



# AJDS Newsletter

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The Australian Jewish Democratic Society

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## Wrong focus for boycott debate

A good strategist hits his or her opponents at their weak spot. And in the case of the Occupation, anyone can tell that the Achilles heel is the settlement project. There is little support for the settlements even among those who tend to give Israel their unquestioning support. But as much as the undersigned would like to spend his time thinking up new ways to mobilise against the settlements, we live in a real world and we need to relate to it.

And in the real world the discourse has turned into a torrent of debate, with the subject matter being the BDS (Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions) campaign against Israel. To continue the metaphor, the flood of responses started with an opinion piece by Dr Neve Gordon of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in the *Los Angeles Times*. Gordon is a long time peace activist, but at the same time he fits the stereotype of a model Israeli who has served in the IDF. In a nutshell, Gordon expressed the view that after a long period of resistance to the idea, he has changed his mind:

*It is indeed not a simple matter for me as an Israeli citizen to call on foreign governments, regional authorities, international social movements, faith-based organisations, unions and citizens to suspend co-operation with Israel. But today, as I watch my two boys playing in the yard, I am convinced that it is the only way that Israel can be saved from itself.*

Gordon's sentiments are totally understandable. Several years ago the AJDS recognised that many of those who campaign for boycotts do it for noble motives. But politics is the art of the possible (and may one add effective.) And that is where our attention should be focused.

Naturally those who support and defend the Occupation were up in arms attacking him. There was a lot of nasty stuff including calls for his sacking but while all supporters of democratic rights ought to defend his right to express his view, that should not be the main concern here.

But among opponents of the Occupation, it was a contribution from the best known figure in the movement, Gush Shalom's Uri Avnery that caused the biggest stir. His comments resulted in some vituperative attacks on him by many from what is supposed to be his own side. While

almost all prefaced their criticism with a tribute to Avnery's long struggle for both Palestinian national rights and peace, they were nevertheless quite spiteful. Take Jeff Blankfort for example telling Avnery: *By what right have you and the 94 per cent of your fellow Israelis who supported the onslaught on Gaza, and with whom you now stand on the boycott issue, to make any claim on those who believe that the only way to bring about a just solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is to make Israel a political and economic pariah?*

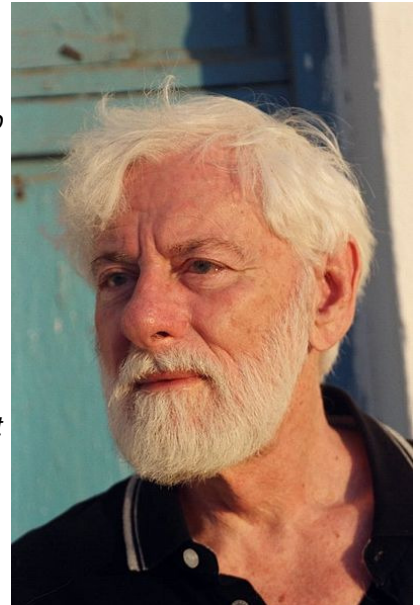
Avnery's rejoinder, which like his original comment and Neve Gordon's is on the AJDS website, answered many of his

critics by carefully examining both their motivation and their attitudes to Israel. But I want to take a somewhat different approach. How, actually, is the boycott going to work? Which people and forces is it going to affect?

I can think of at least four stakeholders here: Palestinian Arabs, world public opinion, Western governments and Israeli Jews,

There is widespread agreement on the effect on the Palestinians. This is one aspect where everyone seems to agree that the South African example is valid. In Archbishop Tutu's words: *The main thing was that it gave us the feeling that we are not alone, that the whole world is with us. That gave us the strength to continue.* No

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**Uri Avnery's insight of Israeli society should not be ignored**

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Contact Larry Stillman at [larryjhs@fastmail.fm](mailto:larryjhs@fastmail.fm) if you have anything you wish to share online.

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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...***

*Our sages told us that the baker should not vouch for his dough. But I can tell you that this is a good issue because a whole team worked on it. Apart from **Steve Brook** who proofread every article, and occasionally offered some wise words [and wrote of his own experience with antisemitism on **page 9**], and yours truly, we had articles from six other members, a record for the past eight years. Toss in a review from Kibbutz Nirim's **Zvi Solow (p15)**, a translation from the Hebrew, and two pieces from the Editor and you have a Newsletter filled with original material that you can't find anywhere else.*

*There are plenty of highlights: **Jeremy Kenner** uses his analytical skills to present an outstanding assessment of the **Jewish Community** on **pp4-5**. **Joan Nestle**, an internationally recognised author on the subject of LGBT rights, looks at **homophobia in the Jewish community** on p6, and reviews the case of **Caster Semenya** on **page 13**. **Sandy Joffe (across)** summarises our **planning process**; while **Miriam Faine** and **Linda Briskman** are full of praise for the respective speakers they heard (**pp6-7**).*

*To add to the mix there are **Les Rosenblatt** on the **ADC (p7)**; my own compilation on **Arabs on the screen (pp14-15)** and **Tami Molad-Hayou's** sardonic piece on the **Israeli Labour party (p13)**.*

*My **front page** commentary on the subject of **BDS** is not an official view of the **AJDS** but a further contribution to the discussion in which all **AJDS** members are welcome to participate. Please do.*

**Sol Salbe**

***(Continued from page 1)***

doubt the Palestinians will also take heart from a boycott for their just struggle particularly when it is using non-violent means.

The impact on world public opinion is not so easy to predict, but a case could be made that the boycott will have a positive momentum and increase those forces who are opposed to the Occupation.

In the final analysis world public opinion can and does influence the powers that be, the Western governments. Politicians do like to be re-elected and moral force sometimes does force their hands. My favourite example is not the fall of Apartheid but something closer to home: East Timor. Prime Minister John Howard didn't want to help East Timor but public opinion expressed, among other ways through talkback radio, changed his mind. Public opinion overrode his own political preferences.

But the group that matters most to fundamentally changing the situation in Israel/Palestine are Israeli Jews -- they select their government and fight its wars. Very little can change unless one way or the other they are persuaded to change their view. Can they be persuaded by external force to change their mind? Both Avnery and our own Larry Stillman (also on the website) argue that for historical reasons including the Holocaust and other Jewish traumas that is extremely unlikely. As Avnery says: *It may well be that the Jewish conviction that "the whole world is against us" is irrational. But in the life of nations, as indeed in the life of individuals, it is irrational to ignore the irrational.*

I think there is even a better argument: In various stages through the 61 years of the Nakba and 42 years of the Occupation Israel has thrown a far more powerful armoury at the Palestinians and they have not given up their attachment to their homeland. Why should a mere boycott persuade the Israeli people to give up what they also consider to be their homeland?

While concentrating on driving a wedge between the settlers and other Israelis through a boycott of the settlements' products, Avnery outlines a wise principle that can take the boycott beyond the settlements themselves, the principle of making a distinction that Israelis can understand and accept. That is a distinction between action against companies and institutions involved in the Occupation as well as the state itself on one hand, and individual Israelis whose hearts and minds need to be won over.

**Sol Salbe**

# AJDS planning process reaches fruition

## Sandy Joffe

Over the past few months a substantial number of AJDS members have been talking, thinking, arguing, discussing, sharing and debating as we focus on our future direction. Our strength, and challenge, is that we have members with strong opinions, diverse interests and great passion, so keeping us focused and moving forward was by no means an easy task. Helen Rosenbaum did a remarkable job of facilitating this process towards three clear and achievable goals.

At the final session, we identified strategies and approaches to realise our goals. These need to be fleshed out to become a concrete action plan. Please read below, and whether you are in furious agreement, or disagreement with the strategies identified, this is your chance to make a difference. **Join a working group today!**

### Goal 1

*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.*



Strategy concepts:

1. Increase our presence on the world wide web by making a conscious and explicit collective effort to contribute to web based discussion groups, and by developing our website -- uploading past statements, newsletters and articles, building the capacity to search our site by subject matter, and creating a space for member postings.
2. Increase our presence in the media. Not only should we be responding to issues, we should be raising them strategically so as to reach the maximum audience, through, for example, regular Op Ed pieces in the mainstream media.
3. Position ourselves by claiming the sensible ground that AJDS members readily agree on.

