



AJDS Newsletter

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The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

August 2009

Nuanced view must be heard!

It is not black and white. No matter which way you look at the Israeli/Palestinian conflict the same conclusion is reached: matters are not clear cut. It just is not true that one side is always right and the other side is invariably wrong.

But of course that's the kind of view that one hears most often because those who see the world without shades of grey usually shout the loudest. Time after time one gets the hardline-one sidedness where the facts do not get a run, or at most are selectively picked to fit in with the view the writer had long ago predetermined. You only need to know whether the writer belongs to the Israel-first or Palestine-first crowd, and you can join the dots yourself blindfolded.

Take the recently concluded first Fatah Congress in 20 years. There are those like the Angry Arab (As'ad AbuKhalil) and Antony Loewenstein who wrote about their contempt "for these wealthy, indulged, corrupt Palestinian 'leaders'". They were neatly matched by their pro-Israeli counterparts who spoke about a setback to the peace process and slammed the "confrontational talk like blaming Yasser Arafat's death on Israel." The US Anti-defamation League's Abraham Foxman said that some of the rhetoric coming out of the congress was "not in line with the American initiative to bring the parties closer together."

Let's ignore for the moment the actions (and rhetoric) of Israeli leaders during that same time-span and examine the Fatah congress. Neither the critics from the Left or Right seem to have spent much time looking at what really happened there. There were indeed lots of disappointments. Not one woman was elected to this supposedly secular organisation's ruling body, putting it far behind its Hamas adversaries. Many of the old corrupt leaders are back. But on the other hand, genuine debate took

place, there was open criticism of the leadership expressed, and many who are not tinged by the corruption were elected. Further, voting wasn't rigged and it took place in front of the TV cameras. There were factions and lists but the elections at least appeared to have been less manipulated than some similar Australian political gatherings. These are positive achievements.

A similar kind of selective blindness applies to the impending Leonard Cohen concert in Israel. Seven years ago the AJDS expressed a general view that those who wish to boycott Israel are on whole motivated by genuine concerns but we did not share their choice of tactics which was counterproductive. A lot dust has blown in the Negev since then [not much water flows in the rivers of either Australia or Israel] but those who lead the campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions [BDS] do not fill me with confidence, because of their reaction to Leonard Cohen's move. Rather than cancel his Israel concert, he decided to go ahead but donate all the proceeds to Palestinian and Israeli victims of the conflict.

To an outsider this seems a partial victory. If the aim of BDS is to convince Israelis that there is a price to pay for the Occupation, then the message should be getting through: which future artist will perform in Israel if s/he is not going to keep any of the proceeds? Also how many Israelis, who overwhelmingly endorsed the Cast Lead operation, will be happy to give money, however indirectly, to their victims? It is probably not a coincidence that ticket prices in Israel are much higher than in other venues in Leonard Cohen's current world tour.

But instead of jumping for joy, the BDS movement have spent their time lambasting Cohen for performing in Israel at all. One wonders if they really want to deliver a mes-

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This is it!

The Tachlis* session

We are finally talking strategies!

FOURTH AND FINAL AJDS PLANNING WORKSHOP

Monday 17 August 2009

7.00pm - 9.00pm

Alma Road Community House, 200 Alma Rd, St Kilda East

This is a very important event, so we have picked a time that we think will maximise attendance and hired a hall that should accommodate as many people as possible.

It's the future of your organisation, so please come along and participate!

Tachlis* Yiddish for brass tacks, practicalities

**The Australian Jewish
Democratic Society Inc**
(Affiliated with the Jewish
Community Council of Victoria)

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***The views expressed in this
Newsletter are not necessarily those of the AJDS.
These are expressed in its
own statements.***

What we stand for:

- Social justice and human rights.
- Opposition to the vilification and mandatory detention of asylum seekers.
- The struggle against racism, antisemitism in particular.
- Non-violent paths to conflict resolution.
- In line with this, the search for a negotiated solution to the Israel/Palestinian conflict.
- Equal rights, including land rights and justice, for Indigenous Australians.

In this issue...

*The planning process that the AJDS has been undergoing over the past few months has done its bit to sharpen our minds in other ways. It has certainly fired the imagination as to what we could do with the Newsletter. Stay tuned. In the meantime it has driven home the point that we spend a lot of time concentrating on the ephemeral while we probably should spend some of it in considering long-term views and basic guidelines. So when the issue of boycotts was raised in connection with the Melbourne International Film Festival we decided to concentrate on the long view. Following a brief factual introduction, we have **Gideon Levy** explaining why Israelis are so oblivious to the Occupation and the **Combatants for Peace** arguing the case for prioritising anti-Occupation activities. A contrary view is put by **Lucy Nusseibeh** and **Shelley Ostroff** who contend that dialogue between the two sides has an intrinsic value. You can read all about it on **pp 8-10**.*

*Another issue that was placed upon us was the role of the media, in particularly the role of the individual journalist. **Brad Jacobson** takes up the developments of that role using the example of Walter Cronkite as a case study on **pp 6-7**.*

*We have not neglected the "news" part of the Newsletter. A translation of some disturbing aspects of afforestation in the Negev on **page 5**, will make you look at the Blue Box in a new light. **Margaret Jacobs** reports on a visitor from Afghanistan on **page 12** while **Pamela Curr** tells us more on the treatment of overseas students on **page 4**.*

*We don't like running obituaries, but in many respects they act as historical markers. Those of us who were on university campuses after the 1967 War will remember **Amos Kenan**, although few would have heard of **Sara Alexander**. There is a lot to learn from both their lives and you can do it on **pages 13 and 14-15** respectively.*

*We did not have room for Raisins and Almonds or the light-hearted cartoon with which it usually enriched but do not despair, we do have an article to lift your spirits. **Paul Eedle** has a wonderful vision of a futuristic Middle East peace and best of all he only places its start a short time into the future.*

Finally a plea: let's see many of you at our planning session. It is your organisation and your Newsletter!

Sol Salbe

(Continued from page 1)

sage to Israelis or are they more interested in punitive action against Israel regardless of the political consequences?

Those on the other side are acting just as foolishly, attributing the desire for action against the Occupation to people's whims, antisemitism, media bias, bad Israeli PR – anything other than a natural response to Israel's policy and actions.

There are dozens of other examples with which one can go on. But you don't have to be totally one-sided to possess a pre-set notion of your view which allows you to dispense with the facts. Some people choose to apportion blame to both sides equally. Statistically speaking they may get closer to the mark but it is still a faulty way of thinking. One is still unlikely to come up with meaningful conclusions if one ignores the facts.

It is for this reason that I personally don't like the term "even-handed". In no conflict are the two sides equally responsible for the situation at every stage. Whether the conflict is between Muslims and Hindus in India or Greeks and Macedonians in Europe share of the blame is something to be examined rather than assumed ex ante that it is 50:50.

Those who want to be fair to both sides, because both sides claim have some merit, should not be even-handed. They should be nuanced and considered. It is that voice that needs to be heard and it is up to us to work hard to ensure that it does.

Sol Salbe

AJDS planning process to culminate in strategies session

Since April this year a group of diehard stalwarts have met over a total of 12 hours to discuss and tease out the aspects of AJDS that make it a unique and valuable organisation. In doing this we've looked at the history of AJDS and the socio-political context in which we've been operating. We've appreciated the efforts of our founding members and looked at where we are today and the ways in which we want to develop in the future. We've inspired ourselves by creating a snapshot of the world to which we'd like to contribute and then got practical by analysing key issues we're trying to address and setting goals for the next three years.

Highlights of this work are summarised below.

