



AJDS Newsletter

Volume 11, Issue 8

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www.ajds.org.au

Diaspora Jews must speak on loyalty oath!

Even some staunch defenders of Israel have slammed Israel's amendments to its naturalisation laws as racist and undemocratic. Hitherto, new citizens have had to swear allegiance to Israel and its laws. From now on, they need to pledge their loyalty also to a Jewish and democratic state. As an Israeli friend pointed out, Israelis are a long way from agreed on what constitutes a Jewish state. But whatever it is, why force non-Jews to subscribe to it, except to humiliate and try to exclude them?

Historians may therefore mark the approval of the legislation by Israel's Cabinet as a watershed mark in Israeli democracy. Those historians may also reflect upon the silence of Diaspora Jewry.

The New Israel Fund has been leading opposition against the new oath. Its Chief Executive Officer, Daniel Sokatch, noted that his organisation was in a forlorn position; with the exception of the Union of Reform Judaism and the Anti-Defamation League, almost every major American Jewish organization contacted by a major US Jewish newspaper refused to speak on the record about this issue.

Stand for justice

As Sokatch pointed out about US Jewry, Americans stand up for justice only when their own identity and rights as Jews are threatened. According to Sokatch, "the 'loyalty oath' is a classic slippery-slope issue, which first would compel non-Jews to swear loyalty to a religious identity and entity, a prospect that should deeply trouble us as Americans who support freedom of conscience. But it is also a sop to the hard-line ultra-nationalist right, the same forces that are dug in to enlarge the settlements,

prevent a peace agreement, silence NIF.... and stifle dissent inside and outside Israel."

Everything Sokatch said about the US is also true for our community.

Every country demands a swearing of allegiance as part of its naturalisation process. This includes allegiance to the country's laws and, in Australia's case, to democratic values. But those Israeli legislators who support the new loyalty oath would be unlikely to pledge allegiance to democratic values. Genuine equality for all citizens and communities, safeguarding minority rights, a strong role for the judiciary and freedom of speech are not for them. Their new move goes against the basic democratic concept that citizens' individual viewpoints are not taken into account. It would be the equivalent of asking applicants for naturalisation to endorse Australia as a monarchy.

Context is vital

Minister of Minority Affairs Avishai Braverman observed that the proposal "will send a negative message to Arab citizens". And that message will be amplified by the context: the Knesset is about to debate close to 20 other anti-democratic bills. Interior Minister Eli Yishai is already considering a law to revoke the citizenship of anyone convicted of "disloyalty". Alongside others, he is considering a requirement to sign such an oath by youngsters wishing to get their ID cards. Avigdor Lieberman has explicitly stated that the naturalisation oath is only a first stage in a process.

This process is not only an endorsement of Lieberman's

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AJDS Annual Dinner

Guest speaker

Arnold Zable

Sunday 5 December

7.00pm Almazett restaurant

210 Balaclava Rd Caulfield

\$50 a head, \$60 supporting price

EFT details to be emailed to you.



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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

First of all, an apology for the delay in this issue. It seems as though the odds have been stacked against us. It took some time to clarify the future of this Newsletter and whether it was to be published every two months (it is not, unless of course the next AGM votes for it.) Then a computer breakdown followed by some health issues and other matters meant delay after delay. But we are back and hopefully the November issue is less than four weeks away.

Our internal issues and the repercussions from our BDS resolution occupy a fair bit of space. Various articles are on pages 3, 4 and 13. But, important as they are, issues relating to the AJDS are not as important as those concerning our community, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Jewish world, not to mention this country. The front page deals with our role as Diaspora Jews in speaking against a disturbing racist trend in Israeli politics. The I/P conflict also features in a proposed attack on Iranian nuclear facilities (M J Rosenberg thinks it would be anti-Israel), while Avi Shlaim reviews an important book on Jews in the Muslim world and Theodore Bikel explains why he supports Israeli artists who refuse to perform in the settlement of Ariel.

Rather than arguing with the activists who lead Independent Australian Jewish Voices, we tried a more friendly approach in trying to delve into why they have alienated so many in our community as well as looking at where their critics go wrong. There is a need for a more measured tone in this discussion. Several people had input into the thinking behind it but I, as writer, take full responsibility for the contents.

Also included are articles on the expulsion of the Roma (Gypsy) people from France, a different kind of review of Eat, Pray Love and a review of what looks like being the highlight of the forthcoming Jewish Film Festival: Within the whirlwind.

Sol Salbe

(Continued from page 1)

“no citizenship without loyalty” election campaign. It is also a belated endorsement of the notorious Rabbi Meir Kahane’s ideas. Twenty-five years ago, the Knesset lined up against his racist proposal to disenfranchise Palestinian (Arab) Israeli citizens. Now it has taken the first concrete step towards it.

Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel already have plenty of reasons to feel discriminated against. Ahmed Tibi, who heads the Knesset’s committee into the employment of Arabs in the public service, wrote in the Hebrew Ynet: “Arabs form 20 per cent of the population but constitute 6.5 per cent of public service employees. This single piece of data says everything.” It is a long way from equality. It expresses social exclusion, Dhika, neglect and most importantly discrimination. There is almost no sphere of our lives in which there is an equality between Jews and Arabs – there is none in education, infrastructure, agriculture, industry, sport, employment and almost certainly there is none in terms of allocation of land or town planning.

Ron Gerlitz -- co-executive director of Sikkuy, the Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality in Israel summed up the process of increasing equality in Ynet [for some reason, none of these articles has appeared in the English Ynetnews]. These steps amount to a public declaration of the failure of the State of Israel, product of the Zionist project, to be varied, pluralistic and democratic. The final stage of the project would be the massive removal of citizenship and the creation of a homogenous, intolerant state.

As progressive Jews in Australia we must line up alongside those Israelis who signed the Declaration of Independence from Fascism prompted by the recent legislation. In their words: “A state which forcibly invades the hallowed realm of the individual citizen’s conscience, and which imposes punishment on those whose opinions and beliefs do not fit the authorities’ opinions and the prescribed ‘character’ of the state, stops being a democracy and embarks on becoming a fascist state.” These are harsh words, but we have no choice; our voice must be heard on this issue.

Sol Salbe

AJDS under fire from JCCV...twice

Sol Salbe

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society found out that the president of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) has denounced us through a news blog. While Google delivered the news, the JCCV at no stage made any attempt to contact us either before or after the event. As the AJDS Executive points out in a briefing paper [see Page 13] this meant that JCCV president John Searle got some vital details wrong. After all, it is standard practice for a representative not to attack an affiliate without ensuring that the facts have been verified.

In response the AJDS Executive issued the statement below. The organisation contacted the JCCV and its executive officer, Geoffrey Zygiel, told us that he would act on our request. He did, but 20 days later, on the eve of the next JCCV plenum. In consequence members of our community had no access to our response. Some felt the need to go further and placed a resolution before the plenum. Meanwhile, the Zionist Council of Victoria and others who worked with it on the resolution did not see fit to inform the rest of the community, or the AJDS. The resolution was not circulated with the usual plenum material but dragged in at the last moment.

AJDS response to JCCV initial dissociation

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society considers the Occupation of the West Bank to be a significant obstacle to the achievement of a lasting peace, and the settlements to be one of its worst manifestations.

Its effects are numerous:

* Israel's youth must risk their lives in policing a hostile aggrieved Palestinian population, and risk becoming brutalised by the experience;

* Jewish settlers and their Palestinian neighbours have an understandably impossible relationship which often results in openly violent and destructive behaviour;

* It breaches international law, the very system that actually made possible the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948;

* Development of Palestinian civil society and its economy, which are the prerequisites of prospects for peace, is stifled.

Many Israelis share this view. The AJDS has decided that it does not wish to give financial support to those who produce and export from the settlements, and wishes to discourage others from doing so. We are taking this stand because we hope that it will encourage people to think about the question of the Occupation, and, at a more fundamental level, because we don't wish to be supportive of people who breach International law, with or without the approval of the Israeli Government...(more follows)

This is why we refer to this as a limited Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions policy.