The truck idea .... (you have to join the working group to understand)

## Successful Lemon Tree showing

The AJDS combined with the Melbourne Labour Bund to organise a successful showing of the Israeli film *Lemon Tree*. A large proportion of the audience had seen the film before and one does get more out of Eran Riklis's work the second time around. But most of those who turned up for the second time came to hear Palestinian journalist Maher Mughrabi.

They were not disappointed. Mughrabi gave both an interesting critique and an in-depth analysis of the politics involved.

"Of course we are meant to see here a contest between a security that is military and political and one that is eco-

### Goal 2

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

Strategy concepts:

- Building links – bringing people together. Lots of great ideas to achieve this including:
  - Develop a writing group to produce a publication by early 2010 (Kosher Kovenant Klan)
  - Approach Jewish youth groups and liberal synagogues for joint events and forums
  - Joining with like-minded groups overseas
  - Work with local Palestinian groups

Share our ideas

- Host discussions on our three core issues
- Use community media – Channel 31 etc.

3. Be out there -- continue to march under the AJDS banner for causes we believe in

### Goal 3

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

To be heard, we need to be clear about our structure (AJDS is currently an incorporated body but needs formalisation via "by laws", membership, appointment of officers, financial accountability (ABN etc). This may require some changes:

1. Consideration/ formalisation of the structure of the Executive Committee
2. Formalisation of Sub-Committees, and
3. Representation on other formal structures.

And, complementing the strategies mentioned above, we need to be active in relevant meetings, media, community engagement (Jewish and non-Jewish), advocacy and lobbying, fundraising and promotion.

Finally, the way forward. Three working groups are being formed (but they all have space for additional members, so please call 9652 6260 to find out more). They will report to the executive so that by the end of 2009, we will have an achievable, measurable action plan.

Thanks again to Helen for her insights, thoughtfulness, patience and wisdom in guiding us through this process. If we keep on this journey, AJDS will thrive.

conomic, social and personal. I do not think it is an accident that the former is represented by a man and the latter by a woman, and that those who seek to soften the friction between the two are an immature man - the young soldier 'Quickie' in the watchtower, struggling with his psychometric tests - and the wife of the minister, or to put it another way, the big man's woman", Mughrabi said,

A very engaging question and discussion session followed his talk. Again the tone and nature of the questions demonstrated a willingness to hear and become familiar with a Palestinian point of view.

More such functions are planned for the near future.



## ARE WE WHO WE THINK WE ARE?

### Jeremy Kenner

The Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University has published its *2008-09 Jewish Population Survey Preliminary Findings: Melbourne & Sydney* aka "Gen08." The publication has generated a cascade of commentary and has been summarised in the 28 August *Australian Jewish News* and other community media. The survey tells us a lot about the self-identified Jewish communities of these two cities. However, as in most surveys, there are quite a few bedevilling bits of data and some highly questionable interpretations of the findings. And, from the perspective of those of us who may or may not be included in the survey's "marginalised" category (p 45), there is also a lot that the survey does not tell us about the full range of opinion among Australian Jews.

Reading summaries of surveys is a poor substitute for studying the survey itself. So, whilst the way the survey results are represented in the AJN is a fascinating sub-study worthy of pursuit, I will restrict myself in this commentary to the survey findings and their explication.



**Andrew Markus**

There were 6200 respondents to the survey. These 6200 appear to be highly representative of Jewish demographics (residential location, age, religious affiliation, educational level etc). No argument there. From this, the author, Professor Andrew Markus, concludes that *these statistics point to the success of the survey in reaching a broad range of sub-groups within the community* (p

45). There is no reliable way to know if Prof Markus is right. What we can agree on is that *a scientific sample is only as reliable as the database from which the sample is drawn. Community databases will necessarily under-represent marginal groups ... (and) acceptance of an invitation to participate in a survey differs across segments of the community, with the potential to compromise its claims to be scientific* (p39). The databases to which Prof Markus refers are, in Sydney, the JCA (Jewish Community Appeal) and, in Melbourne, a composite of records supplied by the JCCV, UIA Victoria and Maccabi Victoria. 25,000 invitations were mailed to households identified in those databases. Exactly how many of those households were in Fitzroy or Footscray or otherwise outside the Glen Eira and Port Phillip city boundaries is unclear, but, if one is not listed as a Jewish household on one of the databases, then, in all likelihood, one did not get an invitation.

Let me be clear: this comment is not a criticism of those who constructed the survey. The surveyors genuinely tried, in most respects, to get a reliable cross-section of the Australian Jewish population. They targeted all religious groups and explicitly included the secular Jewish community and also made a point of trying to reach what they called "marginalised groups" such as migrants from the former Soviet Union, South Africa and

Israel, the ultra-orthodox and "young people." Those of us who are members of the AJDS or IAJV or are one of those now-infamous bloggers voicing their views at the *Sensible Jew* may feel left out, but, to some extent, we have only ourselves to blame for not completing the survey in the first place. It's not as if some of us didn't know it was being conducted and couldn't have spread the word.



**Jeremy Kenner**

Still, there are some disturbing aspects to some of the definitions used and the way the survey findings are represented in the document. One fascinating example is the conflation of response categories in the Disconnectedness section of the survey (p 11). Another is a counter-intuitive outcome of two nearly identical questions *Being Jewish is a central (or, alternately, significant) element of my life* and the response to the statement that it is *Very (or, alternately, somewhat) important to be Jewish*. The first question yielded a range of 5/40 per cent for secular Jews, 25/65 per cent for traditional Jews, 50/45 per cent for the modern orthodox and 90/10 per cent for the strictly orthodox; whereas the second yielded a range of 35/40 per cent for secular Jews, 75/25 per cent for traditional Jews, and 85/15 per cent and 100 per cent for the modern and strictly orthodox, respectively. How is it possible that 75 per cent of traditional Jews think that it is very important to be Jewish but only 25 per cent of the same group think that being Jewish is a central element of their lives? This finding highlights the importance of the way a question is asked and what the response options are to the question being asked. In fact, I strongly recommend to your attention Table 10 on page 29 of the survey

where there is an overview of some, but not all of the responses.

Perhaps most problematic is the question *Do you regard yourself as a Zionist?* with the accompanying

explanation that *By the term Zionist we mean that you feel connected to the Jewish people, to Jewish history, culture and beliefs, the Hebrew language and the Jewish homeland, Israel* (p 15). The finding that approximately 80per cent of respondents identified as Zionists is the most widely celebrated finding in the survey. It weaves in and out of the document thereafter



*According to the survey's' definition all these Women in Black activists are committed Zionists*

**(Continued on page 5)**

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like a yellow emoticon smiley face. First, let's note that 13 per cent of those surveyed did not identify as Zionists and 7 per cent either did not know (!) or did not respond to this question. That means that 20 per cent of those living in households registered on mainstream Jewish community databases are (possibly) not self-identified Zionists! This is a rather surprising finding, especially given the expansive definition of this word. Is it really possible that 20 per cent of these people do not feel connected to the Jewish people and its history? Or did they (the 80 per cent? the 20 per cent? Both?) focus on the more conventional definition of Zionism as supportive of the State of Israel (itself a vague composite of support for the per se existence of a Jewish sovereign political entity along a continuum with unquestioned support for its policies and actions on the other end). How, for example, is a non-Zionist orthodox Jew supposed to answer this question? In addition, every question related to Israel is loaded and the interpretations of the responses are similarly so. Ultimately, as a result of the survey definition of Zionism alone, the Gen08 survey actually provides no useful barometer of

support for Zionism or the State of Israel at all.