Our vision for an AJDS world:

A world characterised by:

- Respect for culture through the filter of human rights
- Environmental sustainability
- Inclusive of our collective Jewish experience/heritage
- Nonviolent/peaceful conflict resolution
- Equitable distribution of resources

Priority issues at the heart of AJDS:

- Climate Change
- Middle East
- Social Justice

The key problem we're trying to address is the lack of "hearing within the Jewish community of the AJDS point of view". This was thought to be due to:

- The Jewish community choosing not to hear – the AJDS *brand* is not accepted and our message is confronting

AJDS doesn't reach enough Jewish people – misses many progressive Jews who don't read AJN

Only a narrow range of views are accepted by the Jewish community

Goals for AJDS to work towards achieving over the next 3 years are:

To be a legitimate and responsible progressive Jewish voice raising awareness amongst policy and decision makers, political parties, social media, progressive Palestinian organisations, and thinking Jews about our three core issues – climate change, the Middle East and social justice.

To lay a foundation for a strong, vibrant and progressive Jewish voice into the future.

To increase AJDS's credibility and recognition as a professional organisation by strengthening and clarifying formal structures and processes

The critical next step is to develop clear and doable strategies by which we will realise our goals. We invite all members who want to contribute to vibrant and sustainable organisation to participate in our next workshop.

When: Monday 17 August 7.00pm-9.00pm

Where: the Alma Road Community House, 200 Alma Rd, St Kilda East

Please RSVP to Sol Salbe on 9318 3107 or ssalbe@westnet.com.au to receive summaries of the previous sessions. We encourage you to read these so that our meeting focuses on practical strategies rather than revisiting earlier discussions.

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society together with the Jewish Labour Bund are proud to present a special showing of

Lemon Tree

An Israeli film directed by Eran Riklis starring Hiam Abass and

The film will be followed by a short talk by, and discussion with

Maher Mughrabi

(Palestinian journalist and Foreign News Desk Editor for the *Age*)

7.00pm, Sunday 23 August

261 Hawthorn Rd Caulfield

\$15 (\$7.50 for youth group members)

Light refreshment provided. We would appreciate being notified if you are coming

Foreign students in trouble

Pamela Curr

Back in 2003 at a dinner, conversation turned to the very recent experience of an Indian student friend. This young man shared a house in Carlton with several Australian students. He had successfully passed his exams for three years when the course at his university changed structure.

He wanted the subjects in the old structure, so he sought advice from a lecturer who advised him that the old course structure was available at another university nearby and to check it out. This he did and transferred his enrolment with permission from both universities. He contacted his father who transferred the funds to pay for a full year upfront as required.

He then went to the Department of Immigration to notify them of the changes in accordance with his student visa provisions. He was placed in a small interview room, locked in, his passport was taken and one hour later he was escorted downstairs to the basement by two burly officers and put in a van with covered windows. He was told that he had breached his visa conditions by not informing the department BEFORE he changed his enrolment.

He arrived in Maribyrnong Detention Centre on a night when vanloads of fruit pickers and overstayers had just been detained. He spent two nights on the floor in the visits area as there were not enough beds to go around. He was distressed and terrified as he had never been to a prison or detention centre. He rang his friends in tears when he worked out how to find a phone, begging them to get him out. No one had been notified where he was. One of the students with whom he lived had a father who was a lawyer. Calls were made and the Department demanded the following agreement before the student would be released. The sum of \$4,000 dollars was to be taken to the Department before 11am the next day with an air ticket to India which departed within ten days. This was done and the student came out of detention. I spoke to him and offered to get him legal advice to fight what I believed was an injustice. He agreed, then rang me back three hours later and said that following a conversation with his father, he had decided to leave Australia.

I have never forgotten what he then said. "My father told me that these people (Australian officials) can ruin your whole life. They will mark your passport so that no other country or university will take you. Come home and next year you can go to America and finish your studies".



Pamela Curr

The surface has only been scratched on the abuse of overseas students. Universities and TAFEs are required to report students to the immigration department when they fail or cannot pay their fees. Over the past decade, hundreds of students have wound up in Australian detention centres. Some went home and some fought for years to stay and finish their studies, but no educational institution supported or intervened on their behalf. Many of those who went home, were broken in mind and spirit. Many but not all were from India. While we count the number of students who die in Australia, we should also count the number who were locked up in our detention centres for trivial breaches of their visas. Some failed exams, some could not pay their fees and some worked an extra hour or two in a week. Overseas students were subject to compliance raids in the middle of the night instigated by anonymous dob-ins. When their passports and visas were found to be in order, the laundry basket was searched for evidence of working hours by over-zealous compliance officers. One student I remember had worked 15 hours in one week but 25 hours in the next at the request of his employer. Those five extra hours saw him detained and his visa cancelled.

Hopefully, now that the new detention values are being put into legislation, overseas students may not suffer the horrors of being locked up and treated like criminals on the smallest pretext. However Australia will need to do a lot better for these students for them to continue to come here. We need to look honestly at how we can give them the sort of experience which benefits them and gives them value and care for the money they pay. What a far cry is this lucrative education market from more generous days when Australia educated students under the Colombo Plan!

Greens postpone OSS debate

[Contributed]

A proposed workshop on the Israel-Palestine policy at the Greens National Council in July did not take place. The workshop was linked to a submission made to the policy review process by the Inner Sydney Greens calling for a change in policy away from support for a two-state solution. This proposal and the policy change submission were, however, withdrawn by the NSW delegation as they believed that the matter required far more investigation and debate before a policy change could be sensibly considered. It was agreed that a workshop on this topic would be held in November. This will include invited speakers who would put the case for and against moving away from the current position.

The AJDS website is up and running! ajds.org.au

**Check it out for articles, news, updates,
Comments and *YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!***

Double book launch!

**You are invited to the official launch of
NOW HIT ENTER! and *FOR SAM*, the latest
creations from the fertile word processor of
our colleague **STEVE BROOK**
Thursday, 10 September, 6 pm in the Old
Ballroom, Trades Hall, Carlton.**

The Blue Box, afforestation, and Bedouin removal

Compiled by Sol Salbe

One of Israel's better known success stories concerns afforestation. With increased consciousness about the value of trees, we have regularly heard that while the rest of the world has seen deserts encroaching into what used to be forests, in Israel the opposite process is taking place. The Jewish National Fund is planting trees at an unprecedented rate, particularly in the northern Negev. Australians are particularly aware of the planting as the John Howard forest, named after the former Prime Minister, is in that region.

The benefits of the project are obvious for all to see: increased recreation area, reduction in land erosion and of course the trees' known ability to absorb carbon dioxide and thus reduce greenhouse gases.

But as Zafir Rinat pointed out in the Hebrew *Haaretz* (the article does not seem to have ever been translated into English) all is not what it seems. For the region's Bedouin inhabitants, many of whom live in unrecognised villages, the new forests are seen as a threat to their homes and the farming plots next to them.

"Over the past two years we have seen a systematic effort to turn the northern Negev into a forest region," said Atawa Abu-Frih, chair of the Public Committee for the Unrecognised Villages. "We are not against a green environment, but the afforestation program is becoming an inseparable part of the plan to take over land upon which Bedouin live, or where there are pending land claims by Bedouin."

Preventing illegal Bedouin construction

Rinat explained that according to sources involved in the process, one of the undeclared aims of the project is to plant forests in order to get hold of lands which are the potential targets of illegal Bedouin construction.

He continued: "One of the broadest afforestation plans of the JNF is concentrated in the region known as Goral [Destiny] Hills, between [the upscale Jewish town of Lehavim] and the Bedouin town Laqiya, whose status is legal. The forest will cover, according to a detailed plan, a broad area of thousands of hectares which includes not only land destined for afforestation, but farm lands upon which Bedouin now live."

Needless to say the plans meticulously detail what can and can't be done in the area. The only buildings permitted are those which serve the forests or their visitors. The plans say nothing about what will happen to the hundreds of dwellings that already exist on the land. Detailed objections to the plan submitted to the regional planning committee emphasise this point.

