RACE & CLASS

the other agenda

the right to palestine

a black perspective on the war

islam in the media

the arab working class in britain

Contributions

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Introduction

As we go to press, the Gulf war is over and the victors, in all their righteousness and truth (and touched even with a little mercy for the vanquished), are singing hymns of praise to themselves and their western values. 'Peace' and 'stability' in the Middle East are now to be pursued with the same relentless, self-righteous arrogance as was military combat; indeed, are likely, in many respects, to be indistinguishable from it. The US's agenda for peace, as for war, promises to eradicate all alternatives from consideration.

But there is another agenda to that set by the US and its functionaries: the agenda set by ordinary men and women in every reach of the Third World as they struggle for a minimum of justice and the right to a life – for their children, above all. Nowhere does this emerge more starkly than in Palestine. And it is to the devastation of a whole generation of children in that country who, deprived of their childhood and stripped of their schooling, have been forced, almost as the last legions of honour, into the forefront of battle, that Graham Usher turns his attention in 'Children of the *intifada*'. Behind the children stand the women, attempting, as Nahla Abdo shows, to synthesise both their national struggle and their aspirations as women, in a context where they are beset not only by the necessity of maintaining a whole Palestinian infrastructure against Israeli suppression, but also by patriarchal, fundamentalist elements in their own community.

Israel's desire simply to be rid of the Palestinians within the Occupied Territories is familiar through its use of detentions and deportations. Less familiar is the elaborate and intimidatory bureaucracy through which Palestinian families within the Occupied Territories are separated, kept apart and rendered 'illegal', described here by Khaled Al-Batrawi and Mouin Rabbani.

All these pieces were written before the outbreak of the Gulf war, under cover of which Israel concocted even harsher measures to smash the *intifada* – keeping the Palestinian population under a blanket curfew and so stopping them from earning their livelihood, watering their crops or simply getting something to eat. This, coming on top of a situation in which, even before the war, remittances back home from Palestinian workers in the oil states (including Kuwait) had virtually dried up, has brought many Palestinians to the verge of starvation.

But the war has come back to Britain too. If white society has been largely cushioned from its effects, except as a TV spectacle of tanks, troops and flashing green skies, that has not been the case for black,

especially Muslim, people here. A. Sivanandan's speech to the Black Committee Against War in the Gulf analyses just how the debate over the war has excluded black and Third World concerns – about the new imperial order (political and economic) targeted on the Third World, the media's ability to sanitise the war through the very sophistication of the technology that brings it into every home, and the exacerbation of racism in Britain that it has brought about. Les Levidow and Kevin Robins take up the theme of high-tech weaponry directed against the Third World which, like the eye of God, is all-seeing, but watches only to destroy. The theme of the media is taken up by John Newsinger; for, if the 'respectable' media have sanitised the war, the *Sun* has turned it into yet another occasion to regurgitate the lowest common instincts in all of us. Newsinger shows how its raucous jingoism has helped to set up Muslims and Arabs in this country and their places of worship as ready targets for the fascist 'crusaders' of the street.

But anti-Muslim racism has long had a hold in British society, as evidenced over the 'Rushdie affair'. Simon Cottle's dissection of the way in which one TV news story on it was put together, reveals how unquestioned biases and assumptions about 'Muslims' can distort, and ultimately overturn, the truth. Indeed, the racism that Muslim Arab working-class communities face in Britain has rarely been addressed. Chris Searle's interview with Abdulgalil Shaif, of the Yemeni community in Sheffield, adds another dimension to our agenda; the symbiotic nature of the struggle against racism in the West and for liberation in the Arab world.

Hazel Waters

GRAHAM USHER

Children of Palestine

> 'Grown-ups may not realise how much the occupation is affecting us. But we say, "Very much". So many of us children are wounded and killed. The occupation is burying us alive. Burying our childhood.'[1]

At the heart of the *intifada* is the child. Images conveyed to us via our TV screens and newspapers so load the associated meanings of the uprising on to the child's small shoulders that, in the West, the very word '*intifada*' conjures up figures of youth – swathed in white checkered *kifiyyahs*, running down alleyways, fleeing under tear gas, throwing stones. Media stereotypes rarely speak the truth, of course; yet here, it seems, they allude to it. Documentaries, reports, eye-witnesses and anecdotes all attest that the central actors in the struggle against Israeli occupation are Palestinian children. They are also, overwhelmingly, its victims:

> I lay between the soldier's big boots and he took out his knife . . . he raised the knife in his two hands high over his head and plunged the knife downward until it stopped just an inch from my forehead. I screamed and screamed and so did he.[2]

This is Mohammed from the Gaza strip. He is 9 years old. And while the eloquence with which he renders his ordeal is unusual, the ordeal itself is not. For the Swedish Save the Children organisation, Radda Barnen – to whom his story was told – Mohammed is the typical Palestinian child. He lives with his family in a two-roomed, breeze

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block and corrugated iron 'house' in Jabalya refugee camp, where over 50,000 Palestinians are condensed into a living area of 1½ kilometres. Mohammed shares 'his' bedroom with three brothers and four sisters. Like everyone else in the camp, since December 1987 he has lived under a permanent night curfew and 240 day curfews. During curfew, Palestinians are denied electricity and are unable to leave their homes. During extended curfews, they are forced to go without food and water, while Mohammed and children like him go without school. One study estimates that Jabalya's children have lost 50 per cent of schooldays over the last three years due to the Israeli army's collective punishments of individual school closure or de facto closure by curfew.[3] Finally – as the above testifies – Mohammed has been beaten. He has grown up amidst, and become inured to, levels of military violence that are 'severe, indiscriminate, multi-dimensional and recurrent'.[4]

Radda Barnen's report covers the period from December 1987 to December 1989. During this time, 159 Palestinian children were killed and 63,000 suffered *intifada*-related injuries. Of the fatalities, 106 died from gunshot wounds and 39 from tear-gas exposure. A third of the gunshot deaths occurred while 'not in the vicinity of a protest or demonstration', and four-fifths of the gas victims died at home or 'within 5 metres of an open door or window of the house'.[5] Out of all injuries, 29,900 were from army beatings, with the majority of children sustaining wounds on their 'heads, upper bodies and multiple locations'.[6] In 94 per cent of all cases – death and injury – Israeli military personnel were found to be responsible. The average age of the child victim from all cases was 10.

According to the United Nations, a child is a person who is 16 years or under. There are 898,000 children in the occupied territories, over half the total Palestinian population. Were the above casualty rate per population to be applied to the USA, we would be talking about the murder of 9,680 US children and the deliberate maiming of over three million juveniles. We would not be talking about the use of 'unjustified' or 'excessive' force, but of a sustained and systematic assault on children's lives so great that what it intimates would be ethnocide rather than illegality.

But these children are Palestinians, and the perpetrators of the violence done to them are Israelis. So we don't talk of them in this way. They – like their brothers and sisters in Mozambique, Guatemala and Cambodia – escape the purview of our humanism. They are pawns in a wider international game where the stakes are set by the West, but where the reality is undividedly theirs. And while reports like Radda Barnen's are salutary in reminding us that Israel's 'lethal force' – a force supplied and paid for by the West – is currently being deployed against defenceless children, its 'facts' can only scratch the surface. It

cannot recover the psychological damage suffered by Palestinian children. It leaves us, rather, with questions: What happens to children who have become the chief 'vehicles for social change' in a popular uprising against military occupation, whose self expression and play is met by massive and punitive military responses, whose parents are no longer protectors and whose home affords no refuge? In short, what is it like for the child to have lived through the turmoil?

Children of the stones

> 'Everyday when I come home from school, I wash my hands and have lunch. I wash my plate and do my homework. Then I go out and throw stones.'[7]

Yasser Arafat has called the *intifada* 'a revolution of stones'. The stonethrowers are the *shubab*. No precise translation exists for the Arabic, but its sense is caught in expressions like 'youth activists', 'the guys' or, more recently, 'the underground'. The *shubab* are an epiphenomenon of the uprising. They are the 'occupation generation', children who have lived their entire lives under Israeli rule. Assia Habash, co-director of the Early Childhood Resource Centre (ECRC) in Jerusalem, adumbrates the political forces that shaped them:

> They have spent their lives revolting against one of the most lethal armies and intelligence forces in the world. These young people have nothing to lose . . . If they continue to resist . . . they will be trying to make a future for themselves . . . They feel empowered.[8]

For Habash, this empowerment comes 'as something from within'. While it is cultivated by the sense of absolute dispossession that the Israeli occupation has imposed, its roots derive from the child's position within Palestinian culture.

The central unit of Palestinian society is the *Hamula*. Marwan Darweish defines this as 'an aggregate of the extended family related through a common ancestor'.[9] But the extended family, here, is not to be confused with the Western notion of grandparents and grandchildren living under one roof. For Palestinians, the extended family 'refers to a framework of continuity and support from all family members living in the same proximity'.[10] Within this 'system', the child is the nexus, 'the binding factor' that draws the filial strands together:

> The term 'family' in the Palestinian community is defined by the presence of children. The first born is an actual manifestation and

> confirmation of a marriage. Hence, the child plays a . . . vital role in maintaining the family legacy.[11]

The *Hamula,* traditionally, is hierarchical and male dominated, with a clear distribution of sex roles. From an early age, children are assimilated into the workforce of the family. Daughters 'help at home and play the role of caretakers for their younger brothers and sisters'. Sons, 'while they are allowed more freedom from household responsibilities . . . are expected to aid . . . the family financially . . . by working in the fields around the village or in nearby towns'.[12] It is precisely these fundamental dynamics of family structure that the *intifada* has challenged.