But here is my real problem with this question: the finding, bolded and in Israeli-flag-blue-on-white is ***Eighty per cent of respondents indicated that they regarded themselves as Zionist, while only 13 per cent did not.*** Do you see it? It's the word "only." No scientific survey would ever use such a sentence construction. And therein, as the Bard actually didn't quite say, lies the rub. For all of the efforts made and knowledge gained and despite the seven-page Note on Methodology, hidden amidst the multi-coloured bars and segregated analyses, is the reality that the survey is a fair bit more polemical than advertised. And this is deeply unfortunate, if for no other reason than that it undermines what, in many respects, is a fascinating, multi-layered portrait of a unique Diaspora Jewish community.

But don't take my word for it. Even if you didn't get invited to complete it or wouldn't have done so even if you had been invited, at least get yourself a copy of the survey and study it over Sunday morning coffee. And, for those of you who, like me, always wait and watch the film credits, make sure to read the Note on Methodology: an awful lot of work went into this project.

## Great work in progress: [www.aids.org.au](http://www.aids.org.au)

### [Contributed]

For some months, AJDS members, but in particular Larry Stillman, have been toiling unpaid on building our new website. This is one of those tasks where most of the work input is invisible, but those in the know can tell the difference. Our website is not only up and running. It is functional – you can actually look things up on it. The



**Larry Stillman has almost single-handedly built our website**

grand plan is for it to become the first port of call for members seeking information, not only about our own organisation, statements and policies but issues ranging from global warming through refugee rights to the Middle East. But if we are to move forward as an organisation we need to bring more young people on board. Our website must appeal to them. We checked with Sydney unionist and NSW Jewish Board of Deputies member Angela Budai for her initial verdict. She really liked the content of what she had seen. We agree -- the AJDS website is a "must read" for any disconcerting Jew concerned with human rights or social justice issues. But she was not as enthusiastic about the design. It is clearly a work in progress: although the material is sophisticated and the layout consistent, the text-heaviness—with lack of colour, movement, and images—needs to be ad-

ressed in order to encourage return visits, she said. Site navigation is simple and effective, yet there is no way of contacting the AJDS directly through the website, as email contacts are inactive (perhaps this will be fixed soon). Young readers will shy away from making first contact via phone, and some valuable additions would be a web-based contact or membership form, and an option to sign up for the Middle East News Service.

Useful additions that would help create a dynamic and interesting site might include profiles of regular contributors (including photographs), photographs and reviews of AJDS activities, including forums. Links to relevant newspapers that contain thumbnail images, book reviews with thumbnail images of the covers and thumbnail images with links to external sites will all contribute to livening up what is at the moment a dry text-based information service. The addition of a logo and a greater variety of colour might also attract a younger audience.

We need to listen to younger people and take such suggestions on board. Therefore we need to give Larry Stillman the kind of technical assistance with *Drupal* that he requires. If you know of anyone with those skills, anywhere in the world, please persuade them to assist us. Volunteers should contact him at the address on page 2. With some further work and a fresh approach, the AJDS website is certain to make a much-needed contribution to debate in the Australian Jewish community.



**Angela Budai thinks we need more graphics**



# Homophobia in the Melbourne Jewish community

## Joan Nestle

The Jewish community of Melbourne has a tragic connection to last month's shootings at a support centre for Queer youth in Tel Aviv — the murdered group worker, volunteering his time after serving his 18 months in an elite intelligence unit of the IDF, Nir Katz was the great-nephew of an 89-year-old member of this community — but there are other connections as well. When the *Australian Jewish News* covered the shootings and published an editorial denouncing this act of violence, it received angry letters denouncing its interest in the homosexual community: "The last thing their readers are interested in is what is happening in Tel Aviv snake pits of dreck and perversion," in the words of a anonymous Orthodox Jewish blogger. *AJN Watch*, an online blog, had this to say: "Anyone reading this week's edition of *AJN* will be wondering if he/she didn't mistakenly pick up a copy of the Australian Gayish News."

Michael Barnett, founder of Aleph Melbourne, a group that offers a social support framework for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) Jews, has been struggling with the homophobia of the Jewish community here for a long time. In 1999, Aleph Melbourne applied to the Jewish Community Council of Victoria (JCCV) for membership and was declined. "At the JCCV plenum meeting on May 10, 1999 to decide the fate of Aleph Melbourne's application the... Rabbi... addressed the standing-room-only gathering and denounced the organisation and homosexuals with the same venom and vitriol as Hitler spreading propaganda about the Jews." (On that occasion the AJDS played a leading role in mobilising for Aleph's admission but was unsuccessful.) Barnett goes



**Michael Barnett**

on to say that the issue dominated the Jewish media for several weeks, and while some other community groups offered support, "... at no stage did anyone in a leadership position with the Jewish community speak out against this language of extreme hate and intolerance". Barnett reminds the elected officials that in July of this year, Rabbi Chaim Ingram, Honorary Secretary of the Rabbinical Council of NSW, affronted by some in the Jewish community who supported the rights of gays to marry, penned a letter to the *AJN*, "... where he unapologetically lumped homosexuals alongside people who committed adultery, bestiality and incest". These attacks on the humanity of gay people by members of a community who know firsthand the dangers of being exiled from the human family deepen the pain of those who see themselves as integral parts of both communities. One can only take such attacks on one's humanity so long. Invoking the Brumby government's concern over anti-vilification legislation, Barnett writes to the elected member: "I wish to bring to your attention those significant and powerful segments of the Victorian Jewish community and therefore by virtue of its status as the community's peak body, the JCCV, are amongst the main protagonists of homophobic hate and intolerance in Victoria." (The full text of these and other letters, including the answering one from John Searle, the President of the JCCV, can be found on [www.aleph.org.au](http://www.aleph.org.au))

"I have been called a noisy Jewish homo by *AJN Watch* blog. Yes, I am a noisy Jewish homo and I'm going to get noisier and noisier until I see something positive happen fast", Barnett wrote. "There is much debate about the relationship between hate speech and violent acts, but one thing is clear: one part of the Jewish community was told as long as ten years ago that there was no place at the table for them under the canopy of the JCCV. Just as there are cultural splits in the public discourse in Israel about who is fully human, so are there here." It remains to be seen how the JCCV responds to Barnett's call for the organisation to develop a strategy to counter what he describes as endemic "homophobic attitudes and intolerance of GLBT people...(within)...significant and powerful segments of the Jewish community".

## Israeli scholar on Iran

### Linda Briskman

What can an Israeli academic tell us about Iran? Indeed a lot. In August I was fortunate to attend a Perth seminar led by Professor David Menashri on the topic of Iran and change. I was highly impressed with the depth of knowledge of Menashri, who is Director of the Centre for Iranian Studies at Tel Aviv University.

Menashri gave a very different account to the mainstream Jewish media and many western commentators. Although it is difficult to paraphrase the words of another, the following are the points I found particularly illuminating.

Delving into the heart of today's Iran, he described the major concerns of the Iranian people as "bread" and liberty, and the widening gap between rich and poor. He also highlighted what liberally-minded people know and

value — the commonalities between Islam and Judaism. In my own observations those hostile to Iranian society rarely portray these common links, in an endeavour to present a picture of division and difference.

Despite the restrictions in Iranian society, Menashri pointed out the paradoxes in a country where civil society is large and active, with an abundance of liberal intellectuals. Women's groups are the most active in the Middle East and student groups are the most powerful in that region. He discussed



**David Menashri**

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the proliferation in internet use by young people, something that impressed me deeply when I read a book titled *We are Iran* by Nasrin Alavi.

Menashri's nuanced approach to Iranian politics was by no means starry-eyed about the regime, which has major problems internally and internationally including nuclear ambitions, human rights violations and calls for the destruction of Israel. He states that the solution should not be an Israeli one, and he opposes speaking out loudly against Iran as this merely serves to elevate its power

beyond reality. For Menashri, pressure on Iran should focus on human rights and civil rights.

The trigger for change is yet another question. As Menashri explains, we do not receive signals for revolutionary movements. No one knows from where the "last straw" will emanate, but international and regional diplomacy are the key to rapprochement and change.

[Professor Linda Briskman is an AJDS member living in Perth.]

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## Three wise people from the East

### Miriam Faine

Last month, Melbourne received a visit from three wise people from the East, which is actually to our west, two Palestinians and one Israeli by some accounts; and by another (in the *AJN*) two Israelis and one Palestinian; and by their own accounts, three people of faith: a Jew, a Muslim and a Christian from their Holy Land.