Some of the structures have already been demolished. In fact the struggle of the local Bedouin has been documented in *Destiny Hills*, a film by Leor Kaufman. *South Jerusalem's* Haim Watzman described his impression of the film, which he saw last month at the Jerusalem International Film Festival:

"*Destiny Hills* documents the struggle of Mohammad of the al-Talalqa Bedouin tribe of the Negev to assert his right to live on his tribe's ancestral land.

"In cinematic terms the film is impressively accomplished, and Mohammad, his wife, his four sons, and

the rest of their family are so winning, pleasant, and determined that I walked out of the film wishing they were my neighbours. The family, which lives in poverty, endures the repeated destruction by Israeli authorities of the jerry-built shacks and cinder-block structures they erect and re-erect on the Destiny Hills, land that once



From Destiny Hills

belonged to the tribe and which they still claim. They resist the government's policy of resettling the Negev towns and claim that the state has not lived up to agreements it signed years ago with the tribe's leaders.

Documentary film

"While Kaufman's film portrays life rather than makes political statements, I'm sure that most viewers' immediate reaction is to sympathise with the Bedouin and their wish to maintain (a modern version of) their traditional lifestyle on the lands their forefathers roamed. I'm not expert in the details of their dispute with the government or the terms under which their land was, with the consent of their leaders, taken from them. But as a minority population with little representation facing a strong state, it's not surprising that they've got a raw deal."

The Destiny Hills forest is only one of several such projects. Rinat quotes David Meninger, an environmental consultant who has worked for twenty years with the Nature Reserve Authority and who has close relations with both the JNF people and the Bedouin. Meninger has no doubts as the purpose of the afforestation: "This is a political decision by the state's authorities who have come to the conclusion that afforestation is the best way to defend the State's lands from illegal construction..."

According to Rinat, Meninger can see advantages for the Bedouin from the forests: "The JNF knows how to reach agreement with the Bedouin that allow them to graze their herds in the forests and maintains agricultural activity. Nevertheless it is true that it restricts their movements as nomads and their illegal construction."

For the Bedouin and the human rights organisation who have taken up their cause, a major issue is the government's action in setting up the facts on the ground while the implementation of the Goldberg Committee's recommendation on this very subject are being considered.

Walter Cronkite and changing role of journalists

Brad Jacobson

[Speaking about the launch of the film *Balibo*, Shirley Shackleton, Greg Shackleton's widow, pointed out that her husband and the rest of the *Balibo* five did not regard themselves as particularly heroic. As far as they were concerned, they were merely doing their job. Nevertheless one can hardly imagine the bosses of Channels 7 and 9 keeping their crews in such a dangerous zone especially if their reports were to expose our own government's complicity.

Journalism has indeed come a long way. And not just at the coalface. Those who anchor and deliver the news have also changed. In the days before satellite television we did not get to watch US anchorperson Walter

Cronkite. But the Iraq War(s) were brought to our screen via US television, even on the ABC and SBS, so the changes there matter very much to us.]

Walter Cronkite believed his

"proudest" moment as a journalist occurred when he told the nation that the Vietnam War was unwinnable, despite rosy rhetoric from the Johnson White House and Defence Department. Following his death in July, various network news tributes replayed footage of Cronkite's influential '68 on-air editorial. Yet scrubbed from the memorialising were similar instances of Cronkite's journalistic candour regarding Iraq, such

as his 2006 call for withdrawal from a war he went on to describe as "illegal from the start", initiated on "false pretences" and a "terrible disaster" serving "no purpose" that has "probably made us less safe."

But the most revealing omission from these tributes -- especially in context of the pageant of eulogies extolling Cronkite's journalistic integrity -- may be his response to a reporter's question during a 2006 news conference.

Iraq War

As reported in the *Independent* (UK) at the time: When a reporter asked [Cronkite] whether, given the chance, he would offer similar advice on Iraq [as he had on Vietnam], he did not even wait until the end of the

question. "Yes," he said flatly. "It's my belief that we should get out now."

For Cronkite, the question was simple, his answer emphatic. No need to chew it over, to seek a mealy-mouthed moderate reaction to address the Bush administration's unprecedented extremism, brutality and lawlessness. Doing so would mean that he was operating within their narrative, not his.

It was at this same conference that Cronkite said, "The editorialising that I did on the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and I think helped speed the end of that war, that was what I'm proudest of."

Six weeks later, when asked if his words about the Iraq War would have the same effect as his statement to the

nation on Vietnam, he demurred, "Well, I think it's a little late for that now." But then he added, "I would like to think it would be helpful in getting us out of there. Anybody who can put another match to that fire, to

get us out would be, I think, welcome."

Unworthy heirs

But he certainly wasn't holding his breath for any of his network news heirs to strike another match.

The *Nation* journalist John Nichols reported recently that as the war in Iraq went horribly awry, he asked Cronkite whether a network anchorman would dare speak out in the same way that he had.

"I think it could happen, yes. I don't think it's likely to happen," he said with an audible sigh. "I think the three networks are still hewing pretty much to that theory. They don't even do analysis anymore, which I think is a shame. They don't even do back-ground. They just seem to do headlines, and the less

important it seems the more likely they are to get on the air."

Nichols also asked Cronkite if he thought he would have spoken out against the Iraq War if he were still an anchorman. Cronkite's reply is not only, once again, unequivocal

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"To say that we are mired in stalemate seems the only realistic, yet unsatisfactory, conclusion. It is increasingly clear to this reporter that the only rational way out then will be to negotiate, not as victors, but as an honourable people who lived up to their pledge to defend democracy, and did the best they could."

Walter Cronkite after the Tet Offensive, 27 February 1968



Cronkite in Vietnam

Should we support hate-crime laws?

[If past attitudes are any guide, most AIDS activists probably support the hate-crime laws proposed by the Victorian government. But as Larry Stillman has already pointed out, there are those who disagree.]

In these extracts from his Washington Post article

Richard Cohen puts the case against.

Comments welcome – Ed.]

A prime justification for [hate] laws is that some crimes really affect a class of people. The hate-crimes bill recently passed by the US Senate puts it this way: "A prominent characteristic of a violent crime motivated by bias is that it devastates not just the actual victim . . . but frequently savages the community sharing the traits that caused the victim to be selected." No doubt. But how is this crime different from most other crimes?

The real purpose of hate-crime laws is to reassure politically significant groups -- blacks, Hispanics, Jews, gays, etc. -- that someone cares about them and takes their fears seriously. The penalty for murder is severe, so it's not as if the crime is not being punished. The added "late hit" of a hate crime is without any real consequence, except as a precedent for the punishment of belief or speech. Slippery slopes are supposedly all around us, I know, but this one is the real McCoy.

Let us assume that the "community" is really affected by what we call a hate crime. I am Jewish. But I am more

affected by a mugging in my neighbourhood that might keep me from taking a walk at night than I am by a shooting at the Holocaust museum.

I doubt that any group of drunken toughs is going to hesitate in their pummeling of a gay individual or an African American or a Jew on account of it being a hate crime. If they are not already deterred by the conventional penalties -- prison, etc. -- then why would additional penalties deter them? And if, in fact, they kept their mouths shut, refrained from the N-word or the F-word or the K-word, and simply made the beating or the killing seem one triggered by dissing or some other reason, then they would not be accused of hate -- merely of murder or some such trifle. If, though, they gave vent to their thoughts, they would be in for real trouble.

For the most part, hate-crime legislation is just a sop for politically influential interest groups -- yet another area in which liberals, traditionally sensitive to civil liberties issues, have chosen to mollify an entire population at the expense of the individual and endorse discredited reasoning about deterrence.



Richard Cohen

(Continued from page 6)

but a desperately needed correction to the warped view of journalistic principles that permeate today's network newsrooms, a sane and responsible recalibration of the meaning of "fair and balanced."