Nabira Kevorkian has shown that while adult males take the lead in organising the *intifada* via strikes and demonstrations, 'their authority within the family is changing either because they are so often absent, being detained or employed abroad, or because they are beaten and humiliated in front of their children'.[13] Palestinian women have become more active in the social and political organisation of the camps. Older siblings have had to take responsibility as breadwinners. And younger children have become participants in the uprising. They 'jump' curfew to take in food; pass messages to neighbours; scout so that older brothers and sisters can stay one step ahead of the tidal army raids. The 'hands of the child' here extend beyond the walls of the home to embrace the community as a whole. Giel notes how 'the confined, prison-like space of the Gaza Strip' imputes not only 'suffering and sacrifice' but a territorial sense of identity.[14] Through the *intifada*, the position of children has become transvalued because, as children, they can cover every inch of turf and 'know the pulse of the street'.[15] It is not – as the Israeli Justice Ministry puts it – that 'children of all ages are recruited by the PLO and extremist Islamic elements to participate in street violence';[16] nor – as certain Israeli psychologists have argued – that Palestinian mothers are to blame for having too many children who, undisciplined, become violent and uncontrollable.[17] The role of the *shubab* is not simply that of the stonethrower. It is cohesive, multiple, above all, social rather than narrowly familial. As such, the 'occupation generation' have garnered to themselves 'more respect, responsibility and status than has traditionally been given the young':[18] 'In any confrontation I will be at the forefront. Yes, my father worries for my safety. But, inwardly, he accepts what I have to be.'[19]

This new social identity highlights the most salient feature of the *shubab*: their astute and intense political consciousness. Dr Eyad El Sarraj, for twelve years the only fully qualified psychiatrist working in the Gaza Strip, has conducted thousands of interviews with Palestinian children: 'You talk to an 8-year-old in Gaza and his political

awareness will astound you. Really, he knows more than I knew when I was at university.'[20]

Palestinian children across the occupied territories can tell you which is 'their' village, despite never having seen it or the fact that it was destroyed forty years ago when Israel was established. They can explain the difference between Judaism and Zionism. One 14-year-old girl at school in Jerusalem tells me that 'a 2-year-old knows how to throw stones and who to throw them at. They also know that soldiers kill you.' A study commissioned by Palestinian Women's Action Committees found that, among children attending kindergartens, the average 3-year-old could comprehend and produce accurately the words: soldiers, batons, tear gas, rubber bullets, arrests, torture, closure and detention. For Assia Habash, this collective, historical identity overwhelms all others:

> social history becomes very important for adolescents because developmental outcomes for them depend less upon the day-to-day character of the infrastructure of the family, and more upon the ideologically driven activities available in the community and in the larger society.[21]

As we shall see, this process of national identification is the determinant psychological structure of the Palestinian child. It also starts young. Joumana, a kindergarten teacher in Ramallah, describes her morning class:

> I give out crayons and papers and tell the children to draw whatever they want. Every morning they draw the Palestinian flag. If one child confuses the colours, he or she is patiently corrected by the others. The pictures are then hung on the school's gates, walls and windows.

Why do the children want their drawings outside the school rather than inside the classroom? 'So that the army can see them.'

The hidden *intifada*

The renascence of Palestinian identity has been the upside of the *intifada*. El Sarraj refers to it as 'a sense of ecstasy' that 'gave a renewed meaning to our lives'. There is also the downside:

> You see there is the *intifada* and the hidden *intifada* . . . Sometimes you will see the Palestinian youth with the *kifiyyah* round his face, only seeing his eyes – the way he is portrayed in the western media . . . This distorts what the *intifada* is all about. They are not portraying the fear felt by the youth.[22]

The uprising has transformed the lives of all Palestinian children.

But the psychological impact of this transformation is double-edged. El Sarraj lists disorders amongst children that are 'almost epidemic' in their reach and which he attributes to the 'common effects of war trauma':

> Phobias, truanting, difficulties of concentration, sleeplessness, refusal to eat, attempted suicides. Even hysterical convergence – a child who will suddenly become paralysed or unable to see. You don't see that in the West any more. All these things are about anxiety and fear.[23]

El Sarraj finds the cause of the distress in the material realities of occupation and the excessive levels of military violence to which children are exposed. Thus, different kinds of trauma are related to different forms of collective punishment. One study of Gazan families subjected to prolonged curfew found that the children were prone to be either 'hyperactive and uncontrollable' or 'withdrawn, developing agoraphobic symptoms when curfew is lifted'. A foreign observer who visited a Gaza family during curfew reported that 'in houses where there are no toys, books or television, the children sit listlessly and stare into space for hours on end'.[24]

Children experience curfew as house arrest: 'they suffer from . . . a complete lack of freedom. They can't move about without permission from the military authorities.'[25] If a strong, 'buffering' security is sustained by other family members within the home, adverse psychological reactions may be accommodated. However, curfew doesn't rest at the front door. Since the *intifada* began, at least 1,098 houses have been demolished or sealed for 'security' or 'licensing' reasons. Radda Barnen estimates that, 'of these . . . 1,011 were complete demolitions . . . which left 9,766 people, including 4,883 children, homeless'. Follow-up studies into the welfare of such 'displaced' persons found not only 'a dramatic decline in health', but 'severe emotional traumas that did not abate over time'. Amongst children, these traumas were often somatised in the forms of dietary problems or insomnia.

Beyond the violation of the home, there is the violation of the family as a psychological system. Children here are not just victims of a military violence beyond their control; they are made its accomplices. The most brutal instance of this is the 'punishment' of humiliation, where children are forced by the army to witness the gratuitous and systematic abuse of other family members. During the *intifada*, Palestinian children have not only had to stand and watch their homes being destroyed; they have witnessed their mothers and sisters being insulted, their brothers being beaten, and their fathers – especially, their fathers – being degraded and, on some occasions, killed. This practice has become so widespread throughout the

territories that Palestinians are loth to believe that it is due to a few 'rogue' soldiers. Its routineness, they say, amounts to a deliberate military policy in which fundamental family relations are attacked as a means of bringing about political docility. James Garbarino, who treated victims of military humiliation in Argentina, writes of its psychological impact on children:

> One critical issue lies in politically motivated efforts to demean and humiliate parents in the eyes of their children . . . Here parental legitimacy and power are denied absolutely, with total demolition of the 'buffer-ing function'. . . The intent is usually to demoralise and intimidate parents as a way to neutralise them politically, but one consequence is often to undermine the child's mental health.[26]

El Sarraj's own work with 'demeaned' Palestinian children bears out Garbarino's prognosis. When 'young children witness their parents being beaten in front of their eyes, their main image of security is shattered – if their own fathers cannot protect them, who can?'[27] The child's psychological response to this sudden, violent vulnerability is measured on a behavioural pendulum that swings wildly between defiance and fear. El Sarraj tells the story of a 6-year-old who, for three months, refused to leave his home:

> He told me that he had been with his father one day when soldiers stopped him and beat him up . . . It didn't take me long to discover that the centre . . . of his life was his father. The boy had realised that his father could no longer protect him.[28]

Yet – as Garbarino asserts – equally common reactions to parental humiliation are 'shame, rage and political resolve'. El Sarraj sees these emotions in the passionate identification the *shubab* make with the national struggle. 'Because they see their parents humiliated, their anger becomes directed against the forces of occupation rather than the authority of their family.'[29] The psychological corollary here is not of insecurity manifested as phobia, but of fearlessness. 'A kind of defiance, an open confrontation, that simply did not happen with older generations.'[30] Many observers have commented on the Palestinian child's apparently reckless defiance of speech and action. This is Rami, another 6-year-old:

> He . . . was standing nearby when soldiers began distributing a pamphlet at the end of the 27-day curfew. The pamphlet told the villagers to stop the *intifada* or the olive harvest would be forbidden. A soldier gave a pamphlet to Rami and said, 'Take this to your father.' Rami replied, 'My father refuses to accept this.' The soldier slapped his face and handed him the pamphlet. 'Take

this to your father', he repeated. Rami took it and tore it up in front of the soldier. The soldier slapped him again, handed him another pamphlet and said, 'Take this to your father' . . . Rami tore up the pamphlet, went home, took a handful of stones and climbed up to the roof of his house. His uncle came up and asked what he was doing. 'That soldier insulted me and hit me', said Rami. 'I'm waiting to take revenge.'[31]

The work of Cairo Arafat

Palestinians liken the *intifada* to a hard, gem-like flame. It warms, sometimes burns, but above all illuminates all facets of their occupied existence. This is certainly so for Palestinian children. A study commissioned by the Palestinian Union of Women's Work Committees estimated that 71 per cent of all Palestinian children in the occupied territories had participated 'in some way' in the uprising. Cairo Arafat, a Palestinian child psychologist based at the ECRC, has carried out numerous studies to 'assess the perceptions, attitudes and feelings' of these children. To her, the *intifada* is not just a political uprising against occupation; it is a social and psychological phenomenon that has sunk roots deep into the Palestinian psyche. Her work opens a rare seam from which may be mined the basic psychological modalities of the Palestinian child.

De-education

'The pressure is greatest on the children. They've been denied the education my generation received. With each new generation, a further denial.'[32]

For seventeen months of the first two years of the *intifada*, West Bank schools were closed by military order – a collective punishment that shut 900 institutions and affected over 300,000 students. During 1988, kindergartens were covered by the same order. These, too, were deemed a 'threat to the security interests of the state of Israel'. Thus, for at least two generations of Palestinian children the essential coordinates of educational development – continuity, stability and support – were denied them. For a people who had historically set such store on educational achievement, this denial was a 'national catastrophe and was experienced as such'.[33] But what of its psychological impact on children?

Cairo Arafat conducted interviews with children from all regions of the West Bank. She finds a dichotomy in their responses. On the one hand, there is the politicising impact closure has on the child's immediate, conscious behaviour. On the other, she unearths problems that bode ill for the child's longer-term emotional development.

Thus, children affected by closure expressed strong support for the *intifada*, saying how the struggle has brought them 'closer to Palestine'. She records a complete coincidence between the child's self and national identities:

> I don't mind sacrificing everything for the *intifada* – even my life . . . the Israelis want us to be dependent on them for everything . . . That is why we must get an education, so we won't need them and can do everything for ourselves.[34]

Samir, aged 12. Yet the same child goes on to say that he 'misses school'. The ambivalence is unsurprising. For Palestinian children, schools are not only 'places where you learn; they are the main outlet where you can play, interact and express your identity in an uninhibited way – in other words, where you can socialise and be socialised'.[35] It is this felt social deprivation that repeatedly punctures the ostensibly defiant tone of Arafat's interviewees. The children, she says, are 'bored'. Some 'cannot remember the last time they set foot in school'. In all cases, she notes a progressive oblivescence of learning, with one boy admitting that he has 'forgotten how to read and write'. The continual disruption of schooling – by closure, curfew and army harassment – saps their will to study:

> We have many problems at school. I can't keep up with the lessons, even though the standards are low . . . The army closed the school for six months, but the whole year was lost. We had to start all over again. They are burying us alive and they couldn't care less.[36]

The psychological accompaniment to this is a perpetual sense of 'unease', a 'gross anxiety' that makes the children 'highly distractible, fidgety and excessively distrustful of all adult strangers'.[37] Parents confirm that such behaviours occurred after extended periods of closure. For one Palestinian psychologist, these symptoms are merely the 'husks' of later problems. Drawing on the pioneering work of Fraser amongst children in Northern Ireland, he sees in them 'delayed neuroses, leading to chronic maladjustments in the future'.

Play

> 'When they play, they play with stones and mock guns and Molotov cocktails. They become guards, hostages, casualties . . . They don't have to imagine it. It's for real.'[38]

With the *intifada*, Palestinian children have invented a new litany of games in which they are the officiants. Among the most popular are 'soldiers and *shubab*', where confrontations are staged and sticks and coca-cola cans are magically transformed into guns and tear-gas canisters. Or 'funeral', where girls are carried wreathed in black

plastic bags on the backs of their peers. Gone are the TV-derived role-models of cop, robber and cowboy. Instead, children imitate local martyrs or heroic figures resurrected from Arabic folklore.

