistinguishable from the most exotic, marginal and unrepresentative “jihadi” groups.

Hamas and Hezbollah emerged in the context of brutal Israeli invasions and military occupations. Their popular support and legitimacy have increased as they demonstrated their ability to present a credible veto on the unrestrained exercise of Israeli power where state actors, international bodies, the peace process industry and secular nationalist resistance movements notably failed.

As their influence has grown, both movements have steadily tempered their universalistic Islamist rhetoric and adopted the language and imagery of classical national liberation struggles albeit with an Islamist identity. A political path that was pioneered by Hezbollah of recasting its

Hamas and Hezbollah emerged in the context of brutal Israeli invasions and military occupations

* This article originally appeared on Electronic Intifada.

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have challenged
Western feminist
discourses that
they deemed
irrelevant to their
circumstances
and needs**

Islamist identity and goals within the constraints imposed by pluralist national politics is now being trodden by Hamas.⁶

Contrary to the oft-repeated claim that Hamas inflexibly seeks the complete conquest of Palestine and the expulsion of all Jews (aka “the destruction of Israel”), the movement has moved over time to explicitly endorse a generation-long truce with Israel and unspecified future political arrangements that will be the outcome of negotiations.⁷ Hamas leaders have been able to justify this shift within the Islamist concept of a *hudna*, but have also explicitly modelled their approach on that of other modern national liberation movements in Ireland, South Africa and Vietnam.⁸

The much condemned use of violence by Hamas and Hezbollah - particularly suicide bombings - had more in common with other nationalist movements facing foreign occupation, than deriving from any “Islamist” ideology, as University of Chicago political scientist Robert Pape demonstrated in his book *Dying to Win*. Hezbollah has focused its military strategy on countering Israeli military might, retaliating against Israeli civilian areas only in response to Israeli attacks on Lebanese civilians (as we saw in the July 2006 war). Hamas unilaterally suspended its notorious campaign of suicide attacks on Israeli civilians in 2005, again following the pattern of other groups like the IRA that sought to enter a political process. Hamas maintains this suspension despite escalating Israeli attacks and collective punishment against Palestinian civilians.

Both movements are renowned for providing access to health, housing, jobs and income to the poorest segments of the communities from which they draw support. Anti-Islamist liberals understand this appeal, which is why a few have supported the US, Israeli and EU sanctions against Hamas in Gaza to prevent it from providing for its people, while boosting support for Mahmoud Abbas’ Ramallah regime in the hope that it can buy back support and credibility.

Yet the trump card of anti-Islamist liberals remains the claim that Islamist movements like Hamas are uniquely oppressive to women, sticking to rigid ideologies which prescribe for them a subordinate role. Here their positions, if not their prescriptions, coincide with that of the Bush administration which cynically claimed that its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq with all their catastrophic consequences were partly motivated out of a fervor to “free” the women

of the region. Ironically, as journalist Susan Faludi has noted, these claims were made while the “War on Terror” was simultaneously used by American conservatives as a cover to reassert a more virulent patriarchy at home.⁹

The claim that Hamas should be opposed (while “strategic solidarity” should presumably be extended to other Palestinian factions more amenable to a so-called Western agenda) is based on a caricature of the movement’s changing gender ideologies and practices and ignores the achievements of the Islamist women’s movement in Palestine.

Spectacular examples of the courageous and radical role Islamist women have played came last year when mass non-violent actions by Palestinian women prevented Israeli air raids and extrajudicial executions in Gaza.¹⁰ But this is only the visible tip of the iceberg.

As the work of Birzeit University professor Islah Jad has demonstrated, the Islamist women’s movement has played a major role in transforming Hamas’ ideology about women, placing its demands at the centre of internal debates, and in mobilizing women within Hamas and in society at large to play greater political and economic roles (sixty percent of students at Gaza’s Islamic University, for example, are female).

Islamist women have challenged Western feminist discourses that they deemed irrelevant to their circumstances and needs. They have contended with contradictions in Islamist thinking about the role of women that mirrored the unresolved contradictions that had long plagued the declining secular nationalist movement. At the same time, these Islamist women activists engaged positively with many of the claims made by secular feminists, incorporating them into an ever-changing Islamist nationalist discourse.¹¹

Islamist women have emerged as an important factor in Palestinian political life partly as a result of the demobilization of the secular nationalist women’s movement as it became depoliticized, “NGOized,” professionalized, and detached from its grassroots.¹²

“There are traditions here that say that a woman should take a secondary role - that she should be at the back,” said Jamila Shanti, one of Hamas’ elected female members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, “But that is not Islam.” Speaking after the January

2006 election, but before the EU, US and Israeli effort to destroy the Hamas government took hold, Shanti added, "Hamas will scrap many of these traditions. You will find women going out and participating."¹³ Thus, the work of Islamist women, especially within Hamas, deserves to be recognized, respected and engaged, not rendered invisible.

This is where we have to look beyond caricatures and consider that for many of their adherents Islamist movements are attractive because they offer the hope of alternative forms of social organization that put the human being and the community, rather than the market and the consumer at the centre of life.

In poor countries, neo-liberal capitalism, extolled by Western aid donors and their organs such as the IMF and the World Bank as being the corollary of democracy, has meant in practice unaccountable oligarchy, the demolition of social welfare systems, public education, subsidies for basic necessities, and the flourishing of crony privatization on an epic scale. In many places, Islamist movements have attempted to fill the void.

Hamas' changing views on a long-term truce with Israel, on forms of resistance, and the role of women in society are examples of how an Islamist movement - like any other social movement - responds to the real circumstances of the society of which it is part.

The dialogues that once intransigent colonial rulers and their foreign backers opened with the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa, and Sinn Fein and the IRA in Northern Ireland - that led eventually to peaceful transformations of those societies - are the appropriate model for how to engage with movements like Hamas and Hezbollah today. Some argue that these cases offer no precedent because Irish nationalists and the ANC were always part of a unifying Christian, Western tradition. That is how they may be viewed in hindsight, but like Islamists, they too were once the objects of a dehumanizing civilizational discourse that cast them as irredeemably inferior, alien and beyond inclusion, thus justifying colonial control.