"Yes, yes I do. I think that right now it would be critical to do so," he told Nichols a few months after the invasion in 2003. "I think that right now we are in one of the most dangerous periods in our existence. Not since the Civil War has the state of our democracy been so doubtful. Our foreign policy has taken a very strange turn. And I do think I would try to say something about that."

Too "deferent"

Nichols reported as well that Cronkite was concerned "that broadcast news -- his medium -- had grown too deferent [sic] to power, too stenographic, too consolidated."

In his post "Celebrating Cronkite while ignoring what he did," *Salon's* Glenn Greenwald rightly criticises the procession of network news stars who praised Cronkite's career but have failed to adhere to Cronkite's journalistic standards and to reflect on the consequential glaring shortcomings of their own performance or that of their colleagues.

Underscoring the widespread abdication of traditional, democratic journalistic principles from network news coverage, Greenwald juxtaposes Cronkite's on-air Vietnam moment with a quote by Meet the Press moderator and former George W Bush White House correspondent David Gregory's 2008 statement deflecting criticism:

"The Vietcong did not win by a knockout [in the Tet Offensive], but neither did we. The referees of history may make it a draw. . . We have been too often disappointed by the optimism of the American leaders, both in Vietnam

and Washington, to have faith any longer in the silver linings they find in the darkest clouds. . .

"For it seems now more certain than ever that the bloody experience of Vietnam is to end in a stalemate. . . To say that we are closer to victory today is to believe, in the face of the evidence, the optimists who have been wrong in the past" -- Walter Cronkite, CBS Evening News, February 27, 1968.

"I think there are a lot of critics who think that [in the run-up to the Iraq War] . . . if we did not stand up and say this is bogus, and you're a liar, and why are you doing this, that we didn't do our job. I respectfully disagree. It's not our role" -- David Gregory, MSNBC, May 28, 2008.

If reporting facts, providing substantive context and telling us when our elected officials are lying is not Gregory and his colleagues' role, then I respectfully suggest another title: public relations officer (PRO). The acronym seems fitting as well.

Incidentally, Cronkite also cautioned America about invading Iraq from the beginning. Another Iraq War-related casualty in the recreation of Uncle Walter's journey.

Just as the war was under way, Cronkite spoke at a Drew University forum where, as reported in the *Daily Record*, he said "he feared the war would not go smoothly, ripped the 'arrogance' of Bush and his administration and wondered whether the new US doctrine of 'pre-emptive war' might lead to unintended, dire consequences."

And that's the way it was.

[Brad Jacobson is the founding editor/writer of *Media Bloodhound*, where this article was first published. He is also a freelance journalist and contributing investigative reporter to the online news site *The Raw Story*.]

Boycotts, dialogue and the Occupation

Two months ago we carried a comprehensive review by Margaret Jacobs of the Palestinian Boycott Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. While we did not get any comments from AJDS members, several events have emphasised the importance of keeping the light shining on this issue.

In Melbourne there was Ken Loach's campaign to get the Melbourne International Film Festival (MIFF) to drop the sponsorship by the state of Israel. (Contrary to some reports, Loach had no objection to Israeli films as such). Israel itself has been focussed on singer Leonard Cohen's on-again off-again visit. The Palestinians refused to let Cohen perform in Ramallah if he were to perform in Israel. The final outcome has been for Cohen to perform in Israel and for the US branch of Amnesty International to distribute the proceeds equally between Palestinian and Israeli victims of the conflict through organisations like Combatants for Peace.

Locally the MIFF imbroglio raised many questions. The first, posed by former Sydney Film Festival director Rod Webb, is this: Iran is noted for the quality of its film industry and there is a good representation of those films in the Festival. How should one react to a potential Iranian sponsorship? MIFF has pleaded limited resources as a justification for taking Israel's money; could that justify Iranian money?

The answers to any of these questions are not easy. There are indeed more questions than answers. To get the thought process going we have included three articles. *Haaretz's* Gideon Levy explains that Israelis simply do not get to feel the impact of the Occupation. He hints that perhaps recognising a potential cost may help them consider the matter again. The Combatants for Peace explain the pre-eminence of opposition to that Occupation while Lucy Nusseibeh and Shelley Ostroff argue to the contrary that dialogue is the way to go. We would like to get a range of AJDS views, for this issue is not likely to go away.

Israelis don't pay price for injustice of Occupation

Gideon Levy

Really, who needs all this? The US president is devoting a considerable amount of his precious time and goodwill trying to be persuasive about the need to end the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Europeans are ready to act, half the world is waiting, but let's admit the truth: Why all the commotion about us? The settlers might scream and block highway intersections. The Israel Defence Forces would become less important and the news could actually become boring. The vineyard in the Golan Heights is liable to close, as might the boutique winery in the settlement of Ofra.

Life in Israel is just peachy, and who wants to think about peace, negotiations, withdrawals, the "price" we have to pay and all this unnecessary mess? Cafes are bustling and restaurants are packed. People are vacationing. The markets are surging. Television dumbs us down, highways are jammed, and the festivals are blaring. La Scala performed in the park and Madonna is to follow, and the beaches are full of foreign tourists and locals. The summer of 2009 is wonderful. So why should we change things?

The Israelis aren't paying any price for the injustice of occupation. Life in Israel is immeasurably better than in most countries. The global financial crisis has hit Israel less than other places. It has poor people but not like in the developing world, and the rich and middle class here have not been critically harmed.

Security situation is good

The security situation is also in good shape. No terrorist attacks. No Arabs. And when terrorism subsides, as it has over the past several years, who remembers that there is a "Palestinian problem"? The army and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu can continue to scare us with the terrorism threat, but for the meantime, at least, it doesn't exist. The Iranian nuclear threat is also just a vague option at the moment. Life in Israel is currently secure.

True, every few years a wave of violence erupts, but it usually happens in the country's outskirts and doesn't interest anyone in the centre. Qassam rockets in Sderot or Katyushas in Kiryat Shmona? Who cares? This is followed by another period of quiet, like now. The separation fence, media, education system and political propaganda do a great job in creating an illusion to make us forget what we need to forget and hide what needs to be hidden. They are there and we are here, and here life is a bowl of cherries, if not a blast. Like Switzerland? Even better.

We always knew how to add a measure of significance to the pleasures of life. We practice the cult of security, society's true religion, and we perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust. You can enjoy yourself in Israel and also play the victim, party and gripe. Where else is there a place like this?



Tel Aviv good life

No price to pay

The Israelis don't pay any price for the injustice of the occupation, so the occupation will never end. It will not end a moment before the Israelis understand the connection between the occupation and the price they will be forced to pay. They will never shake it off on their own initiative, and why should they?

Even the most cruel terrorist attacks to befall the country haven't instilled an understanding among the Israelis about the connection between cause and effect -- between occupation and terrorism. Thanks to the media and the politicians -- two of the worst agents for dumbing down and blinding Israeli society -- we learned that the Arabs were born to kill, the whole world is against us, antisemitism determines how Israel is dealt with, and

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there is no connection between our actions and the price we pay.

Neither an international blockade nor terrible bloodletting appear to be on the horizon, to our great fortune. So why should we worry? It's true that the world is beginning to

Fears of war, fears of peace

Lucy Nusseibeh and Shelley Ostroff

Fear permeates the Israeli-Palestinian relationship. Both occupier and occupied experience profound fears regarding their identity, their safety and their very survival. But ironically there are also fears that arise from the prospect of ending the conflict and achieving peace.

One of the painful paradoxes of the dynamic is that some of the unconscious mechanisms we employ to deal with fear often tend to exacerbate it and thereby undermine moves towards peace. Recognising this, unmasking the rhetoric of fear, and also looking at the conflict as only one aspect of a relationship between two peoples bound together in one interdependent system, can help us overcome some of these fears.