For Cairo Arafat, such games provide the ideological cement from which the child's national identity is forged. Play, here, is not simply the re-enactment of daily experience; it is the collective means by which children recover, internalise and identify with past and contemporary Palestinian reality as a way of neutralising and apprehending the most offending features of that reality. Play operates as an imaginative field which transmutes the squalor of their surroundings and violence of their lives into a mark of identity, a signature of resistance. This communal, imaginative process of national identification is best conveyed by the Arabic term *sumud: 'Sumud* infers steadfastness, the ability to bear and withstand hardship, a determined struggle for existence with future prospects of reaping positive outcomes.'[39]

Yet *sumud* is not a defence mechanism. It does not offer fantasy, a denial or avoidance of reality. *Sumud* is a 'cognitive mechanism' that appropriates reality, makes sense of it and 'directs activity towards the future'.[40] For the child, it evolves via a dialectic where the internalised image of oneself is determined in relation to an objectified image of the other. This 'other' is the Israeli; or rather, soldiers and armed settlers, as these, for Palestinian children, are the only Israelis they know.

Arafat has attempted through analyses of children's play to elicit the Palestinian child's 'attitude to and perception of' the soldier. She finds that, to young children, Israelis 'mean some sort of different type of person'. The soldier is a 'fighting machine', a bristle of guns without purpose or motive. On the playground, teachers remark that children who play the 'soldiers' are excessive in their beating of the 'protesters'. When checked, they retort, *'Ana Yuhud*, I am the Jew. I have to do this.'[41] Palestinian identity, on the other hand, is dramatised as that of a caring and supportive community. Girls play 'rescuing the *shubab*', where they become nurses and doctors who tend the injured or emulate the high-pitched ululations of their mothers. This qualitative distinction between Palestinian and Israeli identities runs like a fault-line through the entire repertoire of the child's imagination. Arafat comments on a collection of children's drawings:

> Soldiers are on the one side and Palestinians on the other . . . a soldier inevitably carries a gun, baton and wears drab coloured clothing. Palestinian children . . . draw road blocks, burning tyres, children with rocks in their hands and in the air. In rare instances . . . you find pictures of people running away. Most portray children in confrontation.[42]

The most 'striking feature', however, is the 'absence of facial expressions on the Palestinians'. The Israelis have 'complete facial expressions', are shown to be 'angry' and are drawn in 'considerable detail'. But the *shubab* only have eyes. This is not accidental. If *sumud* articulates an identity where the desires of the self are suborned to the needs of the community, then the facelessness of the children's drawings imaginatively projects this collectivist thrust. *Sumud*, for the child, 'is perceived as an individual and community based coping mechanism'. In their art, as in their politics, 'their feelings (facial expressions) are secondary to the actions (confrontations) taking place amongst people'.[43]

Occupation

> 'Before the *intifada*, one of the most common physical complaints we had was a sense of suffocation . . . this was a symptom of depression brought about by the occupation. Palestinians felt that every area of their lives was being closed down. We felt imprisoned. So people would go to their doctors, holding their necks, saying, "Doctor, I can't breathe, I feel strangled." There were literally thousands of cases like these. How did we know that the cause was psychosomatic? After the *intifada* started, the symptoms disappeared.'[44]

It is this cathartic sense that Palestinians intend when they speak of the *intifada* being 'a dramatic therapy for us'. All commentators agree on the radical change in Palestinian mores, values and morals wrought by the uprising. The change has been registered most deeply by Palestinian children:

> Before the *intifada*, we used to talk about clothes and fun things. Now everything has changed. The *intifada* has solved many problems . . . Everyone is working together – kids, women, men, even old people . . . And people go to the youngsters to solve their problems.[45]

If it is true that the agents of this cultural revolution are increasingly children, it is also true that their new morality didn't drop from the sky. It has a material base, and had spent long years in gestation. It was nurtured by an infrastructure of community organisation and mobilisation that was sown before but flourished with the uprising. The strategic goal of this mobilisation is to create – under the shadow of Israel – a practical programme of social and political self-reliance. To lessen dependence on Israeli goods, a grassroots, home-grown Palestinian economy has sprouted. However, look carefully within Palestinian villages and camps and you will uncover not only hidden

economies of home gardening, animal production, food distribution, garbage collection, civil defence and health care; you will also find that these services are peopled, organised and run by children. Assia Habash explains their educational significance:

> To children, what does self-reliance mean? How can they help in being independent from the Israeli economy? By participating in the agricultural endeavours that are taking place in the community, by participating in the raising of hens, rabbits, caring for the goats and so on . . . the children also learn science, maths, language, and very effectively, because it all relates to their lives . . . So this thing is real education.[46]

The thinking behind this pedagogy is as simple as it is ingenious. Whatever the army prohibits, closes down or destroys, the *shubab* – as a community – allow, open and build. Hana, aged 11, describes a day at her school:

> The students in this school were active in the strikes. So the army put up a concrete gate. But the kids broke it down. Then they put up rocks, but again the kids cleared the path. Then the army brought in workers to build a fence around the school. Like a prison.[47]

But self-reliance is more than just an organisational or educational strategy. For the child, it involves an immense psychological adjustment. 'Occupation is never just military occupation – it is always a cultural, social, above all, *personal* occupation.'[48] And for children, the ties that bind a psychological dependency are, if anything, more tenacious than those that determine economic dependency. For these anchor deep into the recesses of the psyche, invade and possess the very notions of self and identity. Occupied children feel just that – *occupied*, as though someone was continually shovelling earth into their mouths. It is here that El Sarraj's comments about suffocation find their true, explanatory context. Again and again, Palestinian children project their experience of occupation in images of claustrophobia, incarceration and burial: 'At school, we feel the soldiers are on top of us. At break, we feel they are on top of us. When we go home, we feel they are on top of us.'[49]

A young woman from the Gaza Strip says that she prays every night that one day she will have her country. Of what does her nationalism consist? A territory, a history, a language, certainly; but the sensibility of her freedom is a release, a deliverance expressed in starkly physical terms. 'I don't want to be *bound* inside.'

Mediation

For Palestinian children – whose only reality has been that of occupation – the effort required to inculcate a sense of self-reliance, to cohere the frangible nature of their experience into some kind of order, is gargantuan. This task has fallen to Palestinian women.

There are 120 kindergartens and day centres in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These have been set up, funded and sustained entirely by the actions of Palestinian women. And while their remit covers manufacturing, training and business, overwhelmingly they 'have been responsible for childcare and early childhood education'.[50] It is from the matrices of these centres – and the women's committees that run them – that an independent, indigenous Palestinian psychology has evolved. For it is to them that Palestinian mothers turn when faced with the psychological detritus of their children. And it is these mothers – the culture of resistance they embody, the coping strategies they have developed – that Palestinian teachers, childworkers and psychologists quarry in their search for an authentic therapy. The most practised of these strategies has been mediation. Garbarino writes of its psychological bases and potential:

> Our first hypothesis is that the well-being of young children in a society depends upon how well that society is doing in sustaining the basic 'infrastructure' of family life . . . If parents (particularly mothers in most cases) can sustain a strong attachment to their children, can maintain a positive sense of self, and can have access to rudimentary shelter, food and medical care, then children will manage.[51]

Since the *intifada* began, teams of women have gone out to villages and camps, conducted research, called conferences and generally agitated and educated so that mediation becomes an owned, communal practice. The purpose has been to 'help mothers understand what is happening to their children so that they can cope with their behaviour'.[52] But the means have been to utilise and exhort existing features of Palestinian culture to show that they, if employed consciously, will mediate a child's stress. Thus, a study in Qabatya village showed how children's ability to cope with war and trauma is related to the perceived strength of their mothers:

> In one household where family members said seventeen tear-gas canisters were dropped from a helicopter . . . the mother's forthrightness appeared to set an example of fearlessness for her seven children, the oldest of whom was a 10-year-old girl.[53]

At Dar El Tifl El Arabi school in Jerusalem, motherless children – orphaned by the *intifada* – exhibited severe symptoms of

introversion and regression. Women teachers set up special apartments where the children were placed with a group of peers and one or two 'housemothers'. 'Our purpose', says one of the 'mothers', 'is to reform attachments not just with a parent, but with the community as a whole'. After several months the disorders were alleviated.

Such practices provide not only therapeutic models to be emulated throughout the territories. They also act as prisms wherein a community can perceive the psychological resources latent in themselves via the recovery of the political resistances inherent in their culture. The strength of the mother in Qabatya, the use of multiple attachments in Dar El Tifl Arabi, are coping strategies ingrained through a history of Palestinian custom and practice and born in opposition to a history of dispossession and occupation. The work of the women's committees has simply been to disinter this buried culture, brush it clean and give it away to Palestinian women and children as *their* culture. If this therapy is largely female, this does not mean that it is specialist. The roles here are those of archivist, pedagogue and agitator. And the psychology they bequeath is a democratic, social psychology where the oppressed – through communal practice – 'develop in themselves a sense of conscious self-determination that is based on the discovery of their social needs – food, shelter, work' and love.[54]

Torture

> 'I dreamt I was killed. The boys start throwing stones at the army. And I wake up and say, "Boys one day the soldiers will go away. Then we can play on the swings and slides".'[55]

There are some experiences, however, that 'go beyond human mediation or tolerance'.[56] Take this story from Rafah Refugee Camp in Gaza:

> both parents are arrested, the house is demolished and the very young children move into a small tent with their crippled grandmother. Repeated attacks by soldiers over the following weeks force them to leave the tent and wander from one shelter to another . . . Then the children's mother is released from prison . . . She is not recognised by the youngest child.[57]

Children subjected to severe traumatic stress lose 'all hold of what is happening to them'.[58] Victims, they turn in on themselves as totally victimised. To flee the impossible burden of their real worlds, they seek sanctuary in a kind of autism of their own. They exhibit chronic symptoms of quietism, depression and grief. For El Sarraj, such disorders occur most frequently amongst children who have been imprisoned or tortured.