In spite of their visit being sponsored by the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council, when I heard Issa Jabber, Rula Shubeita and Debbie Goldberg speak at my synagogue (Kehilat Nitzan, Melbourne's Masorti congregation) they managed to communicate some of the complexities in the Middle East, against the oversimplified Zionist narrative that prevails in our parochial Melbourne Jewish community. Especially Rula Shubeita, a Palestinian born in Jerusalem and a member of the Holy Land Christian Support Network, insisted that peace needed to be accompanied by justice. As a tour guide, she added: "We need the checkpoints to be open for people to move freely."

The Director of Education of the Palestinian-Israeli town of Abu Ghosh, Issa Jabber, has been the facilitator for Education for Arab-Jewish Coexistence in the Knesset.

He told us about two of his kinsmen working at Mahane Yehuda market during a terrorist attack in Jerusalem. One was blown up and killed by the suicide bomber, the second beaten nearly to death by the enraged Jewish mob when he ran towards his dead brother. "We live together, or else we die together!" he declared. On a more optimistic note was his tale of the music festival set among Abu Ghosh's Christian holy sites which attracts many Jewish visitors and means good business for the town's famous Muslim hummus sellers.

Although I suspect that not too many AJDS members put much faith in religion, Debbie Goldberg, President of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) and Co-Chairperson of the Interreligious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI), who is an Orthodox Jew, told us that the ICCI has successfully promoted dialogue among Israelis and Palestinians. She contended that people who identify with their respective religions and traditions can often find a common language and establish rapport on that basis. Even though the extremist, violent forms of religion receive a great deal more exposure, faith can also be a positive force for peace.

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### AJDS member recalls

## ADC attack on New Matilda echoes earlier distortion

### Les Rosenblatt

*Newsletter* readers who have kept up with the spat between Michael Danby, the B'Nai B'rith Anti Defamation Commission and the on-line news journal New Matilda (and some of its contributors) deserve a 21-gun salute in recognition of their valour and self-sacrifice. It is exhausting reading and one comes out of it not much wiser or better informed. If there is any saving grace in all of it, I think it is to be found in the 7 July New Matilda editorial titled "This debate needs to take a look in the mirror" which to my mind has some Cordelia-like dignity and integrity. Cordelia, as you recall, was the daughter in King Lear who spoke honestly, but was mistakenly and tragically regarded by her foolish father as having betrayed him. Late in June, Deborah Stone for the ADC wrote a report titled "Israel coverage and antisemitism in new matilda.com". This was picked up by the *Jerusalem Post* on 4 July in an article headed "B'nai B'rith charges Aussie website with antisemitic content". A month earlier Michael Danby MP had entered the fray on 8 June with his website commentary, "Prejudice not 'moderated' in Crikey,

New Matilda". Antony Lowenstein and Michael Brull in *New Matilda* penned an article on 7 July 7 aimed at Danby and the ADC's "If you don't agree with us, you're antisemitic." And on and on and on.

I must say that despite my earlier endorsement of much good work done by the ADC, I personally lost trust in its willingness or capacity to be transparent and open about its own biases back in May 2003. This was when I spoke at a Victoria University teach-in at its City Campus on the topic of "War, the Middle East and The New World Order". I was one of several speakers who included Danny Ben Moshe, the then Executive Director of the ADC. I subsequently noticed that I and other speakers appeared on the ADC Online Vol 4 No 2 website as having been present on the panel of speakers and that our names were specified in a context designed to alarm rather than inform. Interestingly, there was no reference to Danny Ben Moshe having been present as one of the speakers himself. One must ask, if it was good enough for the ADC to find us newsworthy, why was its own Exec. Director as a participant exempt?

## Two states: still one exit

### Gershom Gorenberg

Let's face it: when Barack Obama said in Cairo that "the only resolution" of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is two separate states, he was courageously insisting -- well, on what's become conventional wisdom.

But not the unanimous wisdom. The hardliners on each side aren't alone in questioning the two-state idea. On the street in Jerusalem I've run into old friends, veterans of Israeli peace and human-rights activism, who say we've passed the tipping point. There are too many settlements; Israeli withdrawal is impossible; negotiations on two states have repeatedly failed; the only solution is a single, shared Jewish-Palestinian state. I've heard Palestinian intellectuals, former supporters of a two-state solution, who say the same. Among writers outside the conflict zone, British Jewish historian Tony Judd may be best known for suggesting -- back in 2003 -- that as a nation-state, Israel is "an anachronism" and should be replaced by a binational state. Ironically, Obama himself may have given this idea a bit more traction among American progressives -- his election proving, perhaps, that multiculturalism within one polity can work, perhaps not just in America but elsewhere. So is he pursuing an obsolete strategy?

Actually, no. This time the conventional wisdom is correct.

Difficult as reaching a two-state agreement is, it is still a more practical solution than a single state. It has more political support on both sides. And in a very basic way, more psychological than philosophical, most Israeli Jews and most Palestinians are nationalists: their personal identity is rooted in a national community for which they want political independence.

Let's imagine that tomorrow, Israel and the occupied territories are reconstituted as the Eastern Mediterranean Republic, with equal citizenship and rights for all, and elections are held. With the current population, the parliament will be split virtually evenly between Jews and Palestinians. One of the first issues that the parliament and judiciary will face is the settlements that Israel built -- in large part on land requisitioned by the Israeli military in the early years of the occupation, or on what Israel declared to be "state land" under its stunningly wide interpretation of Ottoman-era law, or simply on real estate privately owned by Palestinians. In all three cases, Palestinian claimants will demand return of their property, quite possibly meaning the eviction of those living on it. The problem of evacuating settlers won't vanish. Rather, it will divide the new state's politics on communal lines.

Likewise for refugees. Palestinian legislators will demand that Israel's Law of Return -- extending automatic citizenship to Jewish immigrants -- be extended to cover Pales-

tinians returning to their homeland. Jewish politicians will oppose the move, which could quickly reduce their community to a threatened minority. Palestinians will demand the return of property lost in 1948 and perhaps the revival of destroyed villages.

### Communal fissures

Issues not at the centre of today's diplomacy will also create communal fissures. Israel has a post-industrial Western economy; the West Bank and Gaza are poor and undeveloped. Financing development in majority-Palestinian areas -- and bringing Palestinians into Israel's social-welfare network -- would require higher taxes or fewer services for Jews. But the engine of the Israeli economy is high-tech, an entirely portable industry. Both individuals and companies can leave, crippling the new, shared economy.



***Good idea. but can Obama put the jigsaw together?***

*Digitally enhanced image by Jacob Grech*

In the best case, the outcome would be the continued existence of separate Jewish and Palestinian political parties. Even the more liberal-leaning parties of each community would be hard-pressed to bridge the divide to form stable coalitions. Today's Israeli politics, with its house-of-cards governments, would be nostalgically remembered for its stability. In the worst case, the political tensions would turn into violence. Rather than a solution, the transition to a single state would mark a new stage in the conflict. For a harsh example of the potential fluctuation between political stalemate and civil war, Palestinians and Israeli Jews need only look northward to Lebanon.

I don't claim that many Jews or Palestinians living between the river and the sea have thought through these consequences. Rather, their political preferences reflect the exhausted recognition that the other national group

***(Continued on page 9)***



(Continued from page 8)

isn't going away. For Palestinians, this means that partition is the most likely way to reach independence. For Jews, dividing the land into two states is the only way to maintain a democracy with a Jewish majority.

In both Israel and the occupied territories, polling data suggests that a two-state solution remains the preferred outcome. A poll by Tel Aviv University's Tami Steinmetz Centre in March of this year found that 51 per cent of Israeli Jews favoured a two-state outcome, compared to 28 per cent for the status quo and 7 per cent for a binational state. Among Israel's Palestinian citizens, two-thirds wanted a two-state solution -- even though they expect to continue living as members of a minority in Israel.