Like the leaders of those movements before, Hamas and Hezbollah have been reaching out, attempting to craft messages that can begin to close the seemingly unbridgeable gaps, paying careful attention to their own constituencies as well as their potential interlocutors. In Hamas' case these invitations came in a remarkable series of op-eds by its leaders published in

English-language newspapers since January 2006 including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times* and *The Guardian*.¹⁴ European and American governments have responded that any dialogue must be conditioned on Hamas first accepting all of Israel's demands, while Israel continues to have a free hand.

Israel and its backers routinely dismiss Hamas' overtures as insincere. They wave about the 1988 Hamas Charter - which as current scholarship shows has little relevance or influence on actual Hamas policies and thinking - as an excuse never to talk. Israel's propagandists used the same tactic for years with the PLO Charter (or "covenant" as they insisted on calling it). The increasing influence of mainstream Islamists also terrifies the existing establishments in the Palestinian Authority and other Arab states, who in desperation to preserve their power, have joined the chorus of fear-mongering and repression and some have forged more or less open alliances with Israel.

When broader conflict looms, fuelled by the ideology of the clash of civilizations, and the American president drops casual, smirking references to World War III, a new approach is urgently needed. The European governments, for example, that speak to Hamas in secret, but collude with the brutal sanctions against Gaza, out of fear of the United States, should break with their harmful and misguided policies. They should openly defy Washington and Tel Aviv and engage with Islamist movements in Lebanon and Palestine and more broadly, on equal terms.

Since this change is unlikely in the short term, and the dangers are great, it is the role of progressives to support anti-colonial liberation movements without imposing their own agendas, to push for equal dialogue, to listen carefully to what Islamist movements are saying, and to expose and resist the efforts to demonize and dehumanize entire societies in preparation for new wars.

Notes

- 3 Arun Kundnani, "How liberals lost their anti-racism," 3 October 2007, Institute for Race Relations. (<http://www.irr.org.uk/2007/october/ha000008.html>)
- 4 "Palestine in the Age of Hamas: The Challenge of Progressive Solidarity," MADRE press release, 11 July 2007 (<http://www.commondreams.org/news2007/0711-02.htm>)
5. See for example, Osamah Khalil, "The politics of fear," *The Electronic Intifada*, 8 October 2007. (<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article/9028.shtml>)

the work of Islamist women, especially within Hamas, deserves to be recognized, respected and engaged, not rendered invisible

6. See: Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas A History from Within* (Olive Branch Press, 2007); Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, (Pluto Press, 2006); Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000); Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, (Columbia University Press, 2000).
7. See in particular Tamimi, Chapter 7.
8. See Ahmed Yousef, "Pause for Peace," *The New York Times*, 1 November 2006; and Khaled Meshaal, "We shall never recognize ... a Zionist state on our soil," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 February 2006.
9. Speaking about her new book *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America* (Metro politan Books, 2007) on *Democracy Now!*, 4 October 2007 (<http://www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=07/10/04/1355237>)
10. See "One woman killed, 16 injured in Israeli siege on Gaza mosque," *The Electronic Intifada*, 3 November 2006 (<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article5935.shtml>) and Rami Almeghari, "Necessity is the Mother of Inventive Nonviolent Resistance," 21 November 2006, *The Electronic Intifada* <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article6077.shtml>.
11. See Islah Jad, "Between Religion and Secularism: Islamist women of Hamas," in Fereshteh Nouraie-Simone (editor), *On Shifting Ground: Muslim Women in the Global Era*, (The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005).
12. See Islah Jad, "NGOs: between buzzwords and social movements," in *Development in Practice*, Volume 17, Numbers 4-5, August 2007.
13. Alan Johnston, "Women ponder future under Hamas," BBC, 3 March 2006. (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4767634.stm).
14. In addition to items cited in endnote [6] also see: Mousa Abu Marzook, "What Hamas Is Seeking," *The Washington Post*, 31 January 2006; Abu Marzook, "Hamas' stand," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 2007; Abu Marzook, "Hamas is ready to talk: We welcome the call for dialogue, and reject insincere demands for an undemocratic boycott," *The Guardian*, 16 August 2007; Ahmed Yousef, "What Hamas Wants," *The New York Times*, 20 June 2007; Yousef, "Engage With Hamas; We Earned Our Support," *The New York Times*, 20 June 2007.



Al-Aqsa

Editor

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As the 60th anniversary of the unilateral declaration of the State of Israel approaches and the siege of Gaza succeeds in diverting the world's attention from the ongoing aggressive colonisation of the West Bank, it is pertinent to look at the causes of this shameful situation. Such is the degree of propaganda feeding our collective conscience that it is still common to come across people who believe quite sincerely that the Palestinians are occupying – or seeking to occupy – Israeli land, not the other way around. It is also part of the current trend to talk about going back to the “green line” of 1967 as a starting point for negotiations about “peace”. And yet the argument for going back to the source of the problem – the aforementioned declaration of “independence” – is powerful, for that is where the visible roots of today's conflict lie.

In her excellent account of the “40 Years of Occupation: the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Journal, Issue 9, volume 2 Spring 2007), Rajnaara Akhtar drew attention to the “Palestinians who were forced to flee their homes or face certain death at the hands of terrorist Zionist gangs”. Her following paragraph referred to the estimated “750,000 Palestinians [who] were displaced from their homes” in the period of the *Nakba* (catastrophe) in 1948. Ms. Akhtar's suggestion was that the choice facing Palestinians in 1948 was this: stay and be killed, or flee before the “gangs” get here. In using the term “displaced” she also suggested that this was a rather mild form of population movement, echoing (and, indeed, quoting as her source) Professor Benny Morris's claims in his groundbreaking book, “Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999”¹.