Since the beginning of the *intifada*, the Israeli military's definition of the legal criminal age has been remarkably fluid. In 1987, it was 16; by 1988, 14; today, it is 12. Despite such judicial laxity, there is evidence to show that Israel is still detaining underaged Palestinians in its prisons. A survey of the army's own records reveals children as young as 5 being arrested and detained.[59] A random sample of three Israeli detention centres found eighty-six underaged children within them.[60] The same trend holds with torture. Thus, while torture existed prior to the uprising, it is now being used against ever younger age groups. Hanna, aged 15, was held hooded, hands bound above his head, for twenty-four hours. Khalid, aged 14, was beaten, and then hung from the ceiling and kept from sleeping by having lit cigarettes stubbed out on his arms.[61] It is not simply the physical experience of torture that is disabling. The psychological threat exuded by torture, the sense of absolute powerlessness it imposes, is even more damaging. El Sarraj tells of a boy who, after detention, became uncharacteristically aggressive towards his family:

> I got him to express some of the guilt and shame that he had been bottling up. It turned out that he had been tortured. There had been no sexual abuse, but he had been repeatedly threatened with it. It was unbearable.[62]

Such children have flown by the nets of mother, family and community. How can they be recovered? 'If children have been tortured, one way to make what has happened more bearable is to get them to relate what is happening to them to the national struggle.'[63] This therapeutic use of national identification is the 'most recalcitrant and probably the most significant'[64] aspect of Palestinian mental health practice. Nationalism, here, is not just an ideological position; it is a clinical technique. It flows from the belief that psychological pain is only assimilable when it is meaningful. Assia Habash explains: 'The meaning and harmfulness of an event' as well as the child's 'sufficiency to cope with the stressors' must be met 'with a process of ideological response that mobilises social and psychological resources . . . in the wider social and political context of a victimised and struggling nation'.[65]

For El Sarraj, too, 'the psychological process of healing traumatic experiences draws strength from political and ideological commitment'.[66] The problem is how to actualise this process so that it becomes an integral part of the psychiatrist's method. He describes his treatment of child torture victims:

> When I am faced with a child who has been tortured, I ask . . . Why do you think this is happening to you *as a Palestinian?* I ask this as a way of moving the victim from an exploration of feelings to a more

cognitive understanding of the situation, to get him or her to understand the event politically.[67]

For Palestinians, to understand the 'situation' politically is to understand it historically. What has to be diagnosed is not their own 'trauma', but the trauma endemic to their colonised existence. And this is so for the child torture victim. She must come to know her depression or grief not as an individual pathology, but as the product of a specific historical reality – Israeli occupation and her people's resistance to it. Once she comprehends her pain as one thread out of the total national oppression, she is enabled emotionally to discharge it. Therapy, therefore, consists in facilitating a psychological tonicity within Palestinian children so that they can project themselves imaginatively as a land and as a people. Then they may tap and release from within themselves a moral 'reservoir of creativity and community that transforms the occupying culture into an invigorating, nurturing and healing force'.[68] Mental well-being, here, is the child in revolt against occupation and aware of herself as such:

> You cannot detach the individual experience from the national oppression . . . every event, every suffering, must in the end be related to the national struggle . . . And this is so for the victim of torture. Once he has understood the national context of his suffering, it is up to the individual to decide his role. Some will plant tomatoes; others will work in clinics; others will write on walls . . . and children will confront soldiers with slings and stones. All of these acts assert an individual's identity and demonstrate self-control and responsibility, but they are all determined by the national struggle. The two are inseparable.[69]

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NAHLA ABDO

Women of the *intifada*: gender, class and national liberation*

Historically, women's active participation in liberation movements, those of socialist and/or nationalist forms, has been marked by a split in identity. Women's revolutionary identity has often clashed with their 'womanist' or feminist identity. Most often, though to varying degrees, feminist research has shown that the victory of the socialist or nationalist revolution is not necessarily a victory for women.[1] On the contrary, the Algerian, Iranian and Mozambican cases, among others, have witnessed a reversal of roles for women participants in the liberation. In a recent international round-table discussion on 'National development, identity politics and concepts of feminism' held in October 1990 in Helsinki, I was informed that the well-known Algerian heroine, Jamila Buheirid, is now chairing a cosmetic firm in a state-owned enterprise. Sad as the fate of Jamila and the many Jamilas might be, research on women and revolution or national liberation is still underdeveloped.

Feminist literature lacks a theoretical or conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between the women's movement and the liberation (socialist or nationalist) movement. Instead of addressing

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themselves to the dynamics of the movement and the dialectics of the forces which make up the liberation movement (e.g., the women's movement, labour movement, etc.), feminist studies tend, rather, to concentrate on the structure and the organisation of what happens afterwards, i.e., on the 'liberated nation-socialist-state'.[2] Most studies on women and national liberation have focused on two major images: that of the woman-victim who participated, gave and sacrificed during the movement, but who after liberation was victimised by the patriarchal structure of the state; and that of the strong woman fighter in the forefront of the armed struggle. Both images are products of particular analyses of the struggle which I believe are problematic. In the first instance, analysis tends to locate the blame within the structure of the 'liberated' state and ignores the structure and organisation of the movement itself. The second, which glorifies women's militant contributions, fails to problematise the complexity of their struggle.

The Palestinian *intifada*, which in December 1990 entered its fourth consecutive year, provides a fertile soil for the study of feminism and national liberation. Palestinian women's massive participation in the *intifada* provides a unique case for a potential and real Arab feminist movement in contemporary Arab and Middle Eastern history. It is also useful for hammering out the age-old question: what guarantees are there that Palestinian women's emancipation will be on the main agenda of the national liberation movement after independence?

Gender consciousness and political activism: the contradictions

The major dilemma faced by women in the national struggle is posed by the contradictions men demonstrate between their revolutionary political consciousness and their reactionary social-gender consciousness. These contradictions are nicely articulated in the following poem entitled, 'The first dialogue is with our comrades who don't wash their socks', written by a Cuban feminist after the success of the revolution.

> To you, the revolutionary man and the soul of freedom in this age:
> Here I am going back home
> to be reconstructed – again – as a traditional woman
> . . .
> minutes ago, this chest was reaching out for the screams of the oppressed . . . now it is trembling – fear of you –
> you exhaust me every night
> your return home tires me
> your screams
> your demands: where is the food?

where are the clean clothes?
where are the ironed handkerchiefs?

you frighten me with your remarks about the undusted corners of the house . . . yet, I did not find the time to dust
To you the man of the revolution
I have given all I have

Do you realise the split in my love
between the demands of the street and the cradles of your children?

At home
you take the best chair
to read
your light remains in the shadow . . . so your deep rooted tyranny wouldn't reach everyone.

You make the revolution?
why not?
your food is ready
your shirt is starched
your bed is tidy
your shoes are shiny
your children are healthy
The floor in your house is ready for you to eat on
or . . . to spit on.

Well? No! Go.
Look for yourself deep in you
Grow
So all (the people) will not leave you
Only then will you know
that together we must prepare the children's food
together we wash dishes . . . Read . . . write . . . work . . . dialogue.[3]

My choice of this poem was not for the theoretical insights it offers to a topic on feminism and revolution, or because I was looking for a theoretical framework for my article. I chose it because I found it in the homes of many activist women in the *intifada*. Originally, this piece emerged in a book entitled *Ana . . . Anta wal-thowrah* (I . . . you and the revolution: women's poetry in the Third World) edited and translated by Ilham Abu-Ghazaleh, professor of English literature at Bir Zeit university. The book was reprinted in the summer of 1990 and sold for a nominal price. Most important, however, was the poem's appearance in a popular woman's magazine issued monthly by the Palestinian Women's Committee. Finally, the poem also appeared

in *al-Kateb*, a highly respected literary journal, known for its traditional left stance and widely distributed in occupied Palestine.

The reproduction and widespread distribution of this form of literature in the *intifada* is of particular significance, demonstrating as much as anything a heightened feminist consciousness among Palestinian women activists. This consciousness seems to find expression in releasing and bringing to the fore the frictions and contradictions between Palestinian women's struggle for their emancipation and their struggle to free the nation from colonialism. However, this consciousness, it must be remembered, is not the product of the *intifada*. It is, rather, the product of a long process of subjugation and struggle that Palestinian women have been involved in. The *intifada*, in fact, has served as a powerful social force for the intensification of contradictions within Palestinian society. Resistance in the *intifada* is waged not only against twenty-three years of Israeli military occupation and economic, political, social and cultural oppression of the Palestinians. Women of the *intifada* are beginning simultaneously to wage a social-cultural struggle against the traditional Palestinian patriarchal structure.

The *intifada* combines the trajectories of two movements: a national liberation movement and a woman's movement. While it is hard to conceive of the *intifada* without the decisive role of women, it is equally difficult to perceive of the women's movement in isolation from the wider national liberation movement. This conjuncture raises the fundamental question of the actual relationship between the two movements: are these movements mutually exclusive, or can the struggle for women's emancipation be possible within the national struggle?

Nationalisms: between the state and the movement

Before addressing the issue of feminism and nationalism, it is important to differentiate between two forms of nationalism: the institutionalised, state form of nationalism and the nationalism of a liberation movement. This distinction is theoretically necessary and politically important. Despite certain commonalities in the place and role women have been given in nationalist policies and national movements, the differences between the two forms of nationalism are fundamental. Unlike official, state nationalism, which historically has used, misused and abused women, national liberation movements provide a space for women's emancipation. By taking an active role in their national liberation, and simultaneously bringing their concerns to the forefront of the agenda, women can contribute substantially to freeing the movement from its patriarchal structure.

Official state nationalism: Although the state and state policies have received attention by feminist scholars, most research has been focused on gendered state policies or on the state as a sexist institution. Very little attention has been paid to the inherent racism of the nation-state, particularly with regard to its appropriation of motherhood and its control over women's reproduction. The state-nation uses nationalism to construct an ideology of motherhood which relegates women to the home as 'women's appropriate arena for fostering national identity through their child-rearing and domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers'.[4] Biological and social reproduction through the home are seen as women's 'divine' responsibilities.

This ideological construction is not only sexist, but racist as well. For, in most nation-states, the women targeted for maintaining and reproducing one type of national offspring are certain women and not others. The policy is one of simultaneous inclusion of some and exclusion of others. These racist nationalist-exclusivist mechanisms are manifested most overtly in the state policies of the South African and Israeli regimes. The need for an exclusive Jewish state maintained through the reproduction of Jewish offspring has been an inherent feature in the development of Israel's political and judicial institutions. Israeli-Jewish women are expected to reproduce the Jewish nation at home as well as international Jewry abroad. Jewish mothers, Yuval-Davis writes, need 'to have enough children to "compensate" for the children lost in the Nazi Holocaust and to what is called in Israel the "demographic Holocaust" and assimilation'.[5]

Constructing women's identity on an exclusively racial or ethnic basis is equally a feature of the South African regime. In a Bill introduced in 1930 to enfranchise women: 'a "Woman" means a woman who is wholly of European parentage, extraction or descent.' From the point of view of the apartheid regime, 'mothers have a crucial role in personally supporting and validating military solutions to the opposition to apartheid'.[6]

In a colonial-settler form of state, the reproduction of the 'superior' race has often been accompanied with mechanisms for the control and suppression of the 'inferior' race. In some extreme cases, these mechanisms may include attempts at the physical annihilation of the 'native' population, as in the case of aboriginal inhabitants of Canada, or massive expulsion or 'population transfer', as in the Palestinian case.