Israelis and Palestinians often view each other in stark, polarised terms of "we are good, they are bad". This is actually an expression of a mechanism we use to cope with fear whereby we project unwanted aspects of ourselves or our own group onto the other. Each side tends to attribute all the violence, inhumanity and injustice to the other, while claiming complete moral authority for itself. While this mechanism may help people feel better because it generates a sense of moral strength and clarity in the face of danger and confusion, it does not necessarily have any bearing on reality and therefore does not help alleviate the fear. In fact the opposite is true; it reinforces the fear by making the other side seem worse than it is.

Both Israelis and Palestinians see themselves as victims, albeit for different historical and current reasons. Regardless of the immense inequalities of power and control, there is little acknowledgement by either side of their roles as persecutors in the conflict.

The victim role is more complicated than it seems. While the focus might be on suffering, it also generates a profound sense of self-righteousness and a justification for excessive amounts of violence and inhumanity towards the other. Just think, how much violence is committed in the name of self-defence or security?

Sometimes, the need to preserve the sense of self-righteousness that comes with victimhood can be even more important than safety. This need has brought Israelis and Palestinians in different ways to provoke each other into intensifying the role of persecutor. The violence that is consequently provoked reinforces the "evidence" of the monstrous and inhumane nature of the enemy. When this happens we can see how the fear of violent conflict is often better tolerated than the fear of a loss of one's moral bearings and the resulting guilt and shame that arise from an acknowledgement that one is not only a victim but also a persecutor. Ultimately, these processes can be linked to a generally unacknowledged fear

scowl at Israel. So what? The world hates us anyway, Israelis are convinced. As long as they are not deprived of the world's pleasures, there is no reason to worry. Try to ask them why they are ostracised and you will immediately hear scorn about the world, rather than any self-criticism, God forbid. The Israelis are not only enjoying themselves. They are also very satisfied with themselves.

of peace. Continuing conflict where one's own side is totally good and the other is all bad can be less frightening than the complex world that is offered by the prospect of peace with one's neighbour. War is often recognised as a way to unite a people in fear around a common enemy. It is also a way to protect people from having to face their own dual role as persecutors and victims, and all the moral ambiguity and painful internal personal conflict that implies.

Continuing conflict also allows people to hold onto the comforting solipsistic fantasy of total control -- shared by many Israelis and Palestinians alike -- that if they persist enough, the enemy will disappear and they will be totally vindicated and everything will turn out exactly as they want it to.

Perhaps the prospect of peace also generates a fear of the unknown nature of the relationship that would develop within this new reality (although in different ways for the Israelis and the Palestinians), and the impact this might have on each side's identity. In any relationship, how it is perceived and how it is described affects how people feel within it.

By now the phrase "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" has become a synonym for the relationship between the two peoples. This imposes a perspective that the relationship, by its very nature, is and has to be one of conflict.



Israeli-Palestinian joint youth

What would happen if instead we used the phrase "the conflict within the Israeli-Palestinian relationship"? This phrase suggests that there could be more to the relationship between the two peoples than just conflict. Replacing "conflict" with "relationship" offers space for less hostile and less fearful mutual perceptions. Where "conflict" inspires fear, "relationship" implies the possibility of a different way of dealing with each other; it offers space for heightened discernment and creativity, and even an invitation towards openness and constructive possibilities.

For the fears to be overcome, it is important to take an eagle's-eye view and shift to a higher systemic perspective that acknowledges both Israelis and Palestinians as interdependent parts of a larger whole within which neither part can be eliminated, controlled or fully extricated

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Boycotts, dialogue and the Occupation

(Continued from page 9)

from the other. Such a perspective would focus on how best to manage this relationship in its many dimensions and with real reciprocity. It would take the needs of all parties into account and would cultivate the well-being not only of both Israelis and Palestinians, but of the Israeli-Palestinian system as a whole.

This meta-perspective can render not only the conflict, but also the prospect of peace, less frightening. In focus-

ing on the humanity and diversity of both interdependent parties, it calls for the exploration and discovery of new roles that each side can assume vis-à-vis the other as they work together towards creating their inevitably shared future.

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Combatants for Peace on dialogue and Occupation

[*Combatants for Peace is composed of former IDF and Palestinian organisation fighters who have resolved to work together for peace. Their views may be unpalatable to some, but they are worth a hearing.*]

In order to understand the Combatants for Peace group's methods of operation, it is necessary to comprehend the reality produced by four decades of Occupation.

The broad Israeli Left camp has found it difficult to appreciate and accept the asymmetry between the two peoples. For them, "peace action" involves this or that form of dialogue that tries to bridge the two



Combatants for Peace addressing a group of scouts

peoples above the raised head of that monster called the "Occupation".

One can compare this to a man who brings his wife a bunch of flowers daily when he comes home from work. But as soon

as he finds her behaviour unacceptable he beats her up, only to bring an even bigger bunch of flowers the next day.

Dialogue is important, but for what used to be called the Israeli Left it has become the means of rendering the unacceptable, acceptable.

To understand this behaviour we need to break it down to its components, to discover that it stems from a substantial inability to understand the lack of symmetry in the Israeli-Palestinian situation. We have pointed this out before: the Occupation has hardly got a presence in the lives of Israelis. On the other hand, it has a horrible constant presence in the daily lives of Palestinians. This fact triggers a problematic distortion – in order to appreciate the magnitude of the evil done on a daily basis to the Palestinians, we need to be familiar with them.

This is a difficult situation in which an ugly sight is staring us in the face. It is no surprise that many Israelis avoid confronting it. We thus find that many of those who identify themselves as the "moderate Israeli Left" cheered on the soldiers entering Gaza, shooting indiscriminately, killing and destroying anything they encountered. This was done under the mocking title of "the day after" policy. The

feeling in the Israeli street was that we had had enough. The vast majority of Israeli society chose, in the name of that feeling, not to question themselves too deeply about the details and dimension of what the people of Gaza were undergoing. Above all, they chose to ignore our responsibility for the situation. Israelis are tired; they have no desire to go into details, considering this to be an information overload. All they want is the good life.

The remainder of the Left which nevertheless protested the injustice of it all, were deemed as extremists. Kobi Arieli defined them in *Ma'ariv* as a weird extremist group that in essence "does not exist".

The only positive news in this situation is the decline of influence of the various dialogue groups. After 42 years of Occupation one thing is clear – there is no place for dialogue as a goal in and by itself. The situation demands clear cut action against the Occupation. One can argue with both the Palestinian decision to deny Leonard Cohen a Ramallah concert and their decision to protest against his appearance in Israel. But his protest is what it is – a mild kick at the soft underbelly of the moderate Israeli Left which is satiated, tired of dialogue and indifferent to anything but itself. The Israeli people have developed an impressive one-sided approach to the situation; so concern with security has replaced humanity, dialogue has been substituted for action for change while indifference has taken the place of following one's conscience.

But there are groups that do operate in this gloom. The people who form these groups are neither weird nor extreme (as much as some would like to paint them in that light). They clearly understand that that the only dialogue that counts is the dialogue which aims at the end of the Occupation -- dialogue which is the product of anti-Occupation activities and not a figleaf for it. The difference between the two concepts is enormous.

These groups are growing and will continue to grow. The strenuous efforts by broad groups in Israel to undermine them (such as the witch-hunt against the *Breaking the Silence* association which totally ignored the actual harsh testimonies that they presented) only proves that the time has come to choose sides. The price is the loss of indifference, weariness and impotence. The gains -- precisely the same, as well as the ability to look oneself in the mirror again.

[From the *Combatants for Peace* website. Translated by Sol Salbe.]