Displacement is, in fact a gross under-statement. In his subsequent book, Professor Morris went one step further, based on newly-released (at the time) official Israeli records, and acknowledged that Israel was responsible for a number of acts which today would be (and then should have been) classed as war crimes: “Pillage was almost de rigueur, rape was not infrequent, the execution of prisoners of war was fairly routine during the months before May 1948 (the country was under British administration and the Haganah had no PoW camps), and small- and medium-scale massacres of Arabs occurred during April, May, July and October to November.”² In 2002, Morris argued in the same newspaper that if Israel's first political leaders had expelled all Palestinians in 1948, the Middle East would now be at peace. The fact that the descendents of those forcibly expelled,

raped and murdered in 1948 still struggle for their legitimate right to return to their land is strong evidence that his argument is flawed. People cannot just switch off their quest for justice simply because Zionism and its supporters would prefer it to be the case. Justice is the prerequisite for peace; in its absence, the “legitimacy” of Palestinians' “struggle for liberation from colonial and alien domination ... by all available means...”³ remains strong.

Reading Morris, the casual visitor might be relieved to learn that only “small- and medium-scale massacres of Arabs” took place: nothing to get too upset about, then. This is a conflict that excites passion on both sides and people rarely sit on the fence unless, in all honesty, they simply do not care about human rights and the potential cause of World War Three. However, if such readers actually exist I would refer them to Ilan Pappé's book “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine”.⁴ Yes, *ethnic cleansing*. What happened in 1948 was not just a couple of “small- and medium-scale massacres”, and there was, contrary to what Morris asserted, a very definite plan to cleanse the country of Palestine of its inhabitants to make way for Jews fleeing the aftermath of the European Holocaust. Dr. Pappé records what took place in detail – it is both exhaustive and exhausting – and I heartily recommend it to anyone wishing to look into the causes of what Rajnaara Akhtar calls “displacement”.

I have been supporting the Palestinian cause since 1988 but prior to the early nineteen-eighties I was, by and large, one of many victims of Zionist propaganda “A land without a people for a people without a land”, Hollywood's “Exodus” and Leon Uris novels and all that. A visit to the Holy Land in 1988 changed me, and I have been a passionate campaigner for the Palestinian cause ever since. Nevertheless, despite having a mini-library of books on the subject, I learnt a huge amount from reading Dr. Pappé's book. It is, quite simply, an eye-opener which should dispel completely any notions of mere “displacement” and the minor adjustments to one's daily routine that the term implies.

So while praising Rajnaara Akhtar and others for the principled exposures of what happened in 1967, which appeared throughout the first half of 2007, I believe that it is time for us to expose what really happened in 1948. Israel was, indeed, created by terrorism, but the perpetrators were not “Zionist gangs”. They were the Haganah – the precursors of the Israeli Defence Forces

acting on the explicit orders of David Ben-Gurion and the Zionist leadership. The “cleansing” of Palestinians from their land was an integral part of the Zionist plan to colonise as much of the land as possible, even more than the wildly unfair percentage allocated to them by United Nations in 1947. Indeed, judging by the apartheid wall being built illegally on Palestinian land, and the obscene illegal “settlements” – let’s just call them colonies, shall we, for that is what they are – this quest for ever more land to quench the Zionist thirst is ongoing. 1948, it seems, was just one phase of many, including the war of 1967.

As the legitimate rights of the Palestinians are being usurped by the “international community” led by Zionism’s puppets in Washington, now more than ever before the truth needs to be put before the people. Publications such

as the *Al-Aqsa* Journal deserve our thanks for doing just that. Now the ball is in our court. Humanity cannot claim that we have not been informed. Ignorance and inaction is not an option any more.

Ibrahim Hewitt,
Leicester

Notes

1. John Murray (Publishers) Ltd, 1999
2. Benny Morris, For the Record, January 14, 2004, the Guardian
3. Reaffirmation “of the right of all peoples, notably of those mentioned in General Assembly resolution 2787”, United Nations, 12 December 1972.
4. Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld Publications Ltd., 2006.



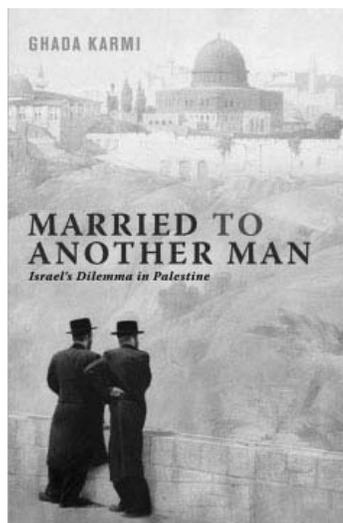
Books Available For Review

1. Failing Peace, Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, Sara Roy
2. The Israel-Palestine Conflict, One Hundred Years of War (New Edition), James L. Gelvin
3. Making Israel, Benny Morris (Ed)
4. The Middle East in International Relations, Power, Politics and Ideology, Fred Halliday

If you would like to review one of these titles, please email info@aqsa.org.uk

Married to Another Man. Israel's Dilemma in Palestine

BY GHADA KARMI, London, Pluto Press, 2007, ISBN 0745320651, pp. 315, £14.99



Ghada Karmi's first book on Palestine, *In Search of Fatima, A Palestinian Story* (London, Verso, 2002) was written from the personal viewpoint of a Palestinian refugee who came to settle in Britain in 1949. Though a very different work, *Married to Another Man* provides a natural complement and sequel to its predecessor by moving from the personal viewpoint to a global perspective. It contains the same frankness and objectivity as the previous work, and is, as one would expect, very well written and clearly presented. The book contains a good analytical index and the Preface sets out the author's purpose (p. ix-x):

'My chief reason for writing this book was to lay out my vision for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is both a personal and political imperative. On the personal level I had long felt that I would never be at peace if I did not see this terrible conflict resolved in my lifetime [...] But on the political level, it seemed to me that the prevailing pessimism about finding a satisfactory solution was unwarranted if one thought through the logic of the situation. This book examines the various solutions to the conflict and concludes that, logically, only one is possible. [This book] is not about the one-state solution as such and yet it also is. Much of it is devoted to ... a necessary review and analysis of the previous history and events that led me to advocate the position I reached. [...] This review ... led irresistibly in my mind to the only conclusion possible in the circumstances. [...] The one-state solution

is no easy topic to write about. It places one immediately amongst a marginal minority and attracts accusations of utopianism, anti-Semitism or even treachery. [...] Yet it is a solution that must be faced squarely and subjected to honest debate because ... it is the only way forward for both Palestinians and Israelis.