### **Palestinian support**

Despite fluctuations, the picture is similar among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The latest poll by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC) reported 55 per cent backing for two states and just 21 per cent for a binational state. The support for a two-state solution has been on an upswing in recent months -- last October there was only a 44 per cent plurality for the two-state option. JMCC analyst Ghassan Khatib told me the reasons for fluctuations are hard to identify. Still, the recent rise in support for two states may indicate a stronger sense that it's achievable. That, in turn, could be the result of heavy media coverage of US pressures on Israel to accept such an outcome, Khatib suggested.

Underlying those figures is a simple fact: in general, Palestinians want more than individual civil rights. They want political sovereignty as a nation -- a community sharing a language, a past, heroes, customs, a calendar, a connec-

tion to a landscape. In general, Jews in Israel seek the same thing, want it deeply, assume it to be essential. Each group wants to determine its future with as much independence as is possible in today's world. It is possible to criticise the idea of a nation as a fiction -- but if so, it continues to be one of the most powerful political fictions in the modern world, and not just among Jews and Palestinians.

### **Arrangement not a solution**

It may be a mistake to refer to the creation of two states as a solution. Politics doesn't often offer solutions; it offers arrangements. Dividing the land into two nation-states is the least-worst arrangement available. It requires further, internal arrangements -- most important, to protect the rights of minorities, such as Arab citizens of Israel.

If the arrangement of two states hasn't been reached yet, despite all the efforts of recent years, it's because neither Jews nor Palestinians have yet come to terms with how much they'll need to give up to get there. On each side, even the most dedicated advocates of two states have their list of concessions that the other side must obviously make. A kind of political Zeno's Paradox has afflicted peace efforts: to get to peace, each side must first traverse half the distance to a compromise. Then it must traverse half the remaining distance, and then half of what is left. The distance between the opposing positions shrinks, but no one ever arrives.

If Obama wants to create an agreement, he will have to drag, wheedle, and push the two sides over the remaining inches to the goal. The conventional wisdom is right about the necessary outcome. Getting there will require an unconventional effort.

## **You know what Jews are like!**

When I lived in Poland, then governed by a quasi-socialist regime, preaching antisemitism was illegal. The *Protocols of Zion*, that piece of historical ordure, was banned and only the Polish version printed under the Nazis was in circulation, very clandestinely indeed.

What this meant was that most Poles, especially those born during or after the war, were unable to recognise an antisemitic argument if it jumped up and bit them. It also meant that there was a high acceptance level for such ideas. What would be strictly out of bounds in an intelligent Australian conversation was perfectly all right in Poland. "You know what Jews are like!" would meet with knowing nods, even if the speaker found it difficult, if not impossible, to back up his remark.

This atmosphere was ideal for genuine antisemites, the spiritual descendants of the prewar National Democrats (Endeks) and Falangists, nationalists all, and notably anti-Soviet into the bargain, nothing surprising in a general European context. When political struggle erupted within the PZPR, the ruling Communist Party, it often had antisemitic overtones. "It was the bloody Jews who brought this lousy system to this country!" was heard, including from some Party members themselves. Fingers were pointed at political leaders of Jewish origin.

The "March Events" of 1968, in which university students across Poland demonstrated against political censorship, among other things, led to a vicious media campaign

against "Zionists", and proved that Poland was one of the few countries in Europe in which antisemitism could still be used as a political weapon. This was much to the horror and dismay, I might add, of many honourable Poles such as the late Mieczyslaw Rakowski (see this *Newsletter*, December 2008).

Books with arguments taken straight from the *Protocols* were brought out by major publishing houses, and efforts, not always successful, were made to put them into school libraries. One example was *Revolution by the Pyramids* by one Kazimierz Sidor, a prewar Endek, in which one chapter was all about the Jewish Plan for World Domination. And at the time, very few people noticed.

There is a serious danger that because of a combination of factors, antisemitic ideas might become more acceptable in Australia too. All it would take is for Israel to continue its punitive "taste of cold steel" approach to the Arab/Moslem world in general and the Palestinians in particular, and for the media to keep reporting on this without fear or favour. Footy and cricket will keep public attention diverted away from such arcane issues as the Middle East, and if forced to an opinion, "You know what Jews are like!" is likely to be the easiest way around it for an increasing number of people in this country too.

**Steve Brook**

# The only answer to hate is humanity

## Yasmin Alibhai-Brown

Buried in the mountain of post-holiday mail – mostly bills and other unwanted missives – was a small envelope, a bit grubby, nervously present as if aware it was intruding or daring to do something improper. In it, a handwritten letter told an age-old story in the simplest of words.

A, a young British Palestinian woman has fallen blindly, agonisingly in love with B, son of American Zionist émigrés in Tel Aviv. They met in a London park last summer, got chatting, shared crisps and Cokes and have been meeting in secret ever since. He is about to go back home after post-graduate studies and she is suicidal at the thought of losing him and not losing him. Born enemies, they must die enemies. "Why should that be?" asks A plaintively and then says she knows.

It is the tragedy of the Middle East, two Semitic tribes, irreconcilable foes. Her boyfriend himself shot at Palestinian children who were throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. Her father, a Fatah member, would kill her if he knew.

Will such a love be possible in 2050? 2090? 3001? And if not, how long will the hate go on between people who became entrenched enemies only 60 years ago? The conflict began in 1947 when the UN General Assembly voted to appropriate part of Palestine to create a new Jewish state. It was, in part, Europe seeking expiation for the Holocaust, in part the answer to ancient Jewish longings and also the prize claimed by militant Zionists who had waged a deadly terrorist campaign for a homeland they believed was theirs by right.

And so it was that in May 1948 Israel was born; more than 700,000 Palestinians were displaced and mass global Jewish immigration began. Before this, even though there were a number of prominent pro-Nazi Arabs, in most of North Africa and the Middle East Jews, Christians and Muslims lived together, peoples of shared places and in many cases shared ethnicity whose quarrels were domestic and easily forgiven.

That ease was replaced by bitterness, political intransigence and relentless violence. Most Muslim Arabs today are instinctively anti-Jewish and the majority of Israelis harbour intense anti-Muslim prejudices. The former have demographic advantage so can spread this virus far and wide; the latter is a superpower capable of destroying the Muslim world and expects to be allowed to do what it pleases, regardless of international law or its own long-term interests. The other week Israeli propagandists accused Hamas of abusing "the laws of war". They would know from long experience exactly how. Gaza is a razed ghetto, its people kept on their knees. It is not at all surprising to me that young men and boys who are forced to live without basics and dignity are easily seduced by depraved al-Qaida ideologues, several of whom were killed in the city of Rafah by Hamas this week. (Suddenly Hamas are the good guys.)

Michael Palin wrote a letter published in the *Independent* after he returned from the Palestinian Literary Festival on the West Bank. It was uncharacteristically forthright for a mild Englishman: "Palestinians are made to feel inferior. Power is wielded by the gun, watchtower, the arbitrary search and ultimately the separation wall which breaks up centuries-old communities and cuts farmers off from their

lands ... [it] prevents the people of the area, Jewish or Palestinian, from coming together for any kind of mutual interest or to exchange their experiences. With human contact virtually forbidden, it is hard to imagine how political change can be effected."

Fish cannot live in the Dead Sea; the environment cannot sustain them. So it is with domesticity, intimacy, trust and commonalities. Unlike fish though, the human spirit rarely gives up trying.

My dearest friend Tom Eisner, a gifted violinist for the London Philharmonic Orchestra came to dinner on Saturday. The son of an ardent Zionist, Tom indefatigably fights for Palestinian rights. He told me about a visit to Gaza when he smelt some food cooking and was invited into dinner by the man of the house who turned out to be a member of Hamas: "I told him I was Jewish. He said, 'It does not matter. Please come in.'"

There are such people all over the Middle East and the rest of the conflicted world who can see and name injustice and courageously abjure group or national loyalties. Take these two particularly-impressive writers whose latest books I read on holiday. *My Happiness Bears No Relation to Happiness* by Adina Hoffman is a beautiful homage to the Palestinian poet, Taha Muhammad Ali. She, like other Israelis, admits she lost her optimism "after a friend, Anna, a plucky free spirit, avid reader and lifelong peacenik, was killed by a Palestinian suicide bomber on a bus. I stopped taking public transportation. I also stopped talking to many Jewish friends who had converted their own fear ... into the most unapologetic racism. 'The Arabs are animals' was now a phrase one heard daily ... my brain had been colonised by the new suspicions, new inhibitions, new categories of doubt."