Our position relates only to the Occupied Territories. We reiterate that we are opposed to a full BDS position which does not distinguish between the two sides of the Green Line. We agree with the Jewish Community Council of Victoria that a full BDS is likely to be counter-productive, however it is not clear whether the JCCV position is an in

This time the AJDS was given about four hours notice. Naturally the AJDS requested additional time to prepare, and requested a postponement to the next plenum. This was in line with past practices, where the AJDS was told that its own emergency resolutions be posted to allow their circulation in order to enable affiliates to discuss the resolution. In order to make an informed decision on it. Our request was ignored.

The JCCV condemned the AJDS unanimously. The JCCV president offered to address a meeting of AJDS members. The AJDS Executive naturally welcomed that offer and resolved to write to Searle, thanking him for the offer and accepting it. The AJDS Executive also stated that because the JCCV process was a clear denial of natural justice, the AJDS will be submitting a rescission resolution of the motion in order to enable all JCCV affiliates to hear the other side before voting again on the same resolution.

The AJDS Executive noted that the JCCV resolution did not engage with any of the points made in either the group's reply or in the briefing paper.

principle opposition to all boycotts, as the JCCV and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry have supported boycotts and blockades targeted at Iran and Gaza.

The strength of a community is reflected in the range of voices that it encompasses. To exclude ours would suggest that the JCCV does not represent the full community but just those who are to the right of centre mainstream. The JCCV has a right to criticise an affiliate when it considers it appropriate. However, the JCCV did not first discuss its concerns with the AJDS and many of its "accusations" are incorrect.

Our point by point rebuttal of the JCCV accusations is available [on page 13], but we do suggest that the JCCV now talk with us directly to clarify their misunderstandings. Indeed, an apology would be in order. If it is considered that the AJDS is on the fringe of the Australian Jewish community, could we draw attention to one of the findings of the community survey undertaken last year by Monash University? Using a liberal definition of Zionism it found that 20 per cent of Australian Jewish respondents self-defined as non-Zionists. We suggest that this puts us well and truly within the mainstream. But seemingly some would prefer the JCCV to not represent Melbournians of our persuasion at all, let alone those to our left.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that one third of the membership of the AJDS lives outside traditional Jewish areas of Melbourne. Our membership of the JCCV brings them into the orbit of the JCCV. Likewise many of our members have no involvement with any other Jewish group. Our affiliation truly puts meaning to "community" in the JCCV's title. It behoves the community, led by our roof body, to reach out to all Jews, no matter their differences, whether political, religious adherence, geographic, ethnic or of sexual orientation.

Why I resigned from the AJDS Executive



Harold Zwier

At a meeting of the Australian Jewish Democratic Society on 8 August, this resolution was adopted after discussion and debate.

"The AJDS is opposed to any Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign aimed at the breadth of Israeli

economic, cultural or intellectual activity. However, the AJDS does support selected BDS actions designed to bring about an end to the Israeli occupation, blockade and settlement on Palestinian lands lying outside of the June 1967 Israeli borders.

"Such limited and focused BDS support might include boycotts of settlement products and divestment from military Research and Development (R&D) and boycott of industrial/military activities unrelated to Israel's defence and security. It might also include selected sanctions or boycotts against specific Israeli academics openly supportive of the Occupation.

"The AJDS will make any decisions on these matters on a case-by-case basis, and exercise its judgement as to the political/social cost-benefits of any such actions before granting specific endorsement or approval."

I opposed this resolution and argued against its adoption at the meeting.

After giving some thought to the implications of the resolution and the way in which it was publicised after the meeting, I decided to resign from the AJDS Executive and tendered my resignation on August 23.

There are several reasons for my decision, but of most concern was the way in which the resolution aligned the AJDS with the worldwide BDS campaign.

Even though the opening sentence of its resolution says "The AJDS is opposed to any Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign aimed at the breadth of Israeli economic, cultural or intellectual activity", its very next sentence connects the AJDS to BDS: "...the AJDS does support selected BDS actions".

I don't have a problem with, for instance, the idea of not buying goods manufactured in the Israeli settlements on the West Bank, nor with the AJDS publicly supporting such a position.

There are many people in the Jewish community who have made that decision personally.

But I do have a problem with connecting that sort of action to the term BDS because it aligns the AJDS with a movement that includes groups well outside the political position of the AJDS with respect to the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

In the past the AJDS has tried to take a fairly independent line, though it has seen its position as being within the ambit of Israeli groups such as Peace Now and various US Jewish groups such as J-Street.

While one can argue the virtues of adopting a provocative stance, my discussions with various people in the Jewish community makes me think that this decision has alienated people rather than stimulating any sort of useful debate.

While I have resigned from the executive, I have not resigned from the AJDS.

6 September 2010

The AJDS month: Internally focussed

[Contributed]

Like many others throughout the country, AJDS activists have enjoyed the final outcome of the Federal elections. It may have taken much longer than usual to find out, but the new Gillard government, which relies for support on the Greens and progressive independents, is probably the best government we have had since the days of Gough Whitlam.

It is just as well that Tony Abbott's reactionary coalition has not come into power, for the AJDS resources and Executive members' energy have been inwardly focussed. The process that started with the planning session in 2009 and the generational change that took place on the Executive meant that various matters had to be reconsidered. Most of the discussion at Executive meetings has been taken up with looking at the direction the AJDS is heading and the projected role of the Executive itself. This, together with re-evaluation of our finances, meant that one major item has been consideration of the best use of limited financial resources. Discussion is at an early stage but it seems as if our next AGM, in a little over three months, will be discussing a myriad of new proposals, including a different concept of a Newsletter, a clearer orientation to others in the Jewish community and lots more.

But there have been some day to day matters to deal with. Many of these resulted from the continuing controversy over the AJDS' BDS resolution. The Executive had to regretfully accept Harold Zwier's resignation (see above). In discussion afterwards it transpired that while Zwier was concerned at the way the Executive dealt with the BDS issue, other members have felt unease at the way other issues had been resolved by a simple majority vote rather than an effort to reach a more inclusive consensus. It was agreed to slow down and reconsider the way the AJDS has been transforming itself into a programmatic organisation. Our greatest strength historically has been its all-encompassing nature, with a membership that in the United States or Israel would have belonged to half a dozen different groups. There has been agreement that this was very desirable feature, even if it limited what we could actually do.

And of course we have the coming Annual Dinner, with one of the best speakers any of us could have wished for. Writer and storyteller, a scholar of Yiddishism and a recorder of our people's lives, Arnold Zable has mesmerised audiences for ages. We are in for a treat. Those of you on email will soon receive details of how you can pay for your tickets electronically. Others can post a cheque to our Post Office box.

One solution: two states

Lara Friedman

The steady march of settlements, the rightward shift in Israeli politics, the growing sense that a conflict-ending peace agreement is impossible -- all these things are feeding some pundits' impulse to declare the death of the two-state solution as a means of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But what are the alternatives?

Some support a one-state solution. Anti-Zionists and some post-Zionists imagine a Palestinian-majority, secular, democratic state; some Israeli right-wingers envision Israel annexing the West Bank, using ploys to disenfranchise its Palestinian residents and finally getting rid of Gaza.

Both visions are illusions. No Israeli government will dissolve the State of Israel. And Israel will never be able to justify, even to its closest allies, formalising its own version of Apartheid in the West Bank while turning Palestinians in Gaza into a futureless, stateless people imprisoned on the edge of the Sinai.

Others want to revive interest in the "make-the-Palestinians-someone-else's-problem" scenario, popular in Israel in the 1970s and 1980s with slogans like "Jordan is Palestine" and "Gaza is Egypt."

But this, too, is an illusion. Neither Egypt nor Jordan will willingly collude in killing the dream of Palestine. Neither will take on Palestinian populations that would almost certainly be destabilising, domestically and regionally. Neither will agree to Israel annexing East Jerusalem. And any effort by Israel to force the issue -- by trying to dump Gaza in Egypt's lap and force parts of the West Bank on Jordan -- would likely cost Israel its peace treaties with both countries.

Still others are adopting a "variation-on-the-status-quo" approach. They suggest that the current situation can be tweaked to be bearable for both sides, until Israelis and Palestinians evolve to the point where a permanent, conflict-ending agreement is possible.