This is a powerful, radical and compelling book, remarkable for its intellectual courage in facing up to an intractable conflict, doing justice to a wide range of viewpoints, and getting to the root of the problem. As the author insists, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not 'very complicated', as often believed, but 'in essence quite simple: a European settler movement had displaced an indigenous population and wilfully denied its basic rights, inevitably provoking resistance and incessant strife' (p. 201). This book provides within the limits of one volume as comprehensive an analysis and history of this conflict as can be found anywhere, spanning its origins to the present day. The preface is not dated, but the book was completed towards the end of 2006, and the author's comments on more recent developments in Palestine can be found in the *Guardian*, 17 July 2007.

A short summary cannot do justice to the range and depth of this book's contents. Successive chapters chart the route that has led to the present-day impasse: the damage done to the Arabs and the Arab world by the creation of Israel at their expense (chapter 1); the reasons why most Jews world-wide support the state of Israel and identify with it (chapter 2); Western backing for Israel that seems almost impervious to reality and, in the case of the US, is driven by the exorbitant influence of the pro-Israel lobby in alliance with Christian Zionists (chapter 3); the long, tortuous and ineffectual attempts to provide a solution, which have left the Palestinians in a worse position than before (chapters 4 and 5); and the bankruptcy of the two-state solution, deliberately rendered unworkable by Israel but still the declared goal of the so-called international community (chapter 6). Chapter 7 then turns to the only option left which has a chance of leading to a lasting settlement by providing some justice for both sides, viz. the one-state solution. A distinction is drawn between two divergent models, that of the 'bi-national state' and that of the 'secular democratic state', and arguments for and against both are discussed. In the author's view, only the secular democratic state satisfies the essential criteria. An Epilogue ('The End of the Zionist Dream?') summarises the argument: as recognised by some Israelis (Meron Benvenisti, Haim Hanegbi), the Zionist project, which sought to impose an intrusive foreign element on the pre-existing population, was flawed from the start and is therefore unsustainable (p. 266; cf. Benny Morris cited

pp. 1-2). Despite formidable obstacles, the one-state solution offers the only way forward, and, as hinted at in the concluding lines, western predominance, the main prop of Israel for so long, cannot be taken for granted forever in a world that is rapidly changing, partly as a consequence of imperial overreach.

This reviewer finds himself in the rare and happy position of being in virtually complete agreement with everything said in this book. A westerner himself, with no direct link with either Palestine or Israel, he fully sympathises with the author's searing condemnation of western double-standards - partiality towards Israel, prejudice against the Palestinians - which lie at the root of the problem (e.g. pp. 4-5, 118-20, 195 and throughout the book). But at the same time he is in no position to advise either the Palestinians or the Israelis on the path forward that only they can determine through dialogue with each other. Predictions about the future are exceptionally difficult to make at this juncture (cf. Preface p. x), especially in the declining phase of a Bush presidency which is fraught with danger. But this is a book that ought to be compulsory reading for all those concerned with this question, and especially for all politicians in the West. They will probably not like what they read and might prefer not to be reminded of the West's continuing responsibility for the tragedies of the Middle East, of which Palestine is the most conspicuous and persistent. At least one hopes that they will approach the question with the same openness of mind and rigour that are displayed throughout this book.

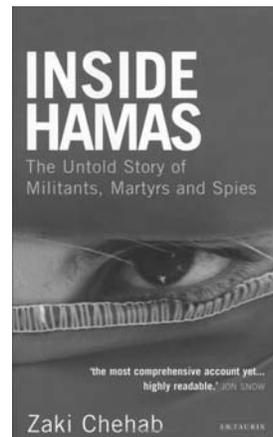
Honorary Lecturer,
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Inside Hamas, The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies

BY ZAKI CHEHAB, London & New York, I. B. Tauris & Co., 2007, ISBN 10-1845113896, pp. 240, £17.99



The electoral victory of HAMAS and the subsequent political problems in the Occupied Territories has sent shock-waves around the world, making serious study of the movement essential. This book more than adequately fills the need. Written by a Palestinian journalist from a refugee camp, the account is readable, informative, objective and at times even touchingly personal. For example, the author, born in Tyre, speaks movingly, if somewhat dishearteningly, of his first visit to his homeland: 'despite the fact that I was standing in the land of my forefathers, it was I who was the stranger', demonstrated by the body-searching and questioning by Israeli soldiers (p.vii).

Much of the strength of this book derives from the personal interviews the author held with people such as Yasser Arafat and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Written in journalistic style, the book is very engaging, although the author has not neglected the study of documentary evidence. It is very much a 'warts and all' book, which contains some surprises. Perhaps it is best to begin with the surprise that struck the world with the HAMAS election triumph in 2006. Condi Rice is quoted as exclaiming 'Why was it that nobody saw it coming? ...It does say something about us not having a good enough finger on the pulse' (p.1).