In most cases, however, the nation-state resorts to social, economic and political pressures to curb or check the growth of the 'undesired' population. Thus, in an attempt to control the Palestinian population, Israel has kept its own 'minority' citizens under military rule for about twenty years – from 1948 to 1966 – limiting Palestinian Arab access to

education, work and social mobility. This was followed later by twenty-three years of military occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, which were placed under an economic and political stranglehold.

Israel has adopted two sets of nationally exclusivist rules for its women's population: that for Arab women, manifested in cutting Arab child national insurance benefits[7] and encouraging abortion clinics and free contraceptives, and that for Jewish women, 'encouraging' the birth of Jewish children through denying Jewish women access to contraceptives and providing other incentives, such as 'The Fund for Encouraging Birth', which was established to subsidise housing loans for Jewish families with more than three children.[8]

Israel's racist, nationally exclusivist policies towards the Palestinians in general have often found an echo in the statements of Israeli leaders, from ex-prime minister Golda Meir's infamous declaration about 'the nightmares she gets when she realises that when she wakes up there will be another Palestinian child born', to prime minister Shamir's description of Palestinian Arabs as 'grasshoppers, animals walking on two legs', (for ex-defence minister Eitan, Palestinians are 'cockroaches'). Israel's racist policies towards Arab women in particular call into question a number of practices I have observed as a Palestinian who has lived most of her childhood and adult life in Israel. Living in Nazareth, which is an exclusively Arab city, I was always disturbed by the widespread phenomenon in my community of caesarean deliveries for the birth of the first child. While the commoditisation of medicine and its incorporation as a profit-making industry partly accounts for this, Israel's declared policy of Jewish national superiority is another partial explanation. One may also question the circumstances around an incident which took place in a girls' school in Nablus (the West Bank) in 1976/7. The windows of the school were found, by UN and other sources, to have been sprayed with chemicals which elementary analysis discovered contained components which could induce sterility.

The nationalism of the liberation movement: In contradistinction to the racist and nationally exclusivist character of official state-nationalism, national liberation movements are moulded around different values. Love of the people and homeland is what distinguishes national liberation movements from state nationalism. 'In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism,' Anderson writes, 'it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism – poetry, prose, fiction, music, plastic arts – show this love very clearly

in thousands of different forms and styles.'[9] According to Anderson, this is particularly true for the colonised people, 'who have every reason to feel hatred for their imperialist rulers, [yet] it is astonishing how insignificant the element of hatred is in these expressions of national feeling'.

It is worth noting here that, in the *intifada*, middle-aged mothers and elderly women have been the primary carriers of the national manifestations of love, sharing and defence of others. Through the neighbourhood committees established in the first year of the *intifada*, these women looked after neighbouring families, shared their food, water and medicine with them. During the prolonged periods of siege, when whole areas were sealed off from the outside world, these women were not only responsible for the maintenance of the community, but also played a crucial role in boosting the morale of the younger, militant generation. During village and house raids, it was these middle-aged 'mothers' who confronted the Israeli soldiers, fought with them physically and did everything possible to rebuff the soldiers and save the males in the house. This form of participatory nationalism through 'motherhood' is an active and innovative form of struggle.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the discourse on women and the *intifada* has focused largely on one particular image of social relations, that is, 'the heroic mother'. She is the middle-aged woman, usually in her national embroidered dress, who is often in the demonstrations. She has invented effective tactics for saving children in danger of being arrested or beaten by Israeli soldiers. By expanding her mothering role to encompass all other children, she has dissolved herself in the wider nation. The actions of such women have given rise to the national heroine known in the literature as '*Um al-Shaheed*' or the 'Mother of the martyr'. Through popular songs and poems such as, 'Mother of the martyr, rejoice. All the youth are your children', the image of this woman has become central to Palestinian popular culture.

Anderson is correct to observe that the colonised, in particular, do not build their nationalism on hatred. Palestinian activists, women and men, reaching out to Israeli Jewish women's and other left organisations symbolise the democratic basis of the Palestinian liberation movement. In fact, the *intifada* has registered a historic turn in the Israeli-Palestinian relationship as far as political alliances – no matter how symbolic – are concerned. This is true for alliances and attempted alliances in Palestine-Israel, as well as abroad. I want to go further and suggest that the Palestinian women's movement has shaken up the Jewish feminist movement in Israel and abroad. Jewish feminists' silence, complicity and indifference to the struggle of Palestinians against the racist Israeli state is being broken down. The politicisation

of some Jewish feminist circles in Israel (e.g., Women in Black and Woman Against Palestinian Women Political Prisoners) is the product of the Palestinian women's uprising. Equally important is the growing voice of dissent and resistance among North American and British Jewish feminists, either through their practice of weekly vigils, awareness campaigns, etc., or through their writings.

This being said, however, one cannot overlook the problems and contradictions embedded in the national liberation movement. In fact, it is because of the historic achievements of Palestinian women that their (my) struggle needs to be re-evaluated continually.

A major concern over nationalism, as far as feminists are concerned, is not the patriotism or love which both women and men hold equally for their land, country, sovereignty and independence. Nor does the problem lie in who is willing to sacrifice more. Palestinian men and women have been struggling for their freedom since the 1920s in various forms of resistance.[10] The real problem lies in the fact that national liberations, by definition, are not about gender or class emancipation. And yet, during the process of liberation, the dynamics of the movement begin to challenge the monolithic concept of the nation. The active participation of women in the movement is bound to unveil and challenge the basis of the nation's imagined harmony, particularly around the issue of gender relations.

The construction of motherhood equals nationhood within the Palestinian context emerged as an expression of Palestinian lived reality. Expulsion from the homeland and refugeeism in foreign territories provided the impetus for the mother-nation relationship. In the refugee camps, women assumed the role of the state and all its institutions, including the educational one. Confined to the camp with little, if any, social or economic mobility, Palestinian women focused their energies on maintaining and reproducing Palestinian children (children, that is, with a national identity). With stories, images, values, etc., which came from Palestine prior to its occupation, the whole process of socialisation in the refugee camps has been based heavily on nationalist symbols.[11]

It is important to differentiate between different constructs of the concept. In the *intifada*, '*um al-Shaheed*' is not necessarily a passive woman, at least not politically. Her location in the movement forces her to become involved in various ways. This woman is fully conscious of her role and place. She is the personification of the nation, ready for the sacrifices required for the nation's liberation. These women speak with great confidence and are proud of the courage with which they have confronted and continue to confront the 'foreign' enemy.

The concept motherhood-nationhood, however, became a prominent feature in Palestinian popular culture when it was taken up by the national male leadership. Motherhood and the glorifying of the

'mother of the martyr' were incorporated in the national ideology of the movement, and particularly in the ideological construction of its armed struggle. Since armed struggle needs not only sacrifices but the will to sacrifice as well, this strengthening of the will was expressed in rewarding 'motherhood'. Originally, this image arose in connection with refugee women in Lebanon, where the PLO had its traditional power base. Mothers of martyrs were elevated as heroines, given special recognition by the leadership and often accompanied leaders on their official visits to the camps.[12] They were rewarded not because of their own activism as persons but, largely, in appreciation of the martyrdom of their sons.

In national liberation movements, motherhood is used interchangeably with the 'survival of cultural and national identity'. For most women, the older generation and the younger, this reality is realised and acted upon. For them, there is nothing essentially or naturally oppressive in having children. Nor is there anything wrong in the very intimate meaning Palestinians attribute to the concept of mother. After all, the long history of pre-capitalist and capitalist patriarchal oppression of women, added to the recent history of refugeeism, has created a close-knit mother-child relationship within Palestinian culture. The serious and genuine objection, however is, that women's gender identity should be subsumed to their identity as mothers. Consequently, it is to this need for women to assert their gender rights not as mothers but as equal human beings, as nationals, that the Palestinian feminist struggle needs to address itself.

The feminist struggle within the Palestinian national movement is waged at various levels. A significant aspect, which has just begun to emerge, is the feminist deconstruction of Palestinian revolutionary (national) literature. The need for this kind of work stems from the reality that our popular culture is, to say the least, sex-blind; to put it bluntly, it is sexist.

The long history of national and cultural negation under which Palestinians have been subjugated since the establishment of the state of Israel has led to their producing a wealth of cultural artifacts which reaffirm cultural-national identity. Some of these products take the form of children's books, such as the '*House of the Palestinian*' which suggests that 'all animals have homes and their homes are called certain names, but only the Palestinian child is without a home to go back to'. Others are expressed as popular songs, drama and poetry. In all this literature, one theme stands out more than any other, that is the reproduction of future generations; the affirming of identity through producing a large number of children.

This theme, one may add, is popular among both Palestinian nationalists and marxists. I cannot think of a more popular poem than Mahmoud Darweish's 'Identity card', or of a more popular song than

Ahmad Qaa'bour's '*Fi al-Dhaffa*' (in the West Bank). The major theme in Darweish's poem is expressed in the following words: 'Right down I am an Arab. My identity number is 50,000 . . . I have eight children and the ninth is due next summer . . . are you angry?' Qaa'bour's song is also about resistance by 'my seven children, my wife and myself'. Of course, there is no doubt that liberating the nation requires, first and foremost, the survival and reproduction of the nation. There is also no doubt that there can be no more bitter dehumanisation than turning a whole nation into 'refugee numbers'. Yet, it must also be said, and loudly, that neither Mahmoud Darweish nor any Palestinian male leader (i.e., most of our national leadership) have given a thought to the fact that the seven or nine children are raised, maintained and reproduced by women alone. Neither Darweish nor any male leader seems to recognise that unless women are liberated from traditional Palestinian patriarchy, our national liberation will always be lame.

It is important to observe here that these nationalist calls are also class laden. When a national call for reproducing a large number of children is made, it assumes a priori a particular audience; these are the peasants, working class and Palestinian poor. Most urban-intellectual middle-and upper-class Palestinians, whether in occupied Palestine or abroad, have long adopted the 'modern' nuclear small-size family. In this context, I believe, nationalism can be doubly oppressive; oppressive on both gender and on class bases.

The challenge

The liberation movement is, as I have suggested, capable of creating a space for women. But how have women begun to affirm their gender identity and push it to the forefront of the national struggle? How have women deconstructed 'oppressive' motherhood and begun to put in its place the image of the emancipated woman?

Ilham abu-Ghazaleh, mentioned earlier, is about to publish the first feminist critique of Ghassan Kanafani's work. Kanafani is considered one of the most famous revolutionary writers in the Arab world, whose work has reached almost every Palestinian home, and has been translated into many languages. Kanafani was assassinated by the Israeli Mossad near his office in Beirut in the late 1970s. The idea of a feminist critique of his work may not have been possible outside the *intifada*. During my stay in occupied Palestine, abu-Ghazaleh was invited by the Palestinian Women's Committee to give a talk on her critique of Kanafani's work. The following are some of the reactions of women who attended the lecture: 'We never read Kanafani this way before', one woman said. 'We never knew that our literature and best written culture has excluded us. And when it

included us it turned us into inferiors', said a second. 'This talk made me determine to go and read all Kanafani's work, but this time from a different perspective', said a third. Like many other women, abu-Ghazaleh is deconstructing the national culture which has ignored, suppressed or subordinated women.