This idea is disconnected from reality. The occupation cannot be neutered by clever arrangements. Any continuation of the status quo, however tweaked, will lead inevitably to more settlement expansion and a deepening of Israel's hold on East Jerusalem -- to the point that even if the hoped-for sea changes someday occurred in both societies, there would be nothing left for the newly enlightened peoples to negotiate.

And finally, a growing number of Israelis are advocating the "no solution" paradigm. This is the view that there is simply no way of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

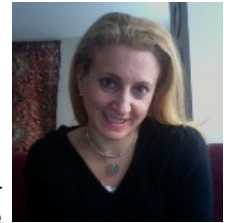
Like the others, the "no solution" paradigm is an illusion -- the product of the fact that the status quo is generally quite bearable for most Israelis. It reflects an almost child-like belief that the situation is static -- that the status quo will endure even if Israel signals that it has no intention of ending the occupation. It assumes that Palestinians, denied even the hope of a political horizon, will not abandon restraint and fight harder and more violently for their freedom. It assumes that the de facto détente that Israel has achieved with the Arab world won't crumble.

Because things generally seem to get worse in the Middle East, we often forget that they can also change for the better. Today, 32 years after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's 1978 visit to Jerusalem, which heralded the beginning of the land-for-peace era, and 17 years after the Oslo Accords, which signalled the birth of the two-state paradigm, there are those who argue that the land-for-peace and two-state paradigms are as fantastical as the others. They are wrong.

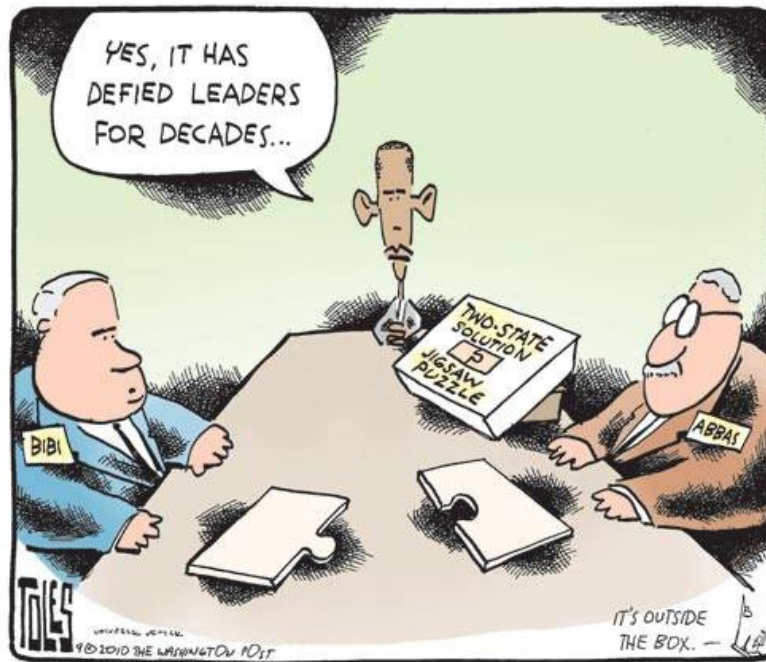
The two-state solution is still possible, even if it becomes harder to imagine -- and to implement -- with each passing day. And it is the only option that holds the promise of anything other than a permanent state of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and between Israel and the Arab world. Israelis and Palestinians seem to recognise this -- polls show that majorities of both populations still support the two-state solution, even as each doubts the seriousness of the other side's commitment to achieving it. Recent polling shows that majorities in the Arab world feel the same and recognise that if the two-state solution is gone, the most likely result will be intense conflict.

Those of us who care about the future of Israel and the Palestinians should be doing everything we can to capitalise on this realism and to realise the two-state solution, before the opportunity is truly lost. And we should be pushing back hard against casual talk about post-two-state paradigms -- because the "alternatives" are just illusions.

Lara Friedman is director of policy and government relations, Americans for Peace Now.



Lara Friedman



Pro-attack on Iran? Anti-Israel!

M J Rosenberg

In his *Atlantic piece* designed to elicit an Obama endorsement of an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, Jeff Goldberg undermines his case by realistically predicting what the effects of an attack would be.

He predicts thousands of deaths — not only Iranians but also many Israelis and probably Americans. Oil prices would skyrocket, Jews in the diaspora would come under attack, the United States would be embroiled in the worst Middle East crisis



Situated right next door to the Defence Ministry, Tel Aviv's Azrieli Towers could be targeted by Hamas or Iran.

ever, and Israel would become the "leper of nations."

Pretty horrible.

In January, James Phillips, Senior Fellow for Middle East Affairs at the very hawkish and right-wing Heritage Foundation, produced a strong report which, among other things, describes what an Iranian retaliation to an Israeli attack would look like. Here are the highlights.

Iran's retaliation for an Israeli strike is likely to be fierce, protracted, and multi-pronged. Iran is likely to bom-

bard Israel with its Shahab-3 medium-range ballistic missiles, possibly armed with chemical, biological, or radiological warheads. Such a missile barrage would amount to a terror campaign, similar to the "war of the cities" during the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, when the two adversaries launched hundreds of Scud surface-to-surface missiles at each others' cities....

In addition to direct attacks on Israel, the Tehran regime is likely to launch indirect attacks using a wide variety of surrogate groups, such as Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Hamas, all of which are armed with Iranian-supplied rockets. Hezbollah has received longer-range and more lethal Iranian rockets that would threaten many more Israeli civilians than during the 2006 war.

Iran also has armed Hamas with increasingly sophisticated long-range rockets, capable of striking Tel Aviv, Israel's largest city, from Gaza. Terrorist attacks on Israeli targets outside Israel, as well as against Jewish communities abroad, would also be near-certain. Iran could activate Hezbollah sleeper cells to attack Israeli targets not only in the Middle East, but in South America, North America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

The Heritage paper also describes the horrific effects an Israeli attack on Iran would have on US interests — including on US men and women in uniform throughout the region.

But that is for another essay. After all, few of the major proponents of bombing Iran are arguing that it is neces-

sary for US security — let alone that a bloody blowback against Americans is a risk worth taking. No, at this point, the argument is all about Israel and the threat an Iranian nuclear weapon might pose to it. That is why virtually all the personalities and organisations agitating for war are strongly identified with the Israeli right.



M J Rosenberg

And that is ironic.

Imagine if an American politician declared that it was necessary for the security of the United States that we take an action that would result in missile onslaughts against our cities. Imagine the South Korean government — which has a truly crazed neighbour next door — proposing a solution to its security problems that would leave thousands of people in Seoul dead or dying. Imagine the Republic of Georgia deciding that the best way to defend against Russia is by bombing Moscow and then seeing what happens next.

Of course, these scenarios are unimaginable. People who advocate policies that would lead to missile onslaughts against civilians in their own country tend to be dismissed as lunatics — unless their country is already under attack. (Londoners bravely withstood the blitz that took 50,000 British lives, but they were defending themselves against Hitler, who attacked their island.)

But, in the case of Israel, those who claim to love it most would tolerate mass carnage to pre-empt a threat that is completely hypothetical.

I am being generous.

Few Israelis, in contrast to the "pro-Israel" organisations here, argue that Iran would use a nuclear weapon. They admit that their concern is that an Iranian bomb would



Iranian nuclear facility

limit Israel's freedom of movement — in other words, its regional hegemony.

Defence Minister Ehud Barak told Goldberg that the "real threat" is that an Iranian bomb might cause an Israeli "brain drain," with some Israelis deciding to leave the country for greener pastures abroad.

"Jews know that they can land on their feet in any corner

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of the world. The real test for us is to make Israel such an attractive place, such a cutting-edge place in human society, education, culture, science, quality of life, that even American Jewish young people want to come here." This vision is threatened by Iran and its proxies, Barak said.

And Goldberg devotes a sizable chunk of his piece arguing that war is inevitable because Netanyahu has to impress his fanatical right-wing and seemingly unhinged 100-year-old father, Ben-Zion Netanyahu.