That quote speaks volumes about the wisdom of US policy both in Palestine and the Middle East in general. However, the surprise that this book offers is that contrary to some claims at the time, including a statement by Dr Rice, that HAMAS itself was surprised by its victory, turns out to be false, p. 2. In fact, in a chapter entitled *Choreographed Victory*, Chehab demonstrates that the victory was the product of an electoral strategy that would make any professional lobbyist green with envy. Dr Zahar, later Foreign Minister in the HAMAS government, explained that they instructed their followers to either avoid answering questions about their intentions, or give a 'misleading response'. Perhaps this is why professional posters and the much-vaunted Israeli intelligence service got it so wrong.

It is clear that HAMAS applied sophisticated *military* strategy to its political manoeuvring.

HAMAS were also very professional in getting out the vote on the day itself (pp. 4-5), combining a tactic of highlighting 'the inadequacies of their opponents' with the galvanising of their supporters. They mobilised tens of thousands for their rallies, (p.6). Perhaps British Muslims, who seek a peaceful, electoral way to aid their suffering brethren in Palestine could learn something from this voting strategy. Certainly, HAMAS does not seem to suffer from the resigned, defeatist attitudes that one often encounters among UK Muslims when it comes to using their votes to influence the situation in Palestine.

Chehab proceeds to give us a history of the formation of HAMAS, rooted in the Muslim Brotherhood, all of which is fairly well-known. Also well-known, but worth repeating, is how initially the Israelis were happy to see Islamist currents arise in the Occupied Territories as rivals to their perceived main foe, the nationalist PLO (p.20). Perhaps the greatest lesson that can be learnt from this is for those American politicians who do obeisance to the Israelis, and especially the present administration, which has sent police and security officials to Lod airport and Jerusalem to learn from the Israelis in how to handle 'Islamic terrorists'. The fact that the Israelis made such a catastrophic blunder as to encourage the Islamists against the nationalists surely negates them as 'experts' in this field.

Sheikh Yassin emerges from these pages as a quiet, determined and clever planner. He was not in a hurry, and was careful to lay the foundations for all-round social, political and military body that could eventually take on the Israelis, (p. 21). HAMAS itself formally emerged in December 1987 (p.25). How durable and well-planned the organisation is has been demonstrated by its survival despite 'numerous arrests' and assassinations: 'A new leadership would emerge... and once more engaging the Israelis by attacking their army posts and patrols'.

The chapter on HAMAS' military wing, the *Ez Ed Din Al Qassam Brigades*, is especially interesting in presenting the story of one of their most famous *mujahidin*, Yehia Ayyash – 'the Engineer' (p.54). So effective was he as a fighter, and in eluding the Israelis through disguise (notably as a religious Jewish settler!) that Rabin once remarked in the Knesset 'I am afraid he might be sitting between us here in the Knesset'. It was Ayyash who was responsible for the first HAMAS martyrdom operation, in retaliation for the Hebron massacre in 1994, through the agency of Raed Zakarneh (p.56).

We have to wait two more chapters before a detailed study on 'The Martyrs' is found, and arguably, the subject would have been better handled at this point, but once it is addressed, the 'successes' and 'failures' are examined with objectivity. Probably the most interesting section deals with female martyr bombers, (p.87). There was initially some unease about the practice, but once it had been decided that it was compatible with Shari'ah, it was accepted.

Among the obstacles that HAMAS faces – repeated several times in the book – is the large number of Palestinians who are working as spies for the Israelis, thought to be 'in excess of 20,000' (p.69). Although some

have been bought, others have been blackmailed by being drugged and tricked into compromising photos which could be devastating to family honour in a conservative Muslim society. One wonders why Islamic leaders have not made a public statement exonerating anyone who has been set-up in this way, inviting such victims to declare what has happened, and issuing a *fatwa* that the honour of such people and their families is not besmirched by such dirty Israeli practices. That might undermine Israeli policy in this regard.

The two other aspects of the book that bear notice are HAMAS' policy on peace and its attitude towards Al-Qaida. It is well-known that Sheikh Yassin was willing to establish a long truce with the Israelis if they withdrew from the West Bank and Gaza, leaving it to future generations of Palestinians to liberate the rest of Palestine (p.36-37). Chehab quotes a HAMAS senior as stating 'You will never find anyone in Hamas who will recognize Israel's right to exist. If you do, he is a liar' (p. 203). Obviously this, and the policy of military resistance, complicates relations with the West (p.151).

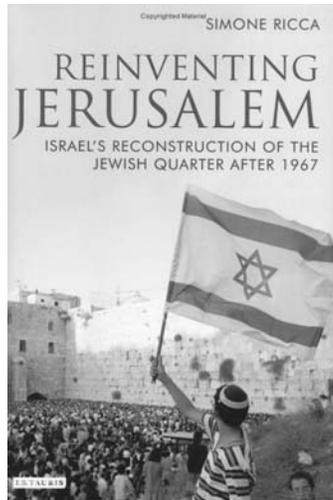
However, given the lack of positive support by the EU and even more so the USA for Fatah when they did play ball, it is questionable whether HAMAS would gain much by cultivating such relationship through jettisoning a major clause in their Charter. Indeed, HAMAS itself has been diplomatically successful in other ways. Through its relationship with Syria and Iran, it has ties with Hezbollah, and was instrumental in raising support for the latter in the 2006 war, when America's allies arguably played the sectarian card against the Shia militia, (p.146).

One major challenge HAMAS faces in the West is the analogy with Al-Qaida. Chehab shows how the Israelis have been keen to make the comparison, and even claimed Al-Qaida cells in Gaza before they existed (p.182), and further making the unlikely allegation that they worked with Hezbollah! In fact, Zawahiri has condemned HAMAS for taking the Parliamentary road, and HAMAS reciprocated by condemning Al-Qaida, emphasising that HAMAS does not militarily operate outside Palestine (p.190). However, Al-Qaida has made some minor inroads into Palestine, and Chehab could have considered the possible effect on HAMAS if Western obduracy continues, or if the group compromised; as this could well lead to burgeoning support for Al-Qaida in the country.