Maybe it was to save herself from that paranoia that she decided to record Taha's life of endless dispossession and his poetic laments.

The other book is by Raja Shehadeh, Palestinian activist and winner of the Orwell Prize for a previous book. In *Strangers in the House* he describes his complicated relationship (often tetchy) with his father, a human rights lawyer who was murdered by "a despicable collaborator working for the Israeli state". He will not though, describe his dad as a "shaheed" (martyr) and rejects the mania for religious martyrdom among his people.

Like Hoffman, Shehadeh has kept his integrity and can still dream of a future without walls and religious barricades.

Daniel Barenboim once more brings the acclaimed West-Eastern Divan (Jewish and Arab musicians playing together) to the Proms this year. It always sells out because, says the conductor, they represent possibilities, they do not hate. And as Palin says, only that kind of human contact will bring effective political resolution so no more will have to die in an unwinnable war.

**[Yasmin Alibhai-Brown is a columnist for the *Independent* in London.]**



**Alibhai-Brown**

# Encountering peace in Israel/Palestine

## Gershon Baskin

President Obama's popularity in Israel is at an all-time low for a US president. Only 4 per cent of Israelis believe that the president is pro-Israeli, according to a survey published in August by the *Jerusalem Post*.

President Obama does not face elections in Israel, so perhaps he does not need to be overly concerned with this statistic, but in order for Obama's Middle East peace plans to succeed, the Israeli public must have a "buy-in".

Israeli society really does want peace, even if at the same time it expresses attitudes which are against making concessions to the Arabs, and in particular to the Palestinians. Israelis --like Palestinians -- have lost confidence in peace processes and of hopes that there is a partner for peace on the other side. As the Oslo process lingered on far beyond the dates of the agreements and violence increased, people in the region and across the globe lost their patience and their belief that Israeli-Palestinian peace was possible.

The US position has always been that Israelis and Palestinians have to want peace more than the third parties do. Well, the people in the region do want it, they just don't know how to do it and have lost faith that it is even possible.

The recent reports of increased law and order and economic growth in the West Bank brought a glimmer of hope to the Israeli public, but then came the Fatah convention which was perceived as backtracking to the days of Palestinian rejection of Israel's right to exist.

It is time to face reality -- Israelis and Palestinian cannot do it by themselves. If President Obama is successful in creating the conditions for a renewal of negotiations, they will surely fail soon after they begin. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas will not get beyond the first substantive discussion on any one of the main strategic issues: security, borders, Jerusalem or refugees. It is not because they don't want to -- I strongly believe that both Abbas and Netanyahu want to bring peace and security to their people -- they are simply not capable of seeing eye-to-eye on any of the main issues.

President Obama will have no choice but to advance the negotiations by putting the US's own vision of peace with a detailed plan on the table. Certain fundamental elements, if included in the plan, will increase the certainty of Israeli public support. The problem, of course, is that these very elements would weaken the support for the plan on the Palestinian and Arab streets.

The following ten points would bring balance and clarity that could help in ensuring public support on both sides:

1. For Israelis, the key is that the right of return will be to the Palestinian state and not to Israel. Some of the refugees could be resettled in areas that will be part of the territorial exchange in lands that were previously under Israeli sovereignty. There is a fundamental contradiction between the "two states for two peoples" solution and the right of return to Israel. Acceptance of this principle removes the urgency of the Palestinian declaration that Israel is the State of the Jewish people (which in any event already appears in the Palestinian Declaration of Independence from November 1988).

2. Israeli acknowledgment of its part of the responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem and for the suffering of the refugees is the key to Palestinian acceptance of the right of return to a future Palestinian state. It would be helpful if a group of experts -- Israeli, Palestinian and international -- worked on designing the language that Israel could adopt to do this.

3. Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims must know that they will have sovereignty over the Haram al Sharif (Temple Mount) including the control of access to their holy places.

4. Israel must have sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter and over the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Security arrangements must be defined and guaranteed in Jerusalem with the development of a bilateral model of security supported by international parties as well.

5. There must be a timetable with clearly-defined benchmarks for implementation. For Israel there must be a "performance based" approach alongside the timetable with the US determining performance accountability and monitoring the schedule for implementation.

6. The creation of a joint (Tri-lateral -- Israel, Palestine and US) mechanism for combating incitement and [harmful] textbooks is essential. This should begin with an invitation to Washington of the two education ministers.

7. Security concerns must be addressed on both sides of the conflict, since the security of both are co-dependent and intertwined. One side's suffering generates tomorrow's aggressors on both sides. There is no such thing as mutually exclusive security -- that is a hoax of the past. Hungry Palestinians means more brutal attacks. Terrorised Israelis means a faster finger on the trigger, and greater likelihood of dehumanising treatment.

8. Since Palestinian security performance is central to the continuation of the process, the Palestinian security forces must be given the best chance of performing possible, more areas of the West Bank must be placed in the hands of the Palestinian security. It is time for the US to establish a tri-lateral joint command and operations room where Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation can be expanded and monitored at the same time.

9. Gaza is not part of the deal at the present time. The plan should include new government elections for the State of Palestine once it is recognised by Israel and/or the members of the Quartet. Participation in elections should be based on all political parties recognising the State of Palestine within its recognised borders.

10. Regional support is also essential and the inclusion of Egypt and Jordan, at first, and then additional Arab states will give greater credibility to the plan on both sides.

These ten principles contain the keys for gaining the support of the Israeli and Palestinian streets for the peace plan.

President Obama should not be deterred by the noise that those who oppose peace on both sides make. The majority of Israelis and Palestinians really do want peace and if these principles are accepted, President Obama will be perceived as being pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian and pro-peace.

[Originally published in the *Jerusalem Post*]



## Familiar enemies

### Joharah Baker

Israelis and Palestinians will undoubtedly go down in history as among the world's most bitter arch enemies. To the world, the word Palestinian is automatically associated with Israeli and vice versa. However, a crazy thing has occurred as a result of both this hostility and of the fact that the two peoples live in such close geographic proximity. In many ways, we know each other better than anyone else.

This thought occurred to me the other day in a taxicab coming back from a west Jerusalem shopping mall. The taxi driver was Jewish Israeli but spoke Arabic (albeit with a heavy Hebrew accent) almost perfectly. When he heard me speaking both English and Arabic to my children, the driver asked me a question I often get. "Where are you from?" Feeling a bit mischievous, I decided to give an answer I know would pique his attention. "From Palestine. Where else?" I answered.

He was slick, I have to give him that. Barely missing a beat, he said, "Where from Palestine?"

### Jerusalem, Palestine

"Jerusalem, I am from Jerusalem," I answered. I felt a tiny bit of satisfaction as the words left my mouth. Saying I am from Jerusalem, Palestine to an Israeli Jew always boosts my sense of pride like nothing else.

My taxi driver turned out to be polite and didn't try to "correct" me by saying that Jerusalem was Israel. Only an

answered, wanting to push the envelope just a bit. He smirked, shook his head and said nothing.

These kinds of exchanges between Palestinians and Israelis are surreal. In any other atmosphere, I would never find myself talking casually to an ex-Israeli army soldier. Moreover, if he was in military garb in my West Bank village I would view him in one light only – my occupier. But being in a taxicab on my way back to east Jerusalem, we were customer and driver and there was room to make sly innuendos that only an Israeli would understand.

### Language

"Al Hamdullillah" said one Israeli journalist during a workshop in Italy after finishing his meal, using the common expression of Palestinian Muslims. "Thanks be to God." In the same conversation, when I was asked if I spoke Hebrew, I answered with a slight laugh, "Only checkpoint Hebrew. I know things like 'Go', 'Show me your ID card', and 'It's closed.'" This made the Israelis at the table smile uncomfortably but laugh with the crowd all the same.