Goldberg writes: "Always in the back of Bibi's mind is Ben-Zion," one of the prime minister's friends told me. "He worries that his father will think he is weak."

One of Netanyahu's Knesset allies told me, indelicately, though perhaps not inaccurately, that the chance for movement toward the creation of an independent Palestinian state will come only after Ben-Zion's death. "Bibi could not withdraw from more of Judea and Samaria" — the biblical names for the West Bank — "and still look into his father's eyes."

Still look into his father's eyes. Binyamin Netanyahu is 61 years old and the prime minister of his country. And yet he makes life-and-death decisions for the children, women and men of his country based on his need for parental approval. What can one say?

There is no evidence whatsoever that a nuclear-armed Iran would behave any differently than any other country that possesses the bomb. It is no more interested in national suicide than the United States, France, Pakistan or even North Korea.

But the hawks and neocons in Israel and here say, "What if they are suicidal? Then it will be too late."

Well, welcome to the atomic age. Since 1945, every nation on the planet — and particularly those, like the United States, with nuclear-armed enemies — have had to live with the possibility that one of their enemies would do something insane. Americans, to put it rather inelegantly, freaked out when they learned that Stalin, a mon-

ster who had killed millions of his own countrymen, had the bomb. But only the crazies proposed pre-emptively bombing the Soviet Union — or Maoist China, when it got the bomb a decade later.

And why? Mostly because they knew that Americans would not tolerate the mass destruction at home that attacking our enemies would produce, destruction which the advocates of attacking Iran are willing to accept for Israel.



Ben-Zion Netanyahu and son

The neocons will respond that Israel is in a uniquely precarious situation. And they will say that after the Holocaust, Israel has every right to do everything in its power to ensure that the State of Israel survives. I totally agree, and I'm grateful that Israel has some 200 nuclear weapons to serve as the ultimate guarantee that no one can attack Israel with the deadliest of weapons.

And that is precisely why smart Israelis, and their friends abroad, must prevent the "bomb Iran" zealots from convincing the United States government that Israel is so helpless and vulnerable that it needs to "Pearl Harbor" Iran. Attacking Iran would begin the terminal unravelling of the Jewish state. What kind of friends would allow that to happen?

You don't destroy the village to save it, especially if the existence of the village is a miracle.

Those who support an Israeli attack on Iran are indistinguishable from Israel's worst enemies. The only difference is that their plans can actually be realised.

M J Rosenberg is Senior Foreign Policy Fellow at Media Matters Action Network. From 1998-2009, he was director of policy at Israel Policy Forum.

Samah Sabawi's disagreement with *Newsletter*

Palestinian activist and well-known BDS (Boycotts, Sanctions and Divestments) supporter Samah Sabawi, who addressed an AJDS forum on the subject of the Palestinian BDS, has disagreed with the way her talk was covered. She requested a public correction. While we stand by our original report, we are happy to reprint her comments on our Editor's Facebook page, where the report was republished:

A correction and a comment. First the comment: I am truly heartened and made optimistic by the fact that we can see past our differences in order to find our common grounds. As I mentioned at the meeting BDS is not a one-size-fits-all, and it can never be. We are all stakeholders and we can chart our own paths toward finding a peaceful resolution as long as we do so based on informed decisions.

Now the corrections:

I wasn't explicit in denying the people of Israel a say in the process. I highlighted the fact that the BDS call was the voice of Palestinian Civil Society's and that Palestini-

ans have a right to determine the path of their resistance. I was actually reading off a note I prepared prior to the meeting and what I said exactly was this: "Of course, we need to regard the views of Israeli and Jewish peace activists and whenever and wherever possible we need to streamline our efforts and work together. Having said that, as we continue to work in solidarity with Palestinian grassroots non-violent resistance and Palestinian Civil Society we must acknowledge that they, the Palestinians — who are living in the iron grip of occupation, have a right to decide on the best method for attaining their freedom from the illegal occupation and the systematic oppression. After all, they are the ones who pay the ultimate price. They have called for a non-violent form of resistance that is anchored in international law and universal human rights values."

Editor's response: I don't dispute what Sabawi has written here. While there were various implicit allusions, the explicit comment came in answer to a question from the audience.

A reversed *Dayenu*

Sol Salbe

A recent advertisement by the Independent Australian Jewish Voices published in a couple of broadsheets and the *Australian Jewish News* has stirred a fair bit of debate on social networks. There has been plenty of criticism, but there is better value in a calm analysis of on one side the ad and its initiators (Antony Loewenstein, Peter Slezak and their close collaborators) and on the other side their critics. One can anticipate the wrath of people on both sides – those who opt for a contextualised analytical approach usually do, but it is nevertheless a worthwhile task.

As the principal of the Middle East News Service, I have already been on the receiving end. My readers are entitled to make up their own minds, and I circulated the invitation to sign from the IAJV. Immediately I was told that I was making a big mistake by associating myself with Loewenstein et al. Why did you circulate it? I was asked. The quick retort was that, for the first time in a long time, the contents of a prospective ad emanating from that source did not make me spit date-stones at the computer screen. This was indeed a more measured ad than recent IAJV efforts.

If a quantitative measure is any guide, the most significant criticism of the IAJV statement was that it is unbalanced. That view was articulated on Facebook by Mark Baker and others. There is no question, and the initiators of the statement will most likely not disagree that it was one-sided. Israel was criticised, the Palestinians were not. Israel was told, albeit indirectly, to change its behaviour. The Palestinians were not.

But is that wrong? Is a political statement only credible if it is even-handed? To answer this question it may be better to explore the general principles, rather than the specifics of this ad. I would like to put the proposition that sheeting home the blame on every occasion, and under all circumstances does result in a loss of credibility. How can one make a nuanced statement when your words do not take account of the context that surrounds whatever is happening? The IAJV appear to have made a conscious decision to not criticise Palestinians. They certainly refused to condemn Hamas and other Palestinian organisations for their rocket bombardment of Sderot and environs in 2008-09. Others like B'Tselem, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were able to de-

nounce the targeting of civilians as a crime against humanity, while all along condemning Israel's own crimes in similar language to that of the IAJV.

But by the same token, addressing both sides regardless of their actions and the facts on the ground can also result in a loss of credibility. As it happens, rockets and mortars are not the issue this time. It is nonsensical to slam both sides when, on this occasion at least, wrongdoing was overwhelmingly confined to one side. Mark Baker chose to contrast the one-sided IAJV ad with a recent J-Street ad. That advertisement criticised Israel for resuming construction in the settlements but at the

same called on the Palestinians to remain at the negotiation table regardless of Israel's actions. Whatever are J-Street's motivations, I for one would not be able to urge anyone to remain in negotiations when the other side was showing such bad faith. Nor have there been such calls from within any section of the Israeli peace movement, no matter how broadly defined. With all due re-

spect to Dr Baker, there are times when one needs to be one-sided.

To continue with one of Dr Baker's other criticisms, IAJV statements would be better received within the Jewish community and others concerned for Israel's welfare had they at least occasionally expressed concern for Israel's Jewish citizens. Baker may wish to reinforce the point on every occasion. I do not think this is entirely necessary, but occasionally stating one's views on this score would give readers a better perspective as to where the signatories were coming from.

Another criticism related to the one-line allusion to the Holocaust. It appears to be shorthand for a several complex issues and thus seems to be gratuitous. It is legitimate to argue that the lesson of "never again" is universally applicable, but it needs more context. Others, even non-Jews like Tariq Ali have been able to draw out the lessons of the Holocaust without causing offence. But to do it properly and explain it requires substantial effort and naturally more than one line. Blogger and activist Michael Brull made the point when that, given the inevitable resulting distraction, perhaps the Holocaust allusion was not worth the trouble. [He also pointed out that the Right side of politics has appropriated the Holocaust as its own with their talk of the Iranian Hitler etc.]

(Continued on page 9)

JEW SAYS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

'The attitude we adopt towards the Arab minority will provide the real test of our moral standards as a people.' - Albert Einstein, in a letter to The New York Times, 1948.