Or, take the newly established Women's Resource and Research Centre in Jerusalem, where Suha Hindiyeh, along with other women, is involved in various research projects on women's issues. Most important is the idea, yet to materialise, of re-writing or reforming the Family Laws. According to Hindiyeh, the project is expected to change legal clauses and add new ones which would guarantee women's right to property, to divorce and to marry, themselves, without a male guardian. If, and when, this project is accomplished and accepted by the higher echelons of the Palestinian leadership, the 'new family laws' could, potentially, revolutionise the status of Palestinian women and probably, of women in other Arab countries. Finally, the women's section of Bisan Research and Development Centre is preparing the first public forum on the *hijab* (veil). According to Eileen Kuttab, a sociologist at Bir Zeit university, this forum aims to deconstruct the oppressive image of Palestinian women which has recently been appropriated by some Muslim fundamentalists.

In the midst of the national struggle, one may argue that it is easier to wage a direct confrontation with patriarchal domination at the level of agency, in quasi-organisational fashion, than through a full-fledged organised movement. The above mentioned forms of resistance are the work of committed activists, who are nonetheless largely middle-class intellectuals. However, the most popular form of resistance is the organised one. Palestinian women's struggle in the *intifada* is organised largely through three major women's '*utors*' (committees). All three were set up initially as 'wings' of the three major Marxist (Leninist) parties within the PLO. Although established in the late 1970s, during the *intifada*, the *utors* have acquired massive support and a widespread membership in villages, refugee camps and cities.

The contribution of the *utors* is extensive, ranging from the day-care centres they have established in many villages and refugee camps, to illiteracy and health awareness campaigns, and the organisation and leading of demonstrations, vigils, sit-ins and direct confrontation with Israeli soldiers, etc. In their drive to create economic opportunities for women, the *utors* have launched a relatively successful campaign to open small workshops and cooperatives for women. During my stay in Palestine I visited the *al-Isawiyah* ('copper carving') women's project, which was established with a view to creating non-traditional jobs for women. Some of the women's cooperatives which were established with the aim of creating a self-sufficient

national economy have been successful in curbing the dependence of Palestinians on Israeli products and the Israeli labour market.

I have elsewhere provided a critical analysis of the mechanisms used by some of the *utors* in their drive to incorporate women in the production (labour) process.[13] There, I argued that women's co-operatives which were established within the context of the home economy may be liberatory on the surface only. By keeping women at home to produce the jam, pickles and other food products, the *utors* are unconsciously over-exploiting women. But here I will focus on one aspect of the *utors*' work in particular, their prioritisation of the national over the gender issue.

Whilst fully recognising that the mass base currently enjoyed by the *utors* is their source of strength, one must also realise that this base can also be a source of strain. One example of such strain is the way in which *utors* perpetuate and even reproduce patriarchal domination with matriarchal domination when they use *um al-Shaheed* to propagate the struggle. Thus, in May 1990, a key-note speaker at the Fifth Annual Convention of Palestinian Women in North America was an *um al-Shaheed*. This woman had nothing to say about the struggle of women in the *intifada*. Instead, she devoted her whole talk to the circumstances of the martyrdom of her son. Painful and emotional as his and the killing of hundreds of Palestinian men and children may be, it is time to talk about women's sufferings as well. Women in the leadership of the *utors* realise that the *intifada* has witnessed many women martyrs, women in prison, women tortured, and all kinds of sacrifices by women. This reality – which is not new for Palestinian women – provides sufficient material for women to re-create an inclusive Palestinian culture. In fact, some *utors* have capitalised on this fact.

In the same Convention a new Palestinian female image was also presented when another key-note speaker introduced herself as '*Um al-Asirah*'. *Um al-Asirah* or the mother of a political female prisoner is a liberating image. Taking pride in a daughter in prison presumes a willingness on the part of women to confront some age-old repressive traditions embodied in the concept of 'women's honour'. *Um al-Asirah* presents the image of a woman who confronts male prison authority by declaring: 'I know that my daughter might be sexually harassed or even raped, but your threats will not deter her or other women from political activism.' *Um al-Asirah* has another message and equally strong: she is reintroducing to the Palestinian male community issues that have been socially taboo: sex and rape. During the *intifada*, political rape was discussed in a number of villages. Women raped or sexually assaulted by Israeli soldiers and police are not considered outcast at all. Although this discussion has not been extended to social rapes, it may be the beginning.

Creating a space for women in Palestinian culture must not be considered a secondary struggle. Culture is produced every day in the *intifada*; it is produced by women, men and children and appropriated through various channels – movies, videos, songs, poems, short stories and so on. Women organisers need to play a more active role in ensuring the inclusion of women in these cultural artifacts now and not after liberation. In Zahirah Kamal's words: 'We can't wait for the state. It is time.'

Women's assertion of equal rights in the organisation and the leadership of the *intifada*, however, remains of the utmost importance in women's struggle for emancipation. This is more true now than at the beginning of the *intifada*. After two and a half years of the struggle, women activists are beginning to question the nature of the national leadership itself, particularly in terms of its delivery – or lack of delivery – on women's issues. Two years have passed since the declaration of the independent state. The state hasn't come yet. In the campaign for economic self-sufficiency, the boycott of Israeli products and the Israeli labour market is not being matched by the development of sufficient national resources. The Israeli military crackdown on Palestinian popular committees, such as education and health committees, and on other forms of popular organisations, has been eroding some of the bases in the infrastructure that women were involved in building up earlier in the *intifada*. During the second year of the *intifada*, it became apparent, as Darweish noted, that many traditional cultural practices, particularly repressive ones, began to disappear. He mentions the decline in the lavishness of and expenditure on marriages, the elimination of '*Maher*' (bride price) and the replacement of arranged marriages with marriages of individual choice.[14] Some gains, it is true. But equally, a new set of problems is emerging. The continuing economic, political and social strangulation of Palestinians is also being met with the re-emergence of polygamy and early marriages among women.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a state of '*Ihbat*' (frustration-alienation) over the lack of a political solution is taking its toll on an increasing number of activists. This is specially so in the poverty-stricken Gaza Strip, where the Muslim fundamentalist movement is trying to exploit the situation and assert itself as a political movement on the ground.

A major challenge currently confronting the women's *utors* relates to the degree or extent of their independence from the larger national political parties with which they are affiliated. 'It is not necessary for women to follow the factional politics and agendas of men', Giacaman rightly observes.[15] Women's *utors* must assert a certain degree of independence particularly with regard to decisions affecting women, such as what projects to promote, what issues to tackle and what

others to avoid. The lack of such independence, I believe, has been largely behind the slow and inefficient way in which the harassment of women by some Muslim fundamentalists has been treated.

It is widely acknowledged that the *intifada* is specially acute in the Gaza Strip. The Strip's specific social history, its demographic density, geographic location and the utter poverty in which most of its population live have accorded it a special role in the *intifada*. On the one hand, Gazan men and women activists demonstrate a strong sense of frustration towards the urban leadership centred in the cities of the West Bank. Yet, on the other hand, I found Gazan refugee activists to be more confrontational on social-gender issues than others. Gazan women are not only closer to the poverty and destitution of refugeeism, they also have to confront all the other social and religious reaction which has emerged in these situations. When the first debate on the *hijab* was held in Jerusalem, 1989, it was the Gazan women who adopted a militant stand against wearing it. During my stay in Gaza I was told that two women withdrew their membership from one of the *utors* to protest the 'light' manner in which it has dealt with the issue.

Under these harsh socio-economic and political conditions, Gazan women cannot afford to prioritise the national struggle over the social-gender and economic struggle. In fact, what I found to be most pressing for these women is the need for social-gender changes so that, as one woman suggested, 'we can continue the struggle freely'. Gazan women begin their criticism of men with their male comrades who they say 'are politically liberated and socially conservative'. The contradictions between feminism and nationalism, between the struggle for women's rights and the national struggle are central for these women. This contradiction is best expressed in the following words of one Gazan woman: 'The woman is expected to be a perfect mother for his children, an excellent traditional wife, expected to labour outside the house, to be active in a political organisation, expected to be a progressive woman . . . She is expected to be everything and nothing should come in her way.' Added to all this, Gazan women, in particular, are suffering increasingly from the campaign of 'veiling', forced upon them by the fundamentalist Hamas movement.

During my stay in Beit Hanoun (Gaza) some women were trying to organise a counter-campaign to the forced veiling. In August, 1990, a week before my arrival there, a Sheikh was heard calling – from the Mosque – for women to wear *hijabs* and *jilbabs*. Women in Beit Hanoun were becoming extremely impatient with the leadership of the *utors* which did not give this phenomenon the attention it deserved. In fact, the women appeared to blame the higher leadership, the Unified Leadership of the *intifada* and the PLO for this

indifference. One woman even suggested that Fateh has tried to solve the problem by asking women in its organisations to wear the *hijab* in order to avoid any 'unnecessary division in the national struggle'. During the arduous campaign of forced veiling, it was noticed that only once, in one of its leaflets did the Unified Leadership address the issue. And, as mentioned earlier, the *utors* in Ramalla only once attempted to discuss the issue, and then in 'a closed circle so as not to alienate the community'.

It is true, as Qasem, a Gazan activist has suggested, that the issue of *hijab* and Muslim fundamentalism has been overplayed by the Israeli and western media to divert attention from the major struggle against Israeli aggression. However, ignoring the conservative and socially reactionary role of fundamentalism towards women can be equally disruptive to the Palestinian struggle. It has become apparent that the women targeted for this onslaught of religious reaction are usually the activists in the *intifada*. These are the ones who are most often in the streets, organising, coordinating or doing their work. Harassing these women damages the *intifada* and the struggle as a whole. In Beit Hanoun, a day-care centre was not allowed to operate because the day-care worker did not want to put on the *hijab*.

The issue of *hijab*, as many women realise, does not stop at women covering their heads. In a discussion in Beit Hanoun, when one woman declared: 'If I had to put the veil in order to continue my struggle I will do it. . .', arguing that when she goes back to her village she would take it off again, another woman interrupted: 'No!'. 'The issue is not the *hijab*', she continued. 'Let's not forget Algiers . . . it starts with the *hijab*, then the *jilbab*, then pushes you home and locks you in the kitchen.' The energy and commitment with which Gazan women confront fundamentalism is reason for pride in them. But as the rank and file of the *intifada*, as its refugee and village masses, these women realise that their individual efforts are not sufficient. Women in Beit Hanoun were able to fight the *hijab* and succeed in not using it in their village because of their efforts as individuals and because they were assisted by family ties and interventions to solve the problem. But as these women correctly argue, what about other village and refugee camp women who don't have family influence and who can not stand individually against the men?