Such anecdotes illustrate the highly entangled relationship between Israelis and Palestinians. First and foremost, we are "enemies", the oppressed and the oppressor, occupied and occupier. All other expressions of the relationship are overshadowed by this fact. But we are enemies whose paths intersect and overlap to the point that we know how to "push each other's buttons." Israeli soldiers understand how to drive a Palestinian man over the edge by insulting his wife, mother or sister, using Arabic curses nonetheless. Palestinians have also learned key Hebrew curses, which they use at the exact moments to send Israeli soldiers into a rage. In public international forums, Palestinians and Israelis can sit at the same table, eating hummus Arabic-style by scooping it up with a bite-sized piece of bread. But once the familiar gesture turns into a conversation, they butt heads because Israelis claim hummus as their own food (disregarding the fact that not only Palestinians but Jordanians, Lebanese, Syrians and pretty much all Arabs have been eating the food for centuries, way before Israel was even created.)

If peace ever does prevail, Palestinians and Israelis will have no problem getting acquainted. Once the Palestinians are settled in an independent, sovereign Palestine and the occupied/occupier relationship is put to rest forever, the familiarity between the two peoples will come in handy when the neighbours need to settle normal affairs between states. Saying I am from Jerusalem, Palestine will become a mere stated fact rather than a political statement made to an adversary.

But we have a long way to go before then. Right now, conversations like the one I had with the taxi driver will remain just that. A seemingly light exchange with tense political undertones between people on opposites sides of a bitter divide.

**[Joharah Baker is a writer for the Media and Information Program at the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy (MIFTAH).]**



**Joharah Baker**



**Israelis and Palestinians both share the love of hummus although they each claim it as their own**

Israeli would understand that I, as a Palestinian, was making a strong political statement by saying I was from Jerusalem, Palestine, especially since I was speaking to an Israeli.

As the small talk continued, another quirky exchange occurred. "Where did you learn your Arabic from?" I asked. "The army," he said, probably trying to provoke a response just like I had a moment earlier. "I speak with the same accent as you".

"Really? You must have served in the Occupied Territories and learnt your Arabic from those you occupied," I

# Gender complexity, race and nationalism

## Joan Nestle

Sports is often the site for breaking new ground on questions of gender, and last month's World Athletic Championships in Berlin has done just that. South Africa's Caster Semenya outran her competitors in the final of the 800 metres as well as our present notions of how many genders there are. While there has been a long history of questioning the gender identity and sexual proclivities of successful women athletes—from Babe Didrikson to sundry Russian women athletes of the cold war to Martina Navratilova to Samantha Stosur—never have the issues of race and the history of colonialism been so highlighted.

The African Black woman's body, however, has long been a site of Western fascination; think of the journey of Saartjie Baartmann, a South African woman forcibly taken from her Eastern Cape Khoisan people in the early 1800s to be displayed as a specimen of African sexuality on the stages of Europe. For over a hundred years, Baartmann lost all other historical markings and was known only by her stage name, the Hottentot Venus. In an article by David Zirin and Sherry Wolf in the August 21 *Nation*, we learn that in 1959, an Olympic official proposed that "in the case of black women, the International Olympic Committee should create a special category of competition for them—the unfairly advantaged hermaphrodites." The scientific testing of Semenya's womanness by the authorities of world sport echoes older colonial insults to the African body, the measuring, weighing, the displaying—all to assert that Africans were fit people to enslave because they were biologically suspect. But times have changed, and the young woman is now an heroic national symbol of excellence; in South Africa, she is every one's little girl and has put her home village, Masehlong, on the world map—her family and friends, old and new, like Winnie Mandela, are fiercely loyal to both her excellence as an

athlete and her gender as a woman.

Zirin and Wolf speak to the reality of the paucity of our gender system, that in fact there are many in-between places, intersexed peoples who do not fit the chromosomal model we have been comfortable with for so long. Careers and lives are lost in the enforced humiliations visited upon gender-complex individuals. And this is happening in a time when, ironically, the difference between male and female athletes is growing narrower. How complex is this story of a runner from South Africa! Loyalties to race, to history, to gender certainty are all put to the test, but where in this storm of complex issues is the space for a person, an athlete not to be male or female, not to be someone's little girl or boy but another combination of skills, joy, desire and beauty.

And now a new image of Semenya has appeared in the glossy pages of *You*, the South African women's popular magazine—the glamorous Semenya done up in all the traditional markings of femininity and looking as beautiful in this version as she did as an athlete in full stride. Dave Zirin wrote excellently in his "Sex Testing Victim Semenya Stands Tall," about the gender panic that went into full gear when Semenya hurtled down the track and how South Africa is ahead of the rest of the world in its constitutional strictures against discrimination based on race, sexuality and gender. He goes on to say, "There is currently no definitive information about Semenya's sexual orientation or gender choice. We know she identifies herself as an 18-year-old woman and she can run like the wind while not looking like the conventional pin-up." Now she does. And what does this transformation from "freak" to model tell us about where our own notions of gender certainty come from? Perhaps as Judith Butler has said, performance is all.

**[Joan Nestle is co-editor of GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary with Clare Howell and Riki Wilchins and a member of the AJDS]**

## Israeli Labour re-centring itself

### Tami Molad-Hayou

Despite repeated attempts to leave, it seems as if I am still a member of the (Israeli) Labour Party. At least I still receive mail from them.

This week the party chairperson, that analytical genius Ehud Barak, demonstrated his canny ability to observe and grasp the Israeli political reality.

The dear Chairperson, Defence Minister and former Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, has joined in with other members of the Labour Party to examine the pitiful state of the party. Their conclusion? "The party's electoral demise stems from the loss of its position in the centre. In other words, the party has moved too far to the Left on security and defence issues".

Get it? The Defence Minister who has not removed the illegal outposts, and the party that sits in the Knesset together with Netanyahu and Lieberman, is too left-wing.

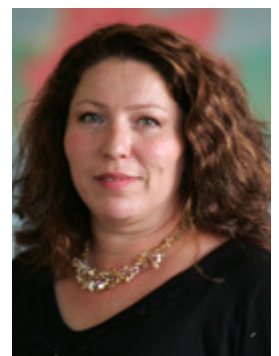
They instantly came up with a panacea as well. The "Central Current" ideological circle is to be revived. The ideological circle that was active in the past will be rein-

vigorated. Soon the party will be transformed back to its golden age and the glorious achievement of dozens of Knesset members will be the norm once again.

If it were not so sad (and a little bit scary) we would have laughed.

On the other hand, this may be the perfect solution for people like me, who believe in equality, justice and striving for peace and who have long given up on Labour as a real alternative. The party from which you can only escape by dying (or so it seems) is in the safe hands of a leader with a brilliant analytical mind. Just like Haim Ramon predicted eons ago, it is being led to its doom like a pod of whales beaching itself on the seashore.

**[Social activist Tami Molad-Hayou is co-editor of the *On the Left Side* website, where this was first published. Translated from Hebrew by Sol Salbe.]**



**Tami Molad-Hayou**



# The Arab image on the screen

## Compiled by Sol Salbe

It all started with an article in the "Mouse" section of *Haaretz*. This cultural supplement had a report about a then forthcoming lecture by Rachel Shalita of the Education Department at Hamidrasha Art Academy at the Tel Aviv Cinematheque's Animation, Comics and Caricature Festival. Shalita's lecture concentrated on the hidden messages in Disney films which parents all over the world regard as something akin to health foods, good for their children. Shalita contends that: "The hidden messages are not necessarily manipulative, but they reflect an extremely conservative worldview in terms of religion and anti-feminism and are problematic with regard to representations of the 'other'."

A large chunk of the Mouse article was devoted to the "other" which is of prime interest to progressive Israelis: Arabs. Fortunately this segment was to a large degree available in the English *Haaretz*. So the obvious proposal was to add a bit of background from the Hebrew and include it in this *Newsletter*.