Not all Australian Jews condone Israel's actions. As a growing group of concerned Jews, we share the widespread outrage at the Israeli Government's unjust treatment of the Palestinian people. We condemn Israel's constant violations of international law which include:

- the invasion of Gaza in 2008 that caused around 1400 mainly civilian deaths.
- the ongoing blockade of Gaza in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention.
- the military assault in May against a civilian flotilla in international waters trying to break the blockade on Gaza.
- the separation wall running through the West Bank which was ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice in 2004.
- the 43-year military occupation of the West Bank and the illegal settlements.

We believe that uncritical support of the Jewish State is not the way to memorialise the Holocaust. We have a moral obligation to speak out.

Join us in urging the Australian Government to exert pressure on Israel to conform to International Law and humanitarian standards.

Published by Independent Australian Jewish Voices on behalf of more than 130 signatories, including:

Andrew Benjamin
Ian Cohen MLC
Eva Cox AO
Ned Curthoys
Sara Dowse

David Goodman
David Heilpern
Linda Jaivin
David Leser
Antony Loewenstein

Andrew Riemer
Peter Slezak
Susan Varga
George Winston AM
Ron Witton

See others on our website www.iajv.org

Hear American Jewish award-winning writer Anna Baltzer talk on *'Life in Occupied Palestine'*, during her October Australian tour.

Details on the IAJV website: www.iajv.org

Ms Balzer has been a volunteer with the International Women's Peace Service in the West Bank, is a Columbia University graduate, former Fulbright scholar and author of *Witness in Palestine: A Jewish American Woman in the Occupied Territories*. Among many public appearances she has featured most recently on the *Jon Stewart Daily Show*.

(Continued from page 8)

Brull was also one of the few who took up the inclusion of an advertisement for a speaking tour by Anna Baltzer as part of the advertisement. The IAJV are co-sponsoring



Peter Slezak

her tour. While the IAJV claim they are not an organisation, it is difficult to conceive of how an amorphous collection of people can sponsor a tour without some decision-making structure. By including the advertisement as part of the statement, the initiators establish a nexus between signing the statement and supporting what appears to the outside world as the structured body that sponsored the tour. That is wrong regardless of the status or popularity of the organisation involved. The collective of all those who agree with the sentiments and contents of a statement should not be associated with

that segment of the whole that wishes to sponsor a particular speaker.

So here was a case of what I can only describe as reversed Dayenu. The substantive part of the statement I could live with and sign, but the initiators do not have a track record of concern for my friends in Israel, and their Holocaust allusion was so fleeting it seemed gratuitous; they conflated their own organisational interest in the success of the speaking tour with the collective interests of all Jews who are critical of the Occupation and the Wall, etc. Altogether it was a bit too much.

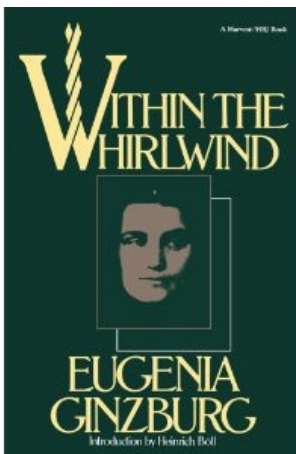
But with some consultation it could be different next time. The initiators seem riled by suggestions for broader consultation coming from Melbourne. Let them consult in Sydney. The key issue is not geographical nor is it an issue confined to one particular group or another. The point is to look at the breadth of opinion that signed the very first statement. They were Zionists, non-Zionists and anti-Zionists; supporters of one state and of two states. A large number of people could be mobilised to sign a statement raising the issues of the Wall, the Gaza flotilla, Cast Lead and so on. Just a little more consultation, that's all.

Indelible *Within the whirlwind*

Masha Leon

Alongside the Israeli film *The Human Resources Manager*, the Polish/German/Belgian film *Within the Whirlwind* is our pick for the 2010 Festival of Jewish Cinema..

The leitmotiv of Marleen Gorris's indelible film, *Within the Whirlwind*, which closed the New York Jewish Film Festival, is how amid unrelenting fear, terror and privation, the human spirit manages to survive — and thrive. The film is based on the memoir of Eugenia Ginzburg, a professor at Kazan State University in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, stunningly portrayed by Emily Watson. In class, Zenia (as friends call her) chastises a student for submitting a work without punctuation. "It opens up the text to multiple interpretations" is the student's defence. Ginzburg then writes



Eugenia Ginzburg's book

on the blackboard, "Pardon impossible to be executed." She puts a comma after "pardon." It then reads: "Pardon, impossible to be executed." A student calls out, "He lives!" Placing the comma after "impossible," it then reads, "Pardon impossible, to be executed." Ginzburg asks the class, "Should the condemned man be executed on the strength of a comma?" The no-punctuation student replies, "Could be either way, I suppose." Ginzburg, a loyal Communist Party member who barely acknowledges the plots swirling about her, finds herself

in this no man's land of political "commas." Watching a colleague dragged off by the authorities, she comments, "I'm sure they know what they are doing."

Later, when she is called on the carpet for not having

condemned a colleague who has been accused of being "party to Trotsky terrorist counter-revolutionary groups," Ginzburg defends herself by claiming ignorance of the facts. "We do not arrest innocent men in this country!" her accuser proclaims. Forbidden to teach, Ginzburg is then arrested, tried and sentenced to execution, but is tearfully relieved when, in 1939, she is condemned to 10 years in Stalin's gulag for "collaboration and conspiring with the enemies of the people."

On the Trans-Siberian train with other prisoners, a young woman is convinced that "Comrade Stalin" is unaware of the injustices of his authorities, and that letters and petitions need to be sent to inform him about the women's arrests. As the train stops in some godforsaken station at which the train guards buy produce from local peasants, Ginzburg is shown peering through a chained opening in a cattle car, watching a young peasant girl come across a frozen field, bearing a basket of raspberries. In what may be a nod to the little girl in the red coat in Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*, the raspberries in this black-and-white film are tinted red! In one of the film's many sublime moments, the young girl hands the basket to Ginzburg, then reaches through the opening and strokes the prisoner's cheek.

Life in the gulag is beyond brutal. The worst enemy is the 40 to 50 below zero weather in which the women work, felling trees. Survival depends on the kindness of fellow prisoners, and, as in Nazi concentration camp settings, it was those friendships that often prevented death or suicide. Ginzburg's sanity is sustained by poetry, Pushkin's writings and the camp's "Volga German" doctor Anon — himself a prisoner, played by Ulrich Tukur (last seen in the film *North Face*) — who is distrusted by the other Russian prisoners. Cultured and sensitive, he cares for the prisoners, often defying orders. Following Stalin's death, Ginzburg was "rehabilitated in 1955." She was forbidden to return to "the mainland," Russia proper.

Abridged from the *New York Forward*

The Roma: Europe's favourite scapegoat

Conn Hallinan

Peggy Hollinger and Chris Bryant of the *Financial Times* put their fingers on what's behind the current uproar over Europe's Roma population: the group is "an easy target for politicians seeking to distract attention from problems at home by playing on fears over security." That strategy was stage centre in early August when France's conservative government shipped several hundred Roma back to Romania and French President Nicolas Sarkozy pledged he would bulldoze 300 Roma camps over the next several weeks.

Europe is certainly in need of distraction these days. Sarkozy's poll numbers are dismal and his administration is plagued by scandals. The economic crisis has seen France's debt soar, and European governments have instituted savage austerity programs that are filling the jobless rolls from Dublin to Athens. Since most politicians would rather not examine the cause of the economic crisis roiling the continent -- many were complicit in dismantling the checks and balances that eventually led to the current recession -- "criminal Gypsies" come in very handy.

France's crackdown was sparked by an angry demonstration in Saint-Aignan following the death of a young "traveller" at the hands of police. Sarkozy never saw a riot he couldn't turn to his advantage. On July 29 his office declared it would dismantle Roma camps because they are "sources of illegal trafficking, profoundly shocking living standards, exploitation of children for begging, prostitution and crime."

European Commission aid declined

Living conditions in Roma camps are, indeed, substandard, but in large part because local French authorities refuse to follow a law requiring that towns with a population of over 5000 establish electrical and water hookups for such camps. And because countries like Germany, France, Italy and Britain refuse to use any of the \$22 billion that the European Commission has made available for alleviating the conditions that the Roma and other minorities exist under.