Coordinated efforts between the masses and the leadership of the women's *utors* are even more crucial now, after the attack on the popular organisations. Middle-class intellectuals in the leadership of the *utors* can play a significant role in opening up space for the village and refugee women. For, it is the latter who make up the bulk of the Palestinian working class and poor peasantry. And it is these villagers and refugees whose class realities are also subsumed by the national struggle. Coordination is equally necessary between the *utors* themselves. The need for such coordination becomes more pressing when women's *utors* place women's agendas on and alongside the national

agenda. And this will happen with an active realisation by our male national leadership – the Unified Leadership of the *intifada* and the PLO – that the Palestinian national struggle is the struggle of women and men and that the decisions which affect the life of this nation need to be made by women and men.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate the words of a Cuban feminist revolutionary:

> The revolution. . . my comrade
> is Us too.
> the revolution is who labours. . .who tills the land. . .who cooks. . .who writes human history for humanity.
> the revolution. . .my love. . .will happen when you realise all forms of oppression
> in the streets
> and at home. . .
> Only when that day comes
> you will be
> finally
> a true revolutionary human being.[16]

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KHALED AL-BATRAWI and MOUIN RABBANI

Break up of families: a case study in creeping transfer

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the enforced separation of families is a social problem greater in scope than unemployment or illiteracy in many other societies. While Israel orchestrated a massive campaign to foster Soviet Jewish emigration and unite the Jewish people in the former homes of Palestinian refugees, the systematic separation of Palestinian families passed without comment. Thousands of Palestinian families were torn apart by the expulsions of 1948, and additional thousands rent asunder by the forced exodus which accompanied the 1967 war. In subsequent years, Israel's deportation policy, applied with equal ferocity to political dissidents and unregistered residents, ensured that more Palestinian families were routinely separated without prior notice. Where those attempting to rejoin their loved ones were once shot on sight by border patrols, currently applications for family reunification on humanitarian grounds are systematically refused on the grounds that they are not 'extraordinarily humanitarian'.

Jackson Diehl's Washington Post *article in late 1989 was perhaps the first attempt in the US mainstream media to examine the subject with the attention it deserves; his predecessor, Glenn Frankel, won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the Occupied Territories without once seriously addressing the subject, despite the fact that hardly a family in the West Bank or Gaza Strip remains unaffected.*

Khaled al-Batrawi, his wife Reema and their 1-year old daughter Beisan certainly don't look like a separated family, and the mere

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reality of them entering the door together seemed to defeat the purpose of this interview. As the conversation progressed, however, it became clear that their situation was not only insufferable, but could have been, and may yet become far worse. I asked Khaled, a 30-year-old resident of al-Bira, located in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, to relate the problems of a family denied the right of cohabitation not because his was a particularly severe case; as described below, he is more fortunate than most. Rather, his intimate knowledge of the subject, command of detail and the more typical involvement of a spouse as opposed to a sibling, child, or parent shed light on the situation confronting many Palestinian families.

I was born in Jerusalem on 3 May 1960. My family is originally from Isdud, a city on the Mediterranean coast demolished by the Israelis after the 1948 war. After the war, my father settled first in the Gaza Strip, but had to leave because, as a political activist, he was persecuted by the Egyptian authorities. He then went to the West Bank, where he was persecuted by the Jordanian authorities. He left for Kuwait, but was expelled, along with many others, in 1959. Shortly before I was born, he managed to settle in al-Bira, in what was then the West Bank of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

In 1978, eleven years after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, I passed the *tawjihi* [matriculation] examination and graduated from secondary school. Thereafter, I went to the Soviet Union, where I studied civil engineering at the Kiev Institute of Civil Engineering until I obtained my master's degree in 1984.

In 1982, I met my wife-to-be, Reema, 'Abd-al-Ghani 'Abd-al-Hafiz al-Qawasmi, who was studying dentistry at the Kiev Medical Institute. Although she is Palestinian and her family is originally from Hebron, she was born in Damascus, Syria, on 16 June 1961 and then moved to Amman, Jordan. Thus, she was not in the West Bank at the time of the occupation in 1967 and, because she was not included in the Israeli census taken in September of that year, was not entitled to an identity card and legal resident status.

When I graduated in 1984, I returned to al-Bira and began working as a civil engineer. Reema did not graduate until 1987. In 1986, however, I registered my marriage with the local Islamic and civil courts as well as the population registration department of the civil administration of the military government so as to have it officially recognised by the Israeli authorities.* In addition, at the population

* All employees of the 'civil administration', which was created in 1981 to comply with the Camp David Accords, are military personnel in uniform. Its current presiding officer is a brigadier-general, Shaike Erez, also in uniform, and as an apparatus it remains formally subservient to the military government. Hence, the formulation 'civil administration of the military government'.

registry, I changed the 'marital status' section on my identity card from 'single' to 'married', and had Reema's name inserted on my identity card as my wife.

In the summer of 1985, Reema went to Amman for vacation. After she arrived there, I submitted an application for a visitor's permit to the civil administration in Ramallah so that we could spend the summer together.* According to the military regulations, one can apply for a visitor's permit which is valid for a period of thirty days and then apply for an extension of an additional thirty days a maximum of two times; or, alternatively, one can apply for a ninety-day visitor's permit which is only valid from 1 June to 1 September and not subject to extension – so that if, for example, a ninety-day permit is granted on 25 August, the visitor still has to leave on 1 September.

Because it was mid-June, I applied for a ninety-day permit. Ten days later, however, my application was rejected without explanation. When my application was rejected, my mother submitted one. Ten days later, her application too was rejected without explanation. I then asked Reema's sister, who is a legal resident of East Jerusalem, which is annexed to Israel and where different regulations are in force, to submit an application at the Ministry of the Interior. This application was approved at the beginning of July.

I was expecting my wife at any moment and eager to see her because one month of her permit had already expired. On 3 July 1985, however, I was arrested and taken to Ramallah prison for interrogation. Reema arrived on 10 July. It was her first visit to her homeland, the first time in her life that she had set foot in it, and she was immediately faced with the fact that I was in prison. We had not seen each other since I left the Soviet Union.

She was able to visit me in prison at the end of July, and I was finally released on 7 August 1985. I had been charged with various security offences, among them one that I had organised Palestinian students in the Soviet Union during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and sent them to Beirut to help resist the siege. In the military court, I was convicted on the basis of confessions given by two Palestinian detainees whom I had never seen or heard of before and was sentenced to one month in prison, a five-year suspended sentence and a fine of 2,000,000 old Israeli shekels [approximately $US1,500]. But because I had already spent more than one month in prison, I was released. I think the ultimate proof of my innocence is that I received such a light sentence, given the severity of the charges. If the Israelis really believed I was guilty, I would probably still be in prison. But I was found guilty nonetheless.

* The civil administration in Ramallah is responsible for Ramallah, al-Bira and the surrounding villages and refugee camps.

After I was released, I spent only ten days with my wife, who had to leave for Amman on 17 August 1985 in order to return to the Soviet Union and complete her studies. She graduated in July 1987, and on 9 December of that year the popular uprising in the Occupied Territories began.

I had not applied for a family reunification permit before Reema's graduation for several reasons. According to the military regulations, if I had applied and the application had been approved, my wife would have had to reside in the Occupied Territories for one full year without leaving – not eleven months and twenty-nine days, but one full year – otherwise the permit would be revoked. Had I applied and been successful, Reema would have had to suspend her studies and postpone her graduation, as there is no dental faculty in the West Bank, and the lack of a degree would have prevented her from finding employment in her field during this period. I was also concerned that the problems described above would, in any case, prejudice my application.

After the uprising began, it became nearly impossible to even submit an application for family reunification because of new measures applied by the Israeli authorities. To submit any application to the civil administration entailed a long and arduous process during which the applicant had to obtain clearance from the income tax department; the value-added tax department; the municipality; the financial department; the police; and the civil administration itself, which checked with the *mukhabarat* [intelligence services] before giving clearance.* The clearances one has to obtain are known as *bara'at dhimmi* and *husun suluk* [certificates of good conduct], and come in the form of stamps by the relevant department on the back of an application. I would like to emphasise that these had to be obtained not in order to get an application approved, but just in order to be permitted to submit it.

Various problems confronted those who needed to obtain such clearances. At the income tax department, for example, unemployed persons would be told things like: 'Your financial situation must be good or else you would be working', and charged 800 new Israeli shekels [approximately $US400]. Employed persons, on the other hand, were ordered to obtain certificates from their employers stating that the employer paid taxes on the applicant's behalf. There were difficulties at all the departments, not only because of the regulations themselves, but also because the personnel at various departments do not understand their own rules and regulations, or perhaps under-

* In a situation where almost any act of significance requires a permit from the civil administration, this has become standard procedure. In many cases, other clearances are required as well.

stand them only too well; they take decisions in a completely arbitrary manner, attempt to collect as much money as possible and consistently procrastinate and delay, telling people to return tomorrow, and then again the day after, and so on. Although I decided not to apply, in January of 1988 I began to collect the various clearances necessary for the submission of an application anyway. It took until December of that year for me to receive all the stamps required.

After I had obtained all the necessary clearances, I finally submitted an application for family reunification on 2 January 1989. I delivered the following documents to the Ramallah office of the civil administration: first, an application for family reunification, which included the required personal information about the applicant, all members of the applicant's nuclear family whether they reside in the Occupied Territories or abroad, the person for whom the application was being submitted, any persons accompanying the person for whom the application was being submitted, and all members of the nuclear family of the person for whom the application was submitted, again whether they reside in the Occupied Territories or not. Second, I submitted all the required clearances from the various departments. Third, I paid an application fee of NIS92 [$US46], although I should add that when one also considers the fees paid to obtain the clearances from the various departments, the total cost amounted to approximately NIS300 [$US150]. My application, which requested family reunification for my wife Reema without any accompanying individuals, as we were still childless, was accepted, and my application number is 19167.

On 2 March 1989, after the routine two-month waiting period for such applications, I went to the offices of the civil administration and was informed that my application for family reunification had been rejected. I was given no further explanation. I would like to point out here that on 1 March 1988 I had begun working as the fieldwork coordinator at the human rights organisation al-Haq in Ramallah, and that in the interim I had acquired the necessary legal knowledge and arguments which could be used for such issues in discussions with the Israeli authorities. Thus, when my application was rejected orally, I immediately asked for written notification of the refusal, but this, too, was rejected without explanation. When I then asked for a clarification of the refusal of my application, the person in charge, a woman officer by the name of Aharona, told me only that there were reasons for the rejection but that she was not entitled to give them to me. Aharona then advised me to apply instead for a work permit for my wife and gave me the relevant information for the application procedure. I was told that I needed the following documents: an application form and a fee of NIS192 [$US96]; the required clearance stamps; and a letter from a local charitable society which operated a

dental clinic, stating that it would hire my wife and requesting a work permit for her. Again, I would like to emphasise that these procedures were required only so that my application could be submitted.