The subject matter wasn't new. Few people have not noticed the stereotyping of Arabs in US television and movies. You only have to think of Max Klinger in *M\*A\*S\*H* to conjure the image of a coward who keeps on talking about camels, which are not exactly thick on the ground in Lebanon, let alone Toledo. Several writers have already commented on the subject. But nothing prepared me for the 7,060,000 entries that came up in a Google search for "Arab image American films".

The very first one listed was by Ray Hanania, a Palestinian American comic writer. His words were astounding:

"As a child growing up on Chicago's Southeast Side in the 1950s and 1960s, I had no role models in the mainstream media, and especially none in Hollywood.

"The movies were filled with villains and almost every vil-

### **AmericanEast**

On 20 January this year, the film that couldn't make it into American [or Australian – Ed] theatres because it portrays Arabs in a positive and negative light was released on DVD.

I hope you will take the time to buy or hire it. I hope Arab Americans and Muslims [and everyone else who can watch it –Ed.] will purchase the DVD, not just to enjoy a film that for the first time portrays the reality of Arab American life in the post-September 11, 2001 world, but that does so in a fair and balanced and dramatic and compelling manner.

It's a GREAT movie.

But buy it also because if you are like me upset with the ugliness that is the stock in trade of the Hollywood movie industry, purchasing it is one way to protest. Make it a success. Share it with your friends and neighbours. Let them see what Hollywood and the mainstream media does not want the world to see, that Arab Americans are no worse, no better and no different than anyone else. We have our bad and our ugly. But we also have our good, our inspirational, our flowers and our beauty.

**Ray Hanania**

lain was an Arab. The terrorists, the killers, the murderers all looked like they were related to me.

"I'd go to the movies with my friends, frightened by the horrific images on the big screen, only to come back to the house and look around the dinner table and see the same faces that Hollywood vilified, exploited and stereotyped.

"Other ethnic groups insist what I went through is what every ethnic kid goes through. Really? Well, yes. Italians have terrible images in the Hollywood movies, too. But I noticed that for every mobster who is Italian, there are at least one or two more good characters who are Italian also in the same movie. In other words, it is not the presence of negative images that is the problem.

"It is the absence of positive images that IS the problem in American Hollywood movies. Yes, there are lots of negative images of every ethnic group, but there are also lots of positive images of ethnic groups, too. Except for Arab Americans.

"In more than 250 movies made by Hollywood that include Middle East related themes or characters who could be surmised or are "Arab" or "Muslim," only about a handful, maybe five, have positive Arab characters. For years, the only positive Arab character in a movie was Aladdin in the Disney cartoon film and he didn't even look Arab at all.

"Last year, two great Hollywood actors, Hesham Issawi and Sayed Badreya decided to do something that hasn't been done yet. They wanted to make a Hollywood movie that told a part of the Arab American and Muslim Arab story in a real way. They wanted to portray the reality of the Arab experience in America just the way it really is. And they made the film *AmericanEast*.

"The problem, of course, is that not one American movie theatre would show the film. Not one. Out of tens of thousands of movie theatres, not one could find the courage to show the film to the public. Why?

"Was it because the film was filled with foul-mouthed language like nearly every major movie and TV program? Was it because it was more violent than the films that are



**Sinbad (R) and Yusuf (L) -- the hooked nose wouldn't have been out of place in Julius Streicher's *Der Stuermer***

*(Continued on page 15)*



(Continued from page 14)

filled with violence?

"No. It made Arabs look normal. It portrayed Arab characters in a normal environment as human beings, like everyone else, who have to deal with the traumas and tragedies of real life."

Shalita also took up *Aladdin* in her lecture. Dana Shweffi reported in the *Mouse* article:

Despite a cast comprising entirely Arab characters, she says, the film is actually insulting to them.

Shalita claims *Aladdin* depicts Arabs in a way that is reminiscent of old anti-Semitic cartoons and caricatures. "The movie opens with an Arab character who looks like a caricature of a Jew with a long nose, and all of the Arab characters speak English with an Arabic accent except for Aladdin and Princess Jasmine, who speak with an American accent.

"An American child cannot identify with an Arab character," Shalita continues. "When they show a market where the signs are meant to be in Arabic but are written in a form of gibberish, it implies there really isn't a culture in existence that uses that language."

## Once Upon a Country: a Palestinian Life

This is a fascinating book, especially so to an Israeli peace activist, who, like this reviewer, participated on the Israeli side in many of the events mentioned in it, and took part, together with the author, in joint Palestinian-Israeli peace demonstrations.

Professor Sari Nusseibeh is a descendant of one of the oldest patrician, semi-feudal Palestinian families which traces its arrival in Jerusalem to the Arab conquest in the seventh century AD. He is currently the President of El Kuds University in East Jerusalem and a professor of Islamic philosophy.

This is a very personal, and yet public autobiography of a Palestinian patrician, whose natural inclination and excellent education at Oxford and Harvard seemed to have destined him for a brilliant academic career. The dramatic events in Palestine and Israel however, almost forced him into an active role in the Palestinian national movement. And so Sari Nusseibeh's story became interwoven with the drama of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Yet this book is not an account of the conflict. Had it been one, it would have left much to be desired. It is however

the story of the evolution of the author's attitudes to the conflict from the traditional Arab view of all of Mandatory Palestine as an Arab country with a Jewish minority, to active support for a two-state solution, a strong advocacy of Palestinian popular non-violent action against the Israeli occupation and of joint activities with the Israeli peace movement.

Nusseibeh relates all this and much more in a very personal way, which makes the book read like a novel rather than a political treatise. The reader feels throughout the author's deep commitment to humanism and his effort to understand also the other (Israeli) point of view.

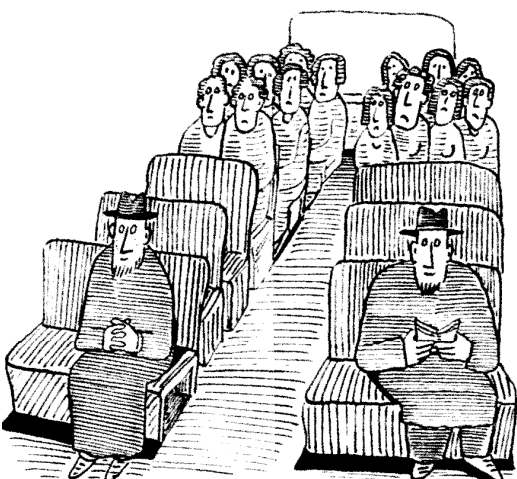
The publication of this book and its author both give reasons for optimism, and provide a strong reply to the perennial question put to peace activists in Israel: "Where is their 'Peace Now'?"

**Zvi Solow**

[The reviewer lives in Kibbutz Nirim, Israel. Sari Nusseibeh with Anthony David, *Once Upon a Country: a Palestinian Life*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.]

## IRAC takes action on segregated buses

On the first Sunday in September, seven Israel Religious Action Centre staff members and I boarded at the front of Bus No 40, one of Jerusalem's segregated bus lines. After paying the fare, we sat down right behind the bus driver, which prompted shouts of "women in the back, women in the back!" from the ultra-Orthodox men on board. Two men rushed to the front and complained to



the driver; I couldn't make out what they were saying, but I did hear the driver say, "it's hard enough to drive a bus in Jerusalem traffic without having to deal with all this balagan [chaos]."

Our protest

was part of a larger demonstration that day co-sponsored by IRAC and other organisations. Forty people, men and women, boarded several segregated buses around the city and sat together up front. None of the protesters sat next to ultra-Orthodox passengers or deliberately provoked them in any way other than our boarding and sitting in the front.

In this case, there was no altercation. The driver chose not to interfere, which allowed us to stay up front, though one ultra-Orthodox man covered his eyes and ears with his pais while others chose to bury their noses in prayer-books.

At the next stop, three Orthodox women sat next to us, since the back of the bus was now filled. We handed out leaflets to all of the women. The next day IRAC received phone calls from three ultra-Orthodox women thanking us for what we were doing and begging us to continue our struggle against state-sponsored segregated bus lines. This case is far from over; we promise to keep you up to date.

[From Anat Hoffman of the IRAC, via Melbourne community activist Malvina Malinek]

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