As for the "crime" and "drug trafficking" charge, research by the European Union (EU) suggests there is no difference between crime rates among the Roma than in "the population at large."

"Indeed there are Roma who are in charge of trafficking networks, but they represent less than one per cent of this population, the rest are victims," David Mark, head of the Civic Alliance of Roma in Romania, a coalition of over 20 Roma non-governmental organisations, told IPS News.

Mark went on to point out that "Because that one per cent commits crimes and the authorities are not able to stop

them, all Roma are being criminalised." The expulsions and demolitions, he charged, are "based on criminalisation of an entire ethnic group, when criminality should be judged on a case by case basis in courts of law."

Hysteria

In some cases the level of hysteria would be almost laughable were it not resulting in the most wide-spread roundup of an ethnic minority since World War II. Italy declared a "Gypsy emergency," in spite of the fact that Italy, which has a population of 57.6 million people, has only 60,000 non-Italian Roma.

Estimates are that there are between 10 and 12 million Roma in Europe, making the group the continent's largest minority.

For several weeks, the EU's executive body, the European Commission, played hot potato with the issue. The EC insisted that it was doing everything it could to help the Roma and pointed to the \$22 billion pot that remains pretty much untapped. But it also kept silent on charges by human rights organisations that countries like Germany, Italy and France were violating EU law guaranteeing freedom of movement.

These nations - primarily France - argue that since the Roma are from Romania and Bulgaria, and both countries are newly minted EU members, the freedom of movement clause doesn't kick in until 2014. And, in any case, French officials charge that the Roma can't show they are gainfully employed and self-supporting.

On this latter point, rights organisations point out that Roma are discriminated against in employment. "It's somewhat hypocritical to complain about people not having money to subsist in France when you don't offer access to the labour market at the same time," says Bob Kushen, managing director of the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest.

EU restrictions

With the exception of Spain and Finland, most EU members have the same restrictions on staying in a country more than three months without a regular job.

France is certainly not alone in singling out the Roma. Germany is preparing to deport 12000 to Kosovo, a destination that may well put the deportees in danger, because Kosovo Albanians accuse the Roma of siding with the Serbs during the 1999 Yugoslav War. From the Roma's point of view Serbia had long guaranteed their communities a certain level of employment and educational opportunities, while the Albanians had always repressed them.



Conn Hallinan



Sarkozy never saw a riot he couldn't turn to his advantage.

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Other countries singling out the Roma include Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium. The Swedes deported some 50 Roma for "begging," even though begging is not a crime in Sweden.

"Recent developments in several European countries, most recently eviction of Roma camps in France and expulsions of Roma from France and Germany, are certainly not the right measures to improve the situation of this vulnerable minority. On the contrary, they are likely to lead to an increase in racist and xenophobic feelings in Europe," said Meviut Cavusogiu, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Cavusogiu cited Protocol No 4 of the European Convention of Human Rights that prohibits "the collective expulsions of aliens," as well as the right to freedom of movement for all EU citizens. However, France was sticking by its guns, claiming that it was not "deporting" anyone: the Roma were leaving voluntarily for a nominal payment of \$386 for adults, and \$129 for children. But some members of Sarkozy's party, the Union for a Popular Movement, were using the word "deport," and even the more explosive term "rafles." That was the term used to describe the rounding up of French Jews during WW II, most of whom died in the death camps.

Roma suffered a similar fate at the hands of the Nazis. It is estimated that between 200,000 and 1.5 million Roma perished in the concentration camps.

Scapegoating the Roma is an old European tradition, almost as old as the initial migration of the Romany people out of Rajasthan, India in the 11th century. Most of those



Roma people leaving France

Roma settled in Moldavia and Wallachia -- today's Romania -- where they were quickly enslaved.

Those Romany who did not escape enslavement by taking up the nomadic life remained slaves until 1856.

A lack of access to education, social services, education and the legal system for Romania's 2.5 million Roma still drives many of them to take to the road. As bad as conditions for the Roma are in countries like France and Germany, they are better than those in poverty-stricken Romania.

Conn Hallinan is currently a columnist for Foreign Policy In Focus (FPIF.com).

The strange case of the undercover cop

ABCC has explaining to do

Bernard Keane

The new head of the Australian Building and Construction Commissioner, Leigh Johns, will have some explaining to do when he attends his first Senate Estimates hearings after the remarkable case of a Western Australian police officer infiltrating a union meeting came to light recently.

The Commission and WA Police have yet to explain how a police officer, Sgt Jack Lee, attended a CFMEU meeting in Karratha undercover and reported on the meeting to the ABCC. WA Police have admitted that Lee, who allegedly was there in plainclothes for the purposes of public safety, failed to follow necessary reporting protocols and was, in the words of WA Police Commander Fred Gere, "drawn into a situation that really a police officer shouldn't have been drawn into". The ABCC is taking action against CFMEU state assistant secretary Joe McDonald on the basis of Lee's report.

This is only the latest in a list of incidents involving the ABCC's use of its draconian powers to pursue a campaign against the CFMEU. It has threatened to jail a Melbourne academic whom it compelled to attend an interrogation over a dispute on a building site the man had seen while walking past. It tried and eventually failed to prosecute CFMEU official Noel Washington for failing to obey a summons to be interrogated about a union meeting held outside work hours. And it is currently pursuing the apparently arbitrary prosecution of South Australian CFMEU member Ark Tribe for failing to attend a hearing.

Former commissioner John Lloyd defended the commission at Estimates this year by saying: "We respond to complaints. We do not go on fishing expeditions." That might explain the commission's curious inactivity after the CFMEU's NSW headquarters was firebombed in May,

only contacting the union about the incident two weeks later -- the day before the Commission was due to appear at Estimates.

The ABCC's vendetta against the CFMEU has proceeded while -- as tragically predicted by a major employer group in 2004 -- there has been a huge increase in deaths in the building industry, up more than 30 per cent between 2004 and 2008, and sham contracting in the building industry has cost taxpayers hundreds of millions a year in lost revenue. Until Labor Senator Doug Cameron raised the issue at Estimates in 2009, the commission had routinely fobbed off complaints about sham contracting to the Fair Work Ombudsman, despite having statutory responsibility for the issue.

The Commission has a large number of ex-police officers working for it and the CFMEU says it is implausible that there was no planning of Lee's undercover infiltration of the meeting between the WA Police, which has denied involvement, and ABCC staff.

"It's passing strange that the police sought to secure the peace at a public meeting by sending a plain-clothes officer in," CFMEU construction division head Dave Noonan told *Crikey.com.au*.

Noonan wrote to new Workplace Relations Minister Chris Evans calling for an independent inquiry into the incident and whether the ABCC is using law enforcement officials for covert monitoring elsewhere. Labor promised before the 2007 election to abolish the ABCC but instead opted to transfer most of its powers to a new Building Industry Inspectorate. The relevant legislation failed to pass before the election.

Bernard Keane is Canberra correspondent for *Crikey.com.au* where this was first published.

A different take on *Eat, Pray, Love*

Sandip Roy

For the longest time, I thought the 2006 bestseller *Eat, Pray, Love* was a sequel to the 2004 bestseller about punctuation, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*.

Now I am enlightened. One is about the search for the meaning of life. The other is about the meaning of a comma.

I confess I never read Elizabeth Gilbert's bestseller except for browsing through a few pages in a copy sitting by a friend's bedside. I enjoyed the writing. The story of picking yourself up after losing your way has universal appeal even if we all can't afford to recharge under the Tuscan sun.

It's not Gilbert's fault, but as someone who comes from India, I have an instinctive reflex reaction to books about white people discovering themselves in brown places. I want to gag, shoot and leave.

The story is so self-involved, its movie version should've been called, "Watch Me Eat, Pray and Love." In a way I almost prefer the old colonials in their pith helmets trampling over the Empire's far-flung outposts. At least they were somewhat honest in their dealings. They wanted the gold, the cotton, and labourers for their sugar plantations. And they wanted to bring Western civilisation, afternoon tea and anti-sodomy laws to godforsaken places riddled with malaria and beriberi.