Welcome to the Middle East, 2030

Paul Eedle

What if Barack Obama can make peace between the Arabs and Israel? It's easy to see how he might fail. But what if he succeeds and really does create a "new beginning between the United States and Muslims"? Here is a first draft of history for the next 20 years. The events are fantasy, of course, but the logic is based on four big trends:

First, Islam will slowly work out what it is for instead of simply what it is against. It will stop being used as an anti-western ideology but will remain a destabilising force, mobilising people against tyranny and corruption. Second, Arab nationalism will finally be buried after decades of failure, and non-Arab identities will re-emerge. Arabism powered the struggle for independence from colonialism and then the fight against Israel, until political Islam overtook it in the 1980s. But it suppressed the real religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the Middle East. As Arabism declines, urban elites will become more cosmopolitan but local and minority identities will sharpen, some to the point of violence.

Third, democracy will advance but only slowly and patchily. Without an Arab-Israeli conflict, autocrats will find it tougher to justify repression by citing national security. Rulers in countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Algeria will no longer be able to assume US support. However, oil revenues will free many governments from any need to consult their citizens. No taxation, no need for representation. Intelligence services and armed forces will shore up rulers so they themselves can continue to enjoy power and wealth.

Last, Middle Eastern economies will boom. Three of the potentially most dynamic economies in the region have been crippled by war and/or political sanctions: Israel, Iraq and Iran. All three have a skilled, entrepreneurial middle class, and Iraq and Iran have oil. Stability and open borders will make possible waves of investment in infrastructure, property and services. Growth will be dragged down, though, by corruption, cronyism, and a chronic shortage of water made worse by climate change. Rising prosperity will barely keep up with rapid population growth and the chasm between rich and poor will not narrow.

So imagine the unimaginable, Barack Obama at a ceremony on the White House lawn signing a comprehensive Middle East peace agreement. It's still only January 2010. This could be the future:

2010: Marwan Barghout, jailed by Israel in 2002 for leading the second Intifada, is elected the first president of an independent Palestine. The Israeli prime minister Tzipi Livni announces that Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich will fund reconstruction of the oil export pipeline from Kirkuk in northern Iraq to Haifa, closed since 1948.

2011: Property prices in the West Bank triple in a year as former Palestinian refugees buy or build houses with payouts of \$100,000 per family from the new Palestine Refugee Compensation Fund.

2013: Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Palestine, Jordan and Iraq establish the Middle East Water Community (MEWC). Its first project is a giant pipeline network to carry water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in southern Turkey to Israel, Palestine and Jordan.

2015: Revolution in Egypt. President Gamal Mubarak (son of the late Hosni) escapes by private jet to Jeddah after three weeks of million-strong pro-democracy demonstrations paralyse Cairo. An emergency committee led by the once-banned Muslim Brotherhood announces that presidential and parliamentary elections will be held within three months.

2018: Zahra Rahnvard is elected Iran's first woman president, succeeding her husband Mir-Hossein Mousavi. The slogans "Death to America, Death to Israel" are banned from Friday prayers.

The other original revolutionary chants, "Death to the Shah" and "Death to the Soviet Union", have long since come true.

2020: The Gulf Co-operation Council (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Oman) merges with the Middle East Water Community to form the MEC, the Middle East Community, a free trade area in which citizens of any member state may live, work and buy property in any other member state. Egypt, Sudan and Yemen immediately join the new grouping. The Arab League is dissolved and its 1950s headquarters in Cairo leased to Arab Disney as the hub of a new entertainment complex.

2022: After closely-fought referendums, voters in the 16 MEC countries agree to admit Iran. Saudi Arabia's vast solar power arrays in the desert will now be linked with Iran's five nuclear power stations in a grid which will halve electricity prices across the Community. Cartoonists mock the MEC's grandiose new solar-powered parliament building in Baghdad as a modern Tower of Babel, where every document and debate now has to be translated into Arabic, Hebrew, Kurdish, Turkish, Farsi and Aramaic at great expense. In practice, most Community business is done in English.

2026: Crude oil production in the Middle East falls below 20m barrels a day for the first time this century as climate change policies across the world cut fossil fuel demand and reserves in smaller producers run out. The total labour force, though, in MEC countries has doubled since the turn of the century to 200 million, 60 million of whom are unemployed – 7.5m of those in Saudi Arabia alone. Former US President Barack Obama accepts an honorary doctorate in law from the University of Tehran. A woman driving a car is arrested in Riyadh.

2030: Osama bin Laden dies in North Korea. Al-Jazeera reports the news halfway down its evening bulletin, below items on the evacuation of yet another Nile Delta town after the collapse of shoddily-built defences against the rising level of the Mediterranean and the award of the 2034 World Cup to Jerusalem.

[Originally published in the UK *Guardian*.]



Obama:
Hope is the operative word

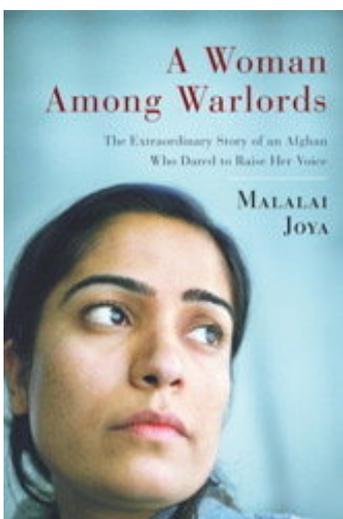
Afghan woman MP speaks in Melbourne

Margaret Jacobs

While in her homeland of Afghanistan, Malalai Joya needs eight bodyguards to protect her in public. Despite having been elected to the Loya Jirga she was abused and threatened by 'fellow' members and then expelled from the parliament. She is forced to stay in a different house each night. She recently visited Australia and spoke at the State Library in Melbourne.

She does it for her people, she says. Why else would Malalai Joya face another hall full of well-meaning Westerners, "democratic-minded people of your country" she calls us—who try to understand, but know very little about her country?

Her words of explanation are dangerous, and are very likely to get her killed. She has to get them out quickly: time is something she has little of. The majority of MPs, many of them warlords or their proxies, wish her dead for exposing them; give comfort to her persecutors; don't care that she has to go into hiding each night, that for her to travel to another country involves subterfuge and disguise. At 30 she has survived five assassination attempts.



Malalai's message is that things are worse in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion. Yes—worse, and Australia is complicit; we are all complicit if we do nothing. What she drags the listener back to over and over is the

hypocrisy. The present US policy continues the mistakes made by Bush. Although Obama and Rudd ask us to believe that the coalition war that is killing so many Afghans is preferable to the alternative, according to Malalai the contrary is true: under this policy murderous warlords and corrupt politicians become ever more powerful. NATO and its allied forces must withdraw.

To explain her position, Malalai Joya starts by pointing to a newspaper article and photograph of a smiling Afghan being welcomed to the US: "Look at him—here he is clean-shaven..." He is Rahmatulla Hashemi, representing the US-backed Karzai regime; standing amongst a group of friends and doing very nicely at a prestigious US university. The article doesn't mention that this man is a powerful mullah who was involved in the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha statues, a vicious hater of Afghani women. Meanwhile in his home country people are desperate for education. This is one of the products of the present military and political strategy.

It is true that in a few parts of Afghanistan, for example Mazār-e Sharīf, women can study. But much of what passes for news and current affairs coverage makes great use of selective facts. Such morsels of freedom as women have gained are used to pull the wool over our eyes. Malalai Joya herself, an elected parliamentarian, is nowadays more of a prisoner than she was under the

Taliban. Under that regime she could at least move around, and could teach in her illegal girls' school. Nowadays she can hardly move at all. Worse still: the Karzai government has just passed a law making it illegal to beg. For many, many women and children in Kabul, begging is their only means of survival. This law will force them right back in to the terrifyingly dangerous provinces, places they were forced to flee because of the Taliban and attacks by US-led forces.