In conclusion, we should say that Chehab's book is an indispensable guide to the organisation whose successful campaign in the freest election in the Middle East has turned the region upside down. That victory showed that Islamist groups can indeed win power by the ballot instead of relying on the bullet, but it equally demonstrated that Western powers are no happier when they take the electoral road than when they engage in armed conflict, and it also showed that militant Islamists, such as Al-Qaida, will both oppose such moves and wait in the wings to replace such groups. In this regard, Chehab's volume is not just a history book, it is a warning for the future.

Reinventing Jerusalem, Israel's Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter after 1967

BY SIMONE RICCA, London/New York, I.B. Tauris, 2007, ISBN: 978 1 84511 387 2, pp.258, £54.50



Simone Ricca, a conservation architect, has produced an outstanding piece of work. His aim for writing this book has been “the feeling that the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem represented a violent fracture in the long history and evolution of the city.” For him the reconstructed Jewish Quarter can also be regarded as a “condensed version of the entire Israeli experiment.” (p. XI) The ideologically motivated reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter also demonstrates the changing nature of Zionist ideology. Jerusalem did not feature prominently in Zionism and played if anything a negative role prior to 1967. The secular founders of Zionism regarded the old city and its religious Jewish inhabitants as a remnant of traditional Jewish society, which they rejected. The new Zionist enterprise was secular in outlook and religion was replaced by nationalism. Tel Aviv was built as a new ‘Hebrew’ city that came to symbolize the revival of Jewry and the creation of the ‘new’ Hebrew society. It was only after the war in 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank that Jerusalem and the old city became central in the Zionist construction of history. In the eyes of a conservation architect it became “an artificial island, an inwardly turned enclave. It looked to me like the very proof of the ‘otherness’ at the centre of the Zionist enterprise, just the opposite of the much sought after idea of continuity and rebirth, of a bridge between ancient Israelites and modern Israelis.” (p. XII)

The book is about the connection between urban restoration or rather reconstruction and political ideologies and the impact of ideology (Zionism) on urban planning. The restoration of the Jewish Quarter was a reconstruction that had nothing to do with the restoration of all historic buildings. On the contrary historic buildings

that had no value for the Zionist ideology were simply destroyed.

The book consists of six chapters. In the first chapter the author investigates the connection between planning, nationalism, heritage and reconstruction. The second chapter is dedicated to the creation of the Jewish quarter, the legal framework and land confiscation. In the third chapter, Ricca looks at the guidelines for reconstruction. In the fourth chapter the author compares other examples of urban restoration with the Jerusalem case. The fifth chapter is dedicated to UNESCO and Jerusalem and in the last chapter Ricca engages in a comparative approach between Israel and Palestine and the role of political ideologies and nationalism in the case of urban reconstruction.

The author clearly differentiates between ‘restoration’ and ‘reconstruction’ and argues that these terms are often misused. A restoration project respects the original material and authentic documents whereas a reconstruction project does the opposite; it aims at rewriting history and imposing the dominant ideology on the past and reading the past through that ideology disregarding other histories. Clearly, the urban planning in Jerusalem and the old city after the war in 1967 falls into the category of reconstruction when ideologues, academics, politicians, city planners in the State of Israel tried to construct Jerusalem as a “mythical and eternal Jewish capital” ignoring historical facts that demonstrate otherwise. “Although the symbolic centre of Judaism, Jerusalem was a city without an important Jewish community for many historic phases. Even before the destruction of the Temple part of the Jewish population had left Palestine and Jerusalem to settle in the main centres of the Roman Empire and along the Mediterranean coastline.” (p. 17) At the end of the 19th century the maximum number of inhabitants in the Jewish neighbourhood of the old city could not have been more than 11,000-12,000 people. (p. 20) The number of Jews decreased further and in the 1940s there were only about 3000 Jews left, the poorest and most religious. Therefore the Jewish presence in Jerusalem, for the past 2000 years has been “relatively minor and discontinuous, a fact reflected in the rare presence of Jewish constructions before the nineteenth century. It appears, therefore, that the very fabric of the city contradicts the Israeli nationalist vision of Jerusalem as the age-old centre of a vibrant Jewish community. It follows then that, to ‘adapt’ the city to its image in the dominant discourse of Zionism, the urban physical fabric had to be transformed.” The erasure of the Palestinian Arab past served to demonstrate that Jerusalem had always been the “eternal Jewish capital” notwithstanding historical evidence to the contrary. The Israeli Zionist approach to history also manipulates the complex and rich Jewish history and invents a past that fits Zionist ideology and disregards therefore alternative historical evidence. This approach “to history is in fact twofold: on the one hand, while celebrating antiquity as

the period of Jewish national sovereignty it consciously downplays the post-Temple phase in exile, while on the other it celebrates and amplifies the ‘continuous’ Jewish presence in Eretz Israel (in opposition to the Diaspora).” (p. 23) This approach to history (an invention of a tradition) and a myth that serves the Zionist ideology and the Israeli state is evident in the reconstruction of the old city. The urban planning should serve to demonstrate the “eternal” Jewish presence in the city. But it was not only the old city that should demonstrate Jewish presence. Since the occupation following the war in 1967, “many new and gigantic quarters for Jews only, planned and built on expropriated East Jerusalem land, have transformed the image and demography of the city according to Israel’s will and strategy.” (p. 31)