The new breed is more sensitive, less overt. They want to spend a year in a faraway place on a "journey." But the journey is all about what they can get. Not gold, cotton or spices anymore. They want to eat, shoot films (or write books), emote and leave. They want the food, the spirituality, the romance.

Now, I don't want to deny Gilbert her "journey." She is herself honest, edifying and moving. I don't want to deny her Italian carbs, her Indian Om's or her Bali Hai beach romance. We all need that sabbatical from the rut of our lives.

But as her character complained that she had "no passion, no spark, no faith" and needed to go away for one year, I couldn't help wondering where do people in Indonesia and India go away to when they lose their passion, spark and faith? I don't think they come to Manhattan. Usually third-worlders come to America to find education, jobs and to save enough money to send for their families to join them, not work out their kinks.

This is not to say *Eat, Pray, Love* – now a major movie in a theatre near you -- just exists in a self-centred air-conditioned meditation cave and has no heart. But it requires more than the normal suspension of disbelief when Julia Roberts announces she will eat that whole pizza and

buy the "big girl jeans." We see her trying to squeeze her Julia Roberts body into her jeans, struggling with the zipper and we know this is a fine, brave actor at work.

She tries not to be the foreign tourist but she does spend an awful lot of time with the expats whether it's the Swede in Italy, the Texan in India or the Brazilian in Bali. The natives mostly have clearly assigned roles. Language teacher. Hangover healer.

Dispenser of fortune-cookie-style wisdom. Knowledge, it seems, is never so meaningful as when it comes in broken English, served up with puckish grins, and an idyllic backdrop. The expats have messy histories, but the natives' lives, other than that teenaged arranged marriage in India, are not very complicated. They are there as the means to her self-discovery. After that is done, it's time to book the next flight. But all through the film, this is what I was wondering. Why was she drawn to those three countries? Why Italy, India and Indonesia?

Is it because they all start with I?

I, I, and I.

Not inappropriate for a film that is ultimately about Me, Myself, and I. I travel therefore I am.

Nothing drove that home better than what happened after the screening ended. I went down in an elevator crammed with radiant women, all discussing when they teared up during the film, and how much they related to it, and its message of opening yourself up to the world. There

was one woman in a wheelchair in the elevator. After we reached the lobby, the women, still chattering, marched out into the chilly San Francisco night. The woman in the wheelchair remained stranded behind the heavy doors.

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BDS Conference — No AJDS role

AJDS Executive members have received several inquiries as to whether we will be participating at the BDS conference at the end of October in Melbourne. Our resolution is clear: "The AJDS is opposed to any Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign aimed at the breadth of Israeli economic, cultural or intellectual activity." At its last meeting the Executive therefore resolved as an organisation we do not offer any form of assistance to the conference. We do not wish to allow anyone to use our reputation on the Left to enhance the prestige of this event and use it as an argument to the waverers in the same way that our participation in the Victorian Peace Network was used in the churches and unions.



Sandip Roy



AJDS briefing paper on JCCV denunciation

The Australian Jewish Democratic Society did expect a strong reaction to its stance accepting some boycotts of Israel. The community leadership has long preferred the Jewish community to speak with one voice. Those who step outside the boundaries are not viewed with favour and get harshly reminded of their loss of grace. What we did not expect was a denunciation of our position without any attempt to communicate with anyone from the AJDS. The Jewish Community Council of Victoria is meant to be a democratic body. One would expect it to verify the facts before publicly launching an attack on an affiliate. The JCCV also has a reputation for professionalism, but there is nothing professional about attacking someone without ensuring that your arguments are soundly based.

Community affiliated

JCCV president John Searle states that “The AJDS seeks to legitimate its views by describing itself as a ‘community-affiliated Jewish organisation’.



John Searle did not check his facts with AJDS—thus getting them wrong.

while the AJDS is an affiliate of the JCCV, this is a tribute to the latter’s inclusive nature rather than an acceptance of the AJDS’ views.” Never having asked the AJDS about its reason for the use of that description, Searle gets it wrong. We wanted to ensure that concerns with the Occupation and its impact on both Palestinians and Israelis are no longer seen as being confined to those with limited involvement in the community. The AJDS has always firmly placed itself within our community. Although its voice might sometimes be different, it is not defined by that difference. When an organisation so committed to being part of the community takes such a stance such as ours, perhaps it is time to take a break and think of the implications – just how pervasive is such criticism of Israel within the community? Certainly the point has not escaped the Zionist Council of Victoria, which incorporated a reference to support for boycotts within the Jewish community in an advertisement relating to boycotts as soon as our position became public.

Searle contends that boycotts, divestment and sanctions are counterproductive. But perhaps he thinks that they are only counterproductive when he disapproves of the target? For only a fortnight earlier, he was part of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry that lauded

Australian sanctions on Iran. There may well be an argument for sanctions against Iran, but there is an incapable contradiction between arguing that sanctions are ineffective and wholeheartedly supporting sanctions almost in the same breath.

Not 1930s

The JCCV suggests that boycotting settlements is reminiscent of the 1930s, when various fascist movements undertook such actions in order to demonise Jews. We find it difficult to equate well-armed settlers protected by one of the strongest military forces in the world and who are not averse to uprooting Palestinian trees with defenceless Jews facing hostile crowds and indifferent or hostile police forces. Searle’s analogy is a caricature of the true situation.

It interesting to note that while the suggestion is made that support for any BDS measures will harden those who have declared themselves as opponents of a two-state solution on the Palestinian side, no mention is made of the corollary. Doing nothing about the Occupation only strengthens those who want to continue it and expand the settlements. We would argue that every day that nothing is done about settlements is another day in which more Palestinians can be convinced that taking the peaceful road is not going to work. Doing nothing supports those who are determined to undermine any attempts at a peaceful solution.

It is nothing short of hutzpah for Searle to ask “why did [the AJDS] give a platform to pro-Palestinian activist Samah Sabawi at the meeting where this decision was made without allowing a countering point of view?” How does he know we didn’t? Had he asked us or even run a Google search, he would have discovered his accusatory tone to be totally unwarranted.

For a start, Sabawi did not speak at our meeting or even see the resolution. We had held a separate forum on the subject before our Special General Meeting. Sabawi and some people totally opposed to the BDS left the venue before the start of our meeting. Our intention was to have three speakers: Sabawi, a person who thinks boycotting is the wrong way of sending a message against Israel action, and another who would speak on why he feels uncomfortable about the Palestinian BDS. However, our efforts to find a person opposed to Israel’s recent actions who is also opposed to any boycott action came to no avail. We tried contacts in the Zionist youth movements but without luck. There are plenty of people in the community opposed to BDS, but their arguments would be based on the merits of the Gaza flotilla raid. We were not interested in a forum about Israel’s actions but were looking for someone who is as troubled by Israel’s actions as the AJDS has been, but who would suggest alternative tactics. To this day



Many people arrived late for the forum

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In Ishmael's House

Reviewed by Avi Shlaim

In Ishmael's House: A History of Jews in Muslim Lands, by Martin Gilbert.

The Jews have a fair claim to be the most persecuted minority in human history. Salo Baron, the American Jewish historian, coined the label "the lachrymose version" for the conventional accounts of Jewish history as a never-ending chain of discrimination, degradation, persecution and suffering, culminating in the Holocaust.

In his new book, historian Martin Gilbert tackles a relatively neglected but fascinating subject: the history of the Jews in Muslim lands. The end result, however, is essentially an extension of this lachrymose version from Europe to the Near East.

The book is ambitious in scope, covering 1400 years of

Jewish-Arab history. The narrative covers the period from the rise of Islam in the 7th century to the present day. It includes the fraught relationship between the Jews of Medina and the Prophet Muhammad, the Crusader conquest of the Holy Land, the Ottoman Empire, the impact of Zionism in the first half of the 20th century and the creation of Israel in 1948. The emphasis throughout is on the fundamental uncertainty of life under Muslim rule: the dual prospects of opportunity and restriction, protection and persecution.