Malalai Joya speaking at an antiwar rally

Indeed, the number of civilians killed keeps rising and they are mainly women and children. Australians are among the forces of the War on Terror that fire the bullets and drop the bombs.

A question is asked about the possible consequences of withdrawal of the US-led forces. (The implication of such questions is always, wouldn't things be worse if the forces leave?) Malalai Joya replies that two enemies are *never* better than one. She belongs to a people trapped between two enemies. The Taliban and the warlords on one side are anti-democratic and anti-woman. Their majority of the Loya Jirga are like-minded and recently proposed a law preventing Shiite women from going anywhere without the permission of a man.

That's one enemy. Then there's the external enemy, the US-led forces. While she does not forget to express her condolences to the families of the Australian soldiers who have been killed, Joya points to the history of her people—who have always resisted invasion and occupation.

Caught between these two enemies, the ordinary people of Afghanistan are desperate. They are perfectly able to recognise hypocrisy. When she visited her home province, the people who elected her crowded into a mosque in welcome. Yes, she emphasises, a mosque. They cheered her when she called for secularisation: "...even the mullah!" They saw no contradiction in this, despite being Muslims. "They don't care that I am a woman; they don't care that I am young; they don't care about whether or not I have a formal education. They just want to hear the truth."

For more information and a transcript of the speech Malalai Joya gave in the UK in July, as well as photos and video, see www.malalaijoya.com.

An Israeli cultural icon passes

If you have never heard of Amos Kenan, think of this: when he died, the Israeli media was full of obituaries, stories and anecdotes but no member of the government graced the funeral with his or her presence. Kenan was an artistic polymath: sculptor, poet, playwright, painter, novelist, creative chef and journalist. But that is selling him short: he was a fighter, a soldier, a political activist and one of the Hebrew language's most important icons. With his death on 4 August Israel lost yet another of its founding generation's giants.

But let's start at the beginning. Amos Kenan was born as Amos Levine in 1927 in the new Hebrew town of Tel Aviv to a typically secular left-leaning family. After some time with Hashomer Hatzair, his early political identification was with the Canaanite movement. The Canaanites had a strange philosophy: it originated on the political Right but many of its adherents were on the Left. These adherents tended to join either the Irgun or Lehi but their belief in a new Hebrew (as distinct from Jewish) nation had a revolutionary message. Most did not last long in the movement and those like Uri Avnery and Kenan turned the group ideology upside down, regarding the local Palestinian Arabs as the natural allies of the new Hebrew nation and embracing the prospect of a joint struggle.

Kenan served in the IDF in 1948 and his role was far from glorious. As Uri Avnery tells it: "He took part in the atrocious Irgun and Lehi action in Deir Yassin. He had a problem dealing with this -- and he always asserted that the massacre was not intended, or that it did not take place at all. He maintained that the commander was killed and that control over the fighters was lost. He himself was wounded at the beginning of the action, he asserted, and did not see what happened. I was not wholly convinced."

After the war Kenan started writing a satirical column for *Haaretz*. There his distinctive style and freshness of language made a big impact. His barbs at the religious establishment and its increased hold over the rest of society were particularly sharp. However, he did not stay there for long. In July 1952 he was accused of lobbing a bomb into the yard of David-Zvi Pinkas, the Minister for Transport who used petrol shortages to advance his religious agenda de facto banning the movement of private cars on Shabbat. Kenan denied throwing the bomb, was acquitted for lack of evidence but his refusal to cooperate with the investigators cost him his job. He could work on other newspapers but only under an assumed name, so he moved to France instead for the next nine years. From there he contributed to Uri Avnery's *Haolam Hazeh*. [Fifty-six years later his wife, Nurit Gertz, published his biography suggesting that he was indeed responsible for the bombing.] On his return he started writing a column in *Yediot Acharonot*, a column that was published for four decades.

His political career had many momentous stages. In 1956 he objected to the Israeli-British-French attack on Egypt, lobbying against it. In 1967 he was a reserve soldier who witnessed the emptying of three Palestinian villages in the Latrun region. Everyone in the villages: men and women, old people and children, were forced away. Kenan was not the only witness; several kib-

butzniks also testified to the horror, but it was Kenan who made it public by taking it to Uri Avnery, who was then a member of the Knesset. [The area is now the site of Canada Park.]

While objecting to the war's crimes, Kenan made sure that his friends on the international Left knew that the war was not as simple as some of them saw it. He wrote an article in *Yediot Acharonot* titled "A Letter to All Good People," that was translated into English and many other languages and which was handed out as a leaflet by young Left Zionists around the world. I am pretty sure a copy was printed in several Australian University student newspapers. He had plenty to say, for according to Wikipedia, "He was sent by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to interview intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Herbert Marcuse and Noam Chomsky on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."

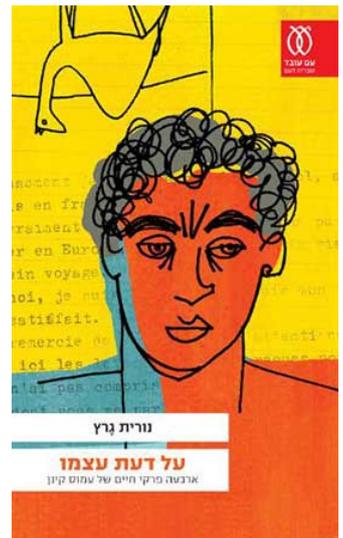
Kenan saw no contradiction between his appeal to the non-Jewish Left and his own increasing role as an opponent of the Occupation. He played a role in setting up the Israeli Council for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. The council's founding manifesto signatories included General Matti Peled, Arie "Lova" Eliav, David Shaham, Alex Massis, Amnon Zichroni and Colonel Meir Pa'il. He maintained a political role until his illness took over.

All his life he wrote in his modern spoken-style Hebrew, one quite different to the Hebrew of other modern masters like S Y Agnon. Former *Haaretz* Editor Hanoch Marmari noted that Kenan was one of the people who inspired him the most to take up the profession. His comments in the *Seventh Eye* tell of Kenan's impact on others:

"Media obituaries for Kenan tended to define him as a polymath. In *Yisrael Hayom* [Israel today – a full-size giveaway daily newspaper] there was even someone who described him as the "most important polymath artist who ever toiled here."

Over and above the empty exaggeration I beg to differ on the polymath aspect. He wrote songs, sketches, scripts, books and plays, he painted and sculpted – but he did it all as a journalist. He accompanied us week after week from one edition to another, talked to us, lectured us, reprimanded us, entertained us and it didn't really matter whether he was reporting from the Cannes Festival or Sinai, it was always in his unmistakable language that no one else seemed to use...

"Kenan was a journalist because he moulded journalists. When looking at his stormy life I recognise that an important reporter does not only mould public opinion, but helps mould the next generation of reporters."



A self-portrait of Amos Kenan on his biography

Sol Salbe

Death of an anti-star

Noam Ben-Zeev

If there is any validity to the claim that a person whose name doesn't register in a Google search does not exist, then Israeli singer Sara Alexander is a figment of the imagination. A careful search in Hebrew yields nothing; only her maiden name -- Sara Shuv -- brings hits. On the local music website Mooma, she is mentioned as a "singer and accordionist", and listed as a member of the Shivat Haminim band alongside Gabi Berlin and Amnon Nadav. "Formed: 1965, disbanded: 1966", the site says. Then came 1967 and the war, followed by a messianic period of national exhilaration -- and Sara Alexander disappeared. She went willingly into exile.

Searching for Alexander in English, however, is more productive, and yields first and foremost her own website (<http://sara.alexander.free.fr>). There you can learn a lot about her music, as well as about what happened to her before and after she left Israel; you can also see photos of her from the last few decades and watch her perform. You can also read about her illness and her death on May 28.