Shortly thereafter, there were advertisements in the local Palestinian press, particularly *al-Quds* newspaper, stating that the Arab Women's Charitable Society in al-Bira sought to employ a dentist. My wife applied and was chosen because she was a registered dentist in the Union of Jordanian Dentists in Amman, while other applicants were not.* Thus, on 14 March 1989, I personally delivered an application for a work permit, complete with the requisite documents, to Aharona. I have never received a response.

At the same time, I continued to pursue the matter of the family reunification permit. When it was originally rejected on 2 March 1989, I immediately wrote to the office of the legal adviser to the civil administration of the military government, informed him of my case, and asked him to intervene in order to clarify the reasons for the refusal. In April 1989, I received a letter from the legal adviser confirming his receipt of my letter and informing me that a reply to my question would be forthcoming. On 22 May 1989, I received another letter informing me that my application for family reunification had been rejected because it was not among those 'extraordinary cases' which could be approved. I immediately wrote him back asking for a definition of 'extraordinary', to which I received a response referring me to the decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice in Case 263/85 of 1985 and subsequent rulings.

I first checked several subsequent cases, which all referred to Case 106/86 of 1986 without further elaboration, and then reviewed the latter case. In Case 106/86, the following statement was submitted by the respondent (the civil administration of the Gaza Strip) and quoted approvingly by the High Court, which upheld the official policy it describes:

> For the past two years in the region of the Gaza District (and also in the region of Judea and Samaria) the policy is that the authorities grant requests for family reunification only in rare and very exceptional cases, where the humanitarian nature of the requests are particularly evident, or when it is in the interest of the authorities (security, political, economic, weighty and similar

* In most cases, West Bank professionals are still certified by Jordanian professional associations headquartered in Amman, while West Bank professional societies continue to operate as branches of their parent Jordanian organisations. Jordan ruled the West Bank from 1948 to 1967 and annexed the territory formally in 1952. Until its formal disengagement and renunciation of sovereign ambitions of 31 July 1988, and in many ways even until today, it continues to exercise a strong influence on West Bank affairs.

interests) to grant the request.*

By this time, I had found that all efforts to obtain a legal permit and all efforts to conform to the requisite procedures had failed and were blocked.

Here I should mention that my wife Reema had visited the West Bank in the summer of 1988 in accordance with a ninety-day visitor's permit issued by the Israeli authorities and left before the permit expired on 1 September 1988. Once again, my application and that of my mother had been refused without explanation and it was obtained by her sister in East Jerusalem. Then, on 17 February 1989, Reema arrived in the West Bank in accordance with a thirty-day visitor's permit, which again could only be obtained by her sister. Before the permit expired on 17 March, however, my sister-in-law applied for an extension of Reema's visitor's permit, as well as a visitor's permit for my mother-in-law, on the grounds that my sister-in-law was pregnant, was experiencing severe health problems and required the assistance of both Reema and her mother. Included with the application was a full medical report on my sister-in-law's condition. The application was approved, permitting Reema to remain in the Occupied Territories until 17 April 1989. Before that date, my sister-in-law again applied for an extension of Reema's visitor's pass, this time on the grounds that Reema was herself seven months pregnant and, according to the medical report which was included with the application, risked early childbirth.

The husband of my sister-in-law went to the Ministry of the Interior in East Jerusalem on an almost daily basis to find out the status of Reema's application because both my wife and her sister were too ill as a result of their pregnancies to go themselves. Each day, he was told that the application had not yet been processed and that he should return the following day. Finally, on 20 June 1989, he was informed that the visitor's permit had been extended only until 17 May. This meant that Reema was already in the Occupied Territories illegally. Therefore, my sister-in-law's husband asked that the permit be extended only until the next day, 21 June, to allow her to leave legally,

* It has become a hallmark of Israeli legal commentary on the Occupied Palestinian Territories explicitly to endorse the humanitarian interest in vague formulations as a substitute for the adoption of humanitarian laws; subsequently to fail to define the humanitarian interest in a meaningful way; and then to reject claims which could only be described as humanitarian on the grounds that they fall outside the scope of the Israeli definition. In the case of the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, for example, the Israeli authorities have refused to apply it to the West Bank and Gaza Strip: instead, they have publicly stated that they will respect its 'humanitarian provisions', which they have never defined. In the meantime, all categories of acts defined as 'grave breaches' in Article 147 of the Convention are systematically pursued.

but his was immediately refused without explanation. If Reema had left at that point, she would have been registered as someone who had illegally overstayed their visitor's permit and thus been deprived of the right to enter the West Bank ever again.

Because we were faced with the certain prospect of permanent banishment, and also because of the health-risk involved in the difficult travel conditions between Jerusalem and Amman, we were forced to remain here illegally. I would like to emphasise that the only alternative would have been that Reema could never come back, and I can state without reservation that under these circumstances we were forced, rather than chose, to break the applicable law. Since 1982, when Reema and I first met, it was her first illegal sojourn in the Occupied Territories.

As it turned out, Reema did not give birth before term and on 15 July 1989 our first child, a daughter, was born. We named her Beisan.* I would like to mention here that we were very concerned about having a child and not losing it. Previously, in 1986, Reema was pregnant but was forced to abort because she lived in Kiev at the time of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.

After the birth of our daughter, I went to the population registration department of the civil administration. Beisan was registered on my identity card, but did not receive an identification number of her own, which meant that, despite her having been born in the West Bank and despite her age, she was also an illegal resident of the Occupied Territories. So, in addition to Reema, Beisan is also in need of a family reunification permit.

According to Military Order 1208 of 1987, only children whose mother is a legally-registered resident of the West Bank are entitled to their own identification number and thus legal resident status.** Previously, the military regulations in force held that only children of legally-resident fathers could be registered.

I can state that, both as an individual and a human-rights worker with al-Haq, the best attempts have been made to raise the issue of family reunification in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Al-Haq has intervened repeatedly with the Israeli authorities, as well as the international and human rights community, in order to reunify Palestinian families which have been separated by Israeli policy. Currently, al-Haq is mounting an international campaign to draw attention to the issue. According to Israeli statistics reported in the

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* Beisan is the name of a town in north-western Palestine which was occupied by Zionist forces in 1948 and annexed to Israel. Khaled, who is also a literary critic and story-writer, often wrote under the name of 'Beisan'.

** Similar military orders apply in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli media, which are based on a report submitted by former Minister of Defence Yitzhak Rabin to the Knesset cited in *al-Quds* Arabic daily of 1 February 1990, 88,429 applications for family reunification have been submitted to the Israeli authorities since 1967. According to these same sources, only 13,509 have been approved. This means that family reunification is at the heart of the problems residents confront as a result of the occupation. In actual fact, though, I should add that we believe that the problem is far worse than described by Rabin. Not only do we believe that more applications have been submitted, and less approved, than was stated, but one should also consider that many persons probably have not submitted applications because the rejection of applications by relatives, neighbours and friends has made them despondent. Furthermore, the statistics cited by Rabin assume that applications were only submitted for 88,000 persons, whereas in actual fact many, if not most, applications were submitted for more than one person, such as, let's say, one application for a spouse and five children accompanying that person instead of six separate applications.

There are few avenues I have not tried. In March 1990, for example, former US president Jimmy Carter came to the Occupied Territories and, in the course of his trip, met the staff of al-Haq, which had been a recipient of the 1989 Carter-Menil Human Rights Prize. During the meeting, the issue of family reunification was raised and president Carter asked for one case to adopt. I gave him mine.

On 2 April 1990, I received a summons to appear at the offices of the civil administration the next day at 10.00am and meet a 'Captain Rakad'. When I arrived at the appointed time, I was taken to meet 'Captain Amal', who is the presiding officer of the civil administration in Ramallah. He informed me that he had approved my application personally, but that he still needed the approval of 'higher authorities' before he could issue me a permit. He told me that I would be informed of the final outcome at a later date. When I asked him when this might be, he assured me that it would be within ten days. I responded that in fifteen days, on 17 April, I was due to leave for the Netherlands to attend a seminar on human rights and development at the Institute for Social Studies in The Hague, that I would not return until 10 June, and would, therefore, appreciate hearing from him before I left. Captain Amal assured me that I would receive a response within ten days, but when I left I had not heard from him.

The Monday after I returned from the Netherlands, I again went to the offices of the civil administration (family reunification cases are only dealt with on Mondays by the Israeli authorities). I was informed that there had been no progress on my application and was told to come back after the Muslim feast, Eid al-Adha. When I again went to the civil administration on 16 July, I was told that there had still been

no progress and was ordered not to return again and to wait for a telephone call. I then asked if it would be possible personally to contact the 'higher authorities' who appeared responsible for the delay, but Captain Rakad refused to divulge any details as to who and where they were and how they might be contacted.

Perhaps here I should point out that I am a person who knows and understands the issues and procedures involved from a legal point of view and knows how to act when confronted with a problem by the Israeli authorities. It is precisely this which makes me wonder how people who don't understand the intricacies of the civil administration cope with it. It is, for example, a known fact that, as a general policy, most applications are refused the first time they are submitted, and that for this reason alone many applicants lose hope and simply give up. I am still trying my best to reunite my family. My wife is staying here illegally and constantly risks expulsion at a moment's notice without the opportunity ever to return. In addition, she is suffering psychologically from the refusal of a work permit, which amounts to enforced inactivity. She feels that her entire education, in the absence of a practice, is being wasted, and it is a very frustrating situation. I also fear for the future of my baby girl, who cannot be registered as a legal resident. This means not only that she can be deported along with her mother, but also that she cannot be treated at a public hospital, cannot attend a public school when she reaches school-age, and is otherwise ineligible for any of the services controlled by the civil administration.

I know of not one case in which an application for family reunification has been approved in the first instance. Typically, applicants are informed that they can re-apply in six months, one year or on another date arbitrarily pulled from a hat by the civil administration official in question. Furthermore, the military regulations state that at the moment of application the person on whose behalf the application is submitted must be outside the country and may not leave for a period of one year in the event of approval.

In the event of rejection, one is faced with four options. The first is to re-apply, which costs even more money and is even more futile; the second is to appeal to the High Court of Justice, which is ill-advised because the court rarely approves a petition to this effect and its ruling consititutes the final say on the matter; the third, available only if relatives are already in the Occupied Territories, is to live as an illegal family and risk expulsion; and the fourth, which is the hardest, and not always an option in any case because of other bureacratic obstacles, is self-expulsion: to leave. And all this while family union is defined as a fundamental human right in the applicable instruments and enshrined in the international law of belligerent occupation as well.

Ramallah, August 1990

SIMON COTTLE