Jewish life under Muslim rule naturally invites comparison with that under Christian rule. Here Gilbert quotes with approval the eminent Jewish scholar Bernard Lewis, who concluded that the situation of the Jews living under Muslim rulers was "never as bad as in Christendom at its worst, nor ever as good as in Christendom at its best".

Lewis observes that "there is nothing in Islamic history to parallel the Spanish expulsion and Inquisition, the Russian pogroms, or the Nazi Holocaust". But he goes on to point out that there is nothing in the history of the Jews under Islam "to compare with the progressive emancipation and acceptance accorded to the Jews in the democratic West during the last three centuries".

Gilbert is an anecdotal historian, not an analytical one. He has produced a lively chronicle of the Jews in Muslim countries from Morocco to Afghanistan. He has rich materials at his disposal and he is attentive to the human voices of individuals. But his account is both highly selective and narrowly focused on the Jews. What is missing is the wider political, social and economic context to enable the reader to place the Jewish minority in each Muslim country within its proper historical perspective.

Some examples of Muslim openness, tolerance and courage are given by Gilbert. The bulk of the book, however, consists of examples of Muslim hatred, hostility and cruelty towards the Jews.

Some of the episodes related in the book are blood-curdling, such as the Ba'th regime's arrest, torture, con-

viction and public hanging of nine Jews in Baghdad in 1969 on trumped-up charges of being Zionist spies. But episodes of this kind are the exception rather than the rule. By piling one horror story on top of another so relentlessly, Gilbert paints a misleading picture of the life of Isaac in the house of Ishmael. The reality was far more complex. As even Lewis conceded: "The Jews were never free from discrimination, but only rarely subject to persecution."

Nowhere is Gilbert more strikingly one-sided than in his account of the consequences of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In the course of this war, the name Palestine was wiped off the map and 726,000 Palestinians became refugees. In its wake, around 850,000 Jews left the Arab

world, mostly to start a new life in the newborn State of Israel. For Gilbert, these Jews are simply the other half of the "double exodus" and he persistently refers to them as "refugees". With few exceptions, however, these Jews left their native lands not as a result of officially sanctioned policies of persecution but because they felt threatened by the rising tide of Arab nationalism. Zionist agents actively encouraged the Jews to leave their ancestral homes because the fledgling State of Israel was desperately short of manpower.

Iraq exemplified this trend. The Iraqi army participated in the War for Palestine, and the Arab defeat provoked a backlash against the Jews back home. Out of a population of 138,000, roughly 120,000 left in 1950-51 in an atmosphere of panic and peril.

I was five years old in 1950 when my family reluctantly moved from Baghdad

to Ramat Gan. We were Arab Jews, we spoke Arabic, our roots went back to the Babylonian exile two and a half millennia ago and my parents did not have the slightest sympathy with Zionism. We were not persecuted but opted to leave because we felt insecure. So, unlike the Palestinians who were driven out of their homes, we were not refugees in the proper sense of the word. But we were truly victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

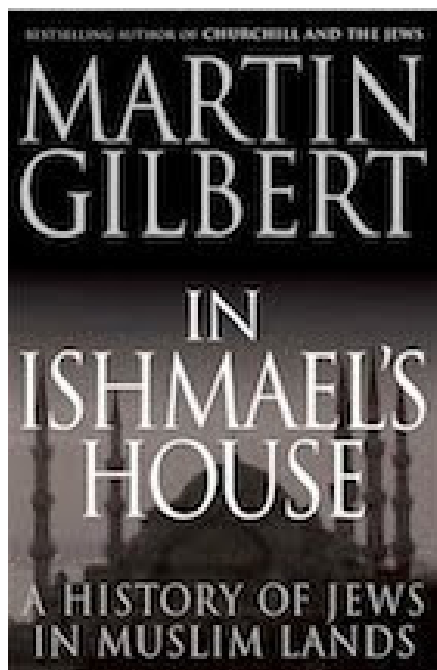
Despite all its shortcomings, Gilbert's book is an illuminating and a moving account of the history of the Jews in Arab lands. But he is psychologically hard-wired to see antisemitism everywhere. The picture he paints is consequently unbalanced.

By dwelling so persistently on the deficits, he downplays the record of tolerance, creative co-existence and multiculturalism in Muslim lands, which constitutes the best model we have for a brighter future.

Avi Shlaim is a professor of international relations at the University of Oxford and the author of *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations*. Originally published in the *Financial Times*.



Avi Shlaim



Legitimising an obstacle to peace

Theodore Bikel

I feel compelled to speak out on the controversy surrounding the Israeli artists who have announced their refusal to perform in the territories. For the record, my career as a performer has spanned 68 years. In my 20s, I was a cofounder of the Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv (of that group, I am the last one alive). I have resided in America since 1954, and as a concert artist I frequently work in the field of Jewish culture, performing in the languages of our people – Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino and even in English, the language spoken by the largest Jewish community in the world.

As president of the Associated Actors and Artists of America (the umbrella union covering performers in the United States), I have often spoken out in opposition to cultural boycotts. I have argued that art opens minds and builds bridges, even when carried into the very heart of enemy territory – perhaps especially then. But life, as we know it, often defies simple formulas. In the political arena, artists make a statement by their presence or their absence.



Ariel Performance Centre

Pablo Casals, the world-famous cellist, who chose life-long exile from his native Spain because of the fascist dictator who ruled the beloved country of his birth, said this: “My cello is my weapon; I choose where I play, when I play, and before whom I play.”

(Continued from page 13)

we do not know of a single member of the community who holds such a view and who is willing to speak out about it.

We advertised the forum broadly with the two speakers we had. In the event, many people arrived late for the forum (a not unheard of occurrence in a Jewish event.) And it had to be truncated. Those present expressed a strong will to tackle Sabawi immediately and take up the points she made, rather than listen to the next speaker, [whose comments were conveyed to the entire membership through the AJDS Newsletter.] So yes, we gave her a voice, but she also heard ours. It is all very well for Searle to quote Sabawi defining Israel as an Apartheid

My own choices have often been dictated by similar sentiments. For many years, when Apartheid was the law of the land there, I refused official invitations and lucrative offers to perform in South Africa. Indeed, I have always refused to appear in halls that were racially segregated, whether in America or elsewhere in the world. More than two years ago, I refused an invitation by the mayor of Ariel to appear at the opening of the very same cultural facility then under construction and now at the centre of the controversy.



Theodore Bikel

There are weighty reasons why I find myself in full support of the artists' refusal to perform in the territories. And it should be noted that I am not alone in supporting the courageous stand of our Israeli colleagues. There is a growing list of over 150 prominent artists and arts leaders from the US who have expressed similar concerns to mine.

The cause celebre regarding the new performance facility in Ariel has given rise to statements from the leaders of that community as well as from Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Culture Minister, Limor Livnat. While the latter asserts that “political disputes should be left outside cultural life and art,” both the prime minister and the settlers' council make it clear that the matter is not about art at all, but about what they call an attack on Israel “from within.”

The declaration of conscience signed by prominent Israeli artists – among them recipients of the Israel Prize, the highest cultural accolade given by the state – is characterised as emanating from “anti-Zionist leftists” and is described by the prime minister as being part of an “international movement of delegitimation.”

Clearly, anything that is connected to the settlers or to the settlements' presence beyond the Green Line is political. And, if the refusal of the artists to perform in the territories is tantamount to delegitimation, it follows that any agreement to perform there would amount to legitimising what many of us (in and outside of Israel) believe to be the single most glaring obstacle to peace.

Theodore Bikel is a Tony- and Oscar-nominated actor and musician.

state, but this is meaningless without mentioning that she would have heard every single person who spoke about the subject disagreeing with her. We would suggest that listening to our opponents is very democratic and very much in the Jewish tradition of resolving issues through argument. Searle's critique of us for inviting a Palestinian says more about his understanding of the terms Jewish and Democratic than about ours. It is he who is making a mockery of the terms.

Searle concludes his remarks by counterpoising the JCCV's support for a balanced solution with that of the AJDS. We are happy for history to compare our long record in genuine commitment to a two-state solution and our willingness to accept serious compromises with that of the JCCV.

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