How important the Jewish Quarter became to Israel’s ideology and symbolism is demonstrated through the nearly unlimited budget not to mention the land confiscation. Despite the fact that there were “almost no Jews living in the heart of the Christian quarters, or in the nearby but completely separated and exclusively Muslim-inhabited Moroccan quarter” (p. 48) the latter was demolished, expropriated and incorporated into the new extended Jewish Quarter. The restoration of the alleged Jewish quarter therefore also served the purpose of expropriating more land from Palestinians and other non-Jews. The borders of the Jewish quarter were not clear and shifted constantly during the 19th and early 20th century. Jews rented their houses from Muslims and only about 20 % of the houses in the quarter (a quarter with no clear borders) were owned by Jews, an indication not only of the economic status of the Jews in the old city but also a sign of neighbourly relations, mixed dwelling and even co-existence – a fact that is abhorrent to Zionism and the Israeli state that embraces segregation at a high cost to all inhabitants of the land but in particular the Palestinians. Of the buildings expropriated in 1967, only 105 were Jewish-owned and more importantly the “Jewish-owned properties were not necessarily clustered in a single contiguous space. Many were scattered among Muslim-owned and inhabited courtyards and quarters and, therefore, even knowing the precise location of Jewish-owned properties would not necessarily help one to define the size of the original Jewish quarter.” (p. 51) When the land was expropriated an estimated 5500 Palestinians were expelled with the approval of the highest Israeli court in order to populate it with Jews only. Zionist ideology dismissed historical and archaeological evidence that showed a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic past but did not fit its agenda. It therefore had to invent a past that never existed in order to justify expulsion and ethnic cleansing. For the mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek, Jerusalem “is the Jews’ city and whenever they have the chance, they return and rebuild it. ... The Arabs were only subtenants and did not care much about the property, now the real tenants have come back and we take proper care of this city.” (p. 54) This argument

brought forward by a secular and leftist political leader who grew up in Vienna and is highly regarded in Israeli and Western circles as a man who promotes understanding and tolerance shows the limits of co-existence in a nationalist atmosphere.

The book provides insight into the link between nationalism, ideology and corruption and how a corrupt ruling class used ideology for its own purpose. Israel’s ruling classes dominated by the Labour party carved out for themselves large portions of the cake on occasion of the reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter. According to an Israeli reporter “many of the heavily subsidized apartments in the quarter went to Housing Ministry officials and other persons of influence. ... One large apartment (...) was sold to a Harry Zibenberg, who is not even an Israeli resident.” (p. 94)

The author also investigates the role of the international community, in particular UNESCO and asks the question whether there existed an awareness of the ideological nature of the reconstruction plan. And indeed the reports indicate that the information was clearly available and the ideological motives of Israel’s secular ruling elite obvious. Despite formal opposition from the UN and UNESCO and “in full view of the special UNESCO envoy who for 26 years held the office of special representative of the director-general for Jerusalem” (p.153) the Israeli state had *carte blanche* to carry out the nationalistic policies and erase any non-Jewish past in the Jewish Quarter.

In the last chapter the author engages in comparative analysis and demonstrates the influence of political ideologies on restoration in the case of Israel and Palestine. He comes to the conclusion that the ethno-nationalistic nature of urban restoration projects are not exclusively Israeli but that all “urban renovation programmes follow an ideological programme and involve rereading national history according to the needs of the ruling power.” (p. 194) Therefore those in power – and this would apply to Palestinians as well - will therefore only allow their version of history and exclude other narratives. The multicultural and multi-religious heritage of cities and places can thus be ignored.

The book is very well researched, using a variety of sources (including some old pictures of Jerusalem), archival material, interviews with the city planners, scholarly research as well as critical Israeli voices such as that of the late professor and critical thinker Yeshayahu Leibowitz, one of the first opponents of the Israeli occupation and an ardent advocate against the misuse of Judaism for political purposes.

The book is yet another important contribution to Israel’s ethnic cleansing policy, land expropriation, displacement of Palestinians (and other non-Jews) and construction of historical myth that do not do justice to the complexity of the rich and diverse past of the land. It also contributes to our understanding of the multi-layered reasons for the conflict and the role Christian Western

countries played in it. The book demonstrates that “what has been built within the Old City is the outcome of an ethno-nationalist policy passed off as a scientific-archaeological venture and an architectural plan of urban restoration, but not a restoration project at all.” (p. 154) It also shows how architects, city planners, builders and bureaucrats played a role in the erasure of the Palestinian past and became compliant in the ethnic cleansing efforts of the Israeli state.

“The newly created ‘ghetto’ in the Old City of Jerusalem is not just the embodiment of the political will to diminish the Palestinian presence in the city and to assert Jewish ‘rights’ over it. It is also a dramatic and long-lasting offence to a site whose very significance involves each and every person on the planet, a site that (...) the then director-general of UNESCO, described in 1969 as ‘a priceless treasure of mankind’s heritage’, and whose importance goes far beyond the contingent Israeli/Palestinian struggle.” (p. 155)

It is a must read for everyone interested in the roots of the conflict as well as the solution to it as the Israeli case in many ways is not unique in its ethno-centric policies, its invention of a tradition, its myth-creating and the dominance of one national narrative that is simply historically incorrect. The solution therefore is a call for the end of nationalism and colonialism, which would bring peace, justice and dignity to all inhabitants of all countries. As the author points out: “Only a new political perspective that guaranteed all the communities the same dignity and an active role in planning the city could lead to urban heritage policies that were capable of incorporating multiple historical narratives.” (p. 195)

Finally, there is one small mistake in the book: The Jews in Jerusalem prior to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 did not live on halakha (which would mean Jewish law) but haluka (which is indeed the international Jewish charity fund with the aim to support religious Jews living in the Holy Land). (p. 20).

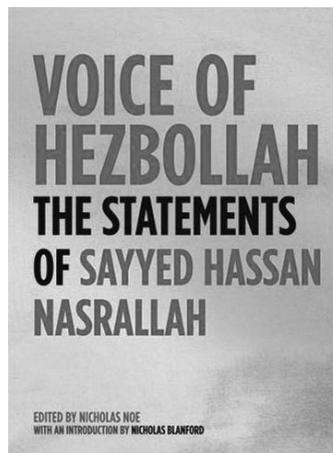
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Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements Of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah

BY NICHOLAS NOE, Verso, 2007, ISBN 101844671
534, Pp320, £12,99



Hezbollah, known for organized militant resistance in Lebanon, piques curiosity and controversy as does its leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Noe chronicles Nasrallah’s interviews taking place from 1986-2005 in *Voice of Hezbollah: The Statements Of Sayyed Hassam Nasrallah*. The book, divided in three historical segments, consequently offers a comprehensive review of Hezbollah’s development, vision, and accomplishments while providing insight into Nasrallah’s political thought. Major historical episodes reviewed in the book include the mid-1980s to the 1990s, the years 2000 to 2004, and finally 2005 and beyond.