A Jerusalem wake

Yes, Sara Alexander indeed existed, and wielded a significant, charismatic presence. An evening honoring her memory and art, as well as her social and political activism, was held last week at the Imperial Hotel near Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem's Old City, as part of a conference called "Thinking about the Other".

The evening's program included a short film about Alexander and her poetry book "Hoshet Li Yad" ("Hold Out Your Hand to Me"), in Hebrew and Arabic. The poems were translated into Arabic by Georges Farah, and the book was brought out by a publisher in Shfaram. It will not be for sale: Alexander asked that it be distributed free to Israeli and Palestinian children and peace activists.

Alexander was among the first Israelis to initiate contact with Palestinians, back when it was still illegal. Her activism was not particularly self-evident, however: born in Jerusalem in 1942, her family moved to Kibbutz Ein Carmel near Atlit when she was 6, and she was raised in the kibbutz spirit of equality, solidarity and modesty. "The only money she ever had in her hand before age 18 was for the bus that took her to Haifa, to the conservatory, for accordion lessons", says her partner of the last 15 years, Jean Dupre.

At 18, Alexander was inducted into the Nahal brigade's performance troupe -- then led by Sasha Argov and Naomi Polani -- as an accordionist. She was one of the youngest members of the group, known for such talents as Yehoram Gaon, Gavri Banai and Aliza Rosen. After her military service, she studied music and musical education at Oranim Academic College, became acquainted with the Tel Aviv bohemians who frequented the legendary Cafe Kasit, and even toured abroad as a representative of Israel with a fellow Nahal troupe "graduate" -- singer Nechama Hendel [Who went on her on exile later to Sydney-Ed].

While other musicians who started out in the Nahal group went on to become local pop-culture icons, Alexander's sharp political awareness led her to take a critical view of

what was going on around her. Such thoughts had existed before, on an intuitive level, she once said in one of her rare interviews, but it was only after the 1967 Six-Day War that her eyes were opened to the injustice of Israel's social reality. She simply did not return after one of her tours abroad, settling in the south of France, in the picturesque town of Bonnieux. She married Danish photographer Johann Alexander, whom she met outside Kasit in Tel Aviv, and they had two sons together, one born during a trip to Uruguay.

Strong connection to Israel

Even from a distance, however, her connection to Israel grew stronger. "She left in order to preserve the Zionist dream that lived within her, innocently," Dupre says. "It pained her: the gap between the dream of this country and the reality. But that's what artists are like, no? They dream, and something of the naive child always remains in them."



Sara Alexander (second from left) in the Nahal troupe

However Alexander did more than dream: starting in the 1970s, she became much more of an activist.

"Paradoxically, she got to know Palestinians only after leaving Israel", Dupre explains.

She began to write songs about peace between the two peoples and to form ties with Israeli and Palestinian activists and artists, as a reflection of her deep commitment to the dream. In her song "Anti-Star" she wrote: "I am not a trumpet blast, I am silence and more silence / The silence of the hungry, the silence of the exploited / The silence of a political prisoner behind bars / The furious silence of an occupied people / The quiet before the storm."

Shalom-Salaam

A 1979 profile on Alexander in the now-defunct weekly *Ha'olam Hazev* [Edited by Uri Avnery] -- the only Israeli publication that wrote anything at all about her back then -- reported her plan to make an album. And "Shalom-Salaam" came out a year later.

"Not one song from it was played on the radio", says Dupre. "People raised an eyebrow at the political texts and [instead] asked for catchy songs and hits."

Alexander thus performed only abroad. Prisons, hospitals

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and schools were her preferred venues, as were political rallies -- in East Berlin before the wall fell, with Gypsy musicians in Hungary, and with Palestinians. Being of mixed descent herself -- Gypsy-Romanian, Ashkenazi and Turkish -- she sang in Hebrew, Arabic, Yiddish, Turkish, Greek, French and English. Her connections with Palestinians became closer: she performed at the Khan Yunis refugee camp and met with Yasser Arafat in Gaza. She was the first Israeli Jewish singer to perform in Arabic in Israel, and took part in the Marrakech Festival in Morocco in 1986.

Alexander's circle included famous Israeli peace activist Abie Nathan and poet Mahmoud Darwish. "An autumn evening, with a church bell / in a foreign city / Mahmoud and I sit / and speak in Hebrew", she wrote in her poem "Mahmoud and I", describing their shared longing for Haifa.

She continued to make frequent visits to this area in the 1990s: right-wing protesters demonstrated at a concert she gave at the Orient House in Jerusalem in 1995, and

she sang at the Jenin refugee camp to mark the departure of the Israeli army after the Oslo Accords. After "Shalom-Salaam," Alexander put out seven more albums, the last one in 2004. She went back to the accordion; the energy of her singing and playing is evident in the video clips.

Her work only grew in intensity, but in 2006 she became ill with cancer. She was buried on June 1 in Bonnieux.

"People from all over the world came to her funeral, even from Africa and South America," says Dupre, who also promoted her music. "Anyone who met her even once fell in love with her. The ideology she learned at the kibbutz - that man is essentially good -- never left her, and people responded to it. Like her poem, she wanted to be an 'anti-star' and disliked any kind of publicity and fame. She devoted herself to art, and out of her love for Israel she sang in Hebrew abroad as well, contrary to any commercial logic. The disease did not beat her, and she was happy till her death: that was the kind of strength she had, the strength of pioneers.

[Originally published in *Haaretz* supplement.]

Pacific Forum disappoints West Papuan leaders

Leaders of the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation were in Cairns to push hard for the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to grant West Papua observer status and also for the forum to discuss many other issues affecting West Papuan people, victims of human rights violations. This was an urgent matter in view of reported new human rights violations are occurring.

Supporters of West Papua point out that the PIF was established to address all the issues affecting the Pacific community, political or otherwise.

It is important for leaders of the PIF raise these concerns in order to prevent further violence.

Vice Chairman of the West Papua National Coalition for Liberation, Dr Otto Ondawame stated that the coalition is not happy at all about the way the PIF treated West Papua. "This is hypocrisy; how could they concern themselves about human rights and democracy issues in other parts of the world but ignore what is happening next door?", he asked. "By not protesting or even mentioning the violence in West Papua you are in fact encouraging it to continue", he added.



Many Human rights violations are often associated with mining activities

The PIF had clearly stated its concerns about the situation in West Papua during its 37th forum meeting in Fiji. West Papuans would have hoped that the PIF be consistent with its concerns because the situation is not improving at all. "Regardless of this setback, we will continue to work for a peaceful and dignified solution to the West Papuan issue. We will never stop until once again we become part of the Pacific community as we were when we were member of the South Pacific Commission from 1947 to 1962", said Rex Rumakiek, the Secretary General of the WPNCL.

[From the WPNCL]

Israeli human rights organisations endorse Mary Robinson's medal

The Obama administration recently announced it would award the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Mary Robinson for her work on behalf of human rights. This has raised the ire of right-wing elements in the Jewish community leadership who have been quite vociferous in their opposition to the award.

Seven courageous Israeli human rights NGOs, among them Yesh Din, B'Tselem, Gisha, Association for Civil Rights in Israel, and Physicians for Human Rights, wrote to President Obama to congratulate him for nominating the former UN official for her award. They wrote:

"We...support your choice of Mary Robinson to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom award. [She] deserves this honour for a lifetime of unflagging support to the cause of human rights in its many dimensions.

"We are greatly saddened by the media furore that has been generated by statements from AIPAC and the ADL, who have referred to Robinson's "long public record of hostility and one-sided bias against the Jewish state," and "animus" towards Israel, respectively. These statements contain factual errors and are misleading...Such rhetoric distracts attention from the real issues that need to be addressed to foster peace and security for Israel and its neighbours."

[From blogger Richard Silverstein]

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