For those unfamiliar with Hezbollah’s history, agenda, and social context; *Voice of Hezbollah* includes an introductory segment by Nicholas Blanford. This segment likewise reveals details of Nasrallah’s life including his education, political awakening, and social background. Blanford describes Nasrallah’s initial involvement with the Movement of the Deprived, its military wing Amal, and his eventual move into Hezbollah following a secular versus Islamist schism within Amal. This introduction likewise outlines Hezbollah’s political agenda involving resistance to Israeli occupation and general de-secularization. Also introduced are related issues ranging from the Palestinian intifada to Israel’s retreat in 2006 following the July War. An articulation of Hezbollah’s overall vision thus comes forth from the book. The organization’s “Open Letter”, their political manifesto, clearly states its mission which expresses the desire for political and religious autonomy and self-determination. In general, Hezbollah purveys an Islamist agenda with the potential to network with other Islamist organizations and states. The hallmark of Hezbollah, thus, becomes its ability to maneuver between servicing its

respective geographic region and paying homage to its benefactor Iran and an overarching Islamic social and political orientation. As Blanford explains about Hezbollah:

The alliance challenges the US, Israel, and Washington's Arab allies for control of the Middle East. The alliance is attempting to draw Lebanon firmly back into its orbit, thus denying the US its Levantine toehold, and reversing the Bush administration's self-declared policy "success" in having helped Lebanon gain independence from Syria in 2005 (12).

A major accomplishment of the book entails examination of Hezbollah's relations with not only Amal, Pan-Arab politics, and the West but with particular nation-states. Those considered include not only Palestine and Israel but Syria, Iran, and the United States. Positioned as a regional resistance unit, Hezbollah sought to free Lebanon from Israeli occupation and domination as well as establish both independence from and friendly relations with Syria whilst maintaining regional autonomy despite close relations to and financial backing from Iran. Because of the US's close ties with Israel, Hezbollah similarly rejected the hegemony of the United States and its handling of Middle Eastern affairs. This stance, as reveal in the following statement by Nasrallah highlights that reflection: "We blame Israel for this blood-soaked carnage, and blame its protector, the United States of America, which is responsible for all Israel's massacres and all the destruction, murder, and displacement it wreaks (53)."

While Noe notes Hezbollah's reference to the United States as "The Great Satan", he furthermore delves into the fundamentally troubled relation between Hezbollah and the associated state of Israel, Zionism, and Judaism in general. Depending on the context spoken from, Nasrallah speaks about Jews as lacking inherent malice toward Hezbollah's vision despite the tendency to do otherwise while speaking to an audience more receptive to language leaning in another direction. In one speech, for instance, Nasrallah states that the organization's war challenges not Jews or their religion per se but rather Zionism and Israeli racism (186). Yet, in a subsequent speech only two months later, he uses divergent language referring to Jews as "vagabonds" and bidding both the United States and Israel demise.

Voice of Hezbollah also covers Hezbollah's tactical engagements and casualties. Such issues discussed include those as wide ranging as assassinations and strategy, specifically as associated with Hezbollah's style of guerilla warfare. Of particular interest is the tendency toward low-

budget operations against the occupiers, or as Nasrallah describes a "war of attrition" (63). The Israeli assassination of Sayyed Abbas Mussawi, Hezbollah's secretary-general, in 1992 receives attention as does the existence of an Israeli anti-Hezbollah assassination list (60). Under Nasrallah's leadership, notably, after Mussawi's assassination, Hezbollah turned from its traditional "human wave" tactic (7). Nasrallah curtailed this tactic, most emblematically associated with sending young men, or boys, arms only with a Koran in droves to stave off an armed enemy army, opting instead for strategy and specialization.

Ultimately Noe accomplishes a delicate feat, which is a revealing of Nasrallah's nuanced handling of various audiences. Having committed himself to avoiding ideological conflicts, Nasrallah evidently carefully couches his language vis-à-vis venue and audience. This careful positioning, as demonstrated through the interviews contained in *Voices of Hezbollah*, extends beyond speech and into actual tactical and strategic political actions and alliances. While Hezbollah consequently might otherwise appear to exist at the mercy of international interest, or in spite of international contestation, the organization nonetheless more accurately comes forth through *Voices of Hezbollah* as an independent and innovative Islamist interest group servicing audiences beyond its own boundaries whilst dedicating itself to local and regional struggles. As Nasrallah's explains: "Hezbollah is therefore an Islamic, Lebanese jihadist movement that has its own independent internal and local decision-making process, and its own independent leadership and cadres (135)." In other words, despite the guerilla organization's participation in a global Islamist struggle, it maintains its own internal integrity.

Those Hezbollah espouses to serve include the deprived, disposed, and otherwise oppressed. Its vision, ultimately a liberatory vision entrenched in theological commitments and rhetoric, signifies a truly genuine and ultimately successful movement toward national and cultural independence. Although primarily a warring guerilla entity operating for the purpose of riding Lebanon of Israeli occupation, Hezbollah epitomizes a greater social movement toward justice and salvation for many. In the words of Sayyed Hassab Nasrallah: "Before being a battle with guns and weapons, it is a battle of ideology, faith, loyalty, truth, reliance on God, aspiration to martyrdom, renunciation of worldly pleasures, the love of others, and the desire to serve them (177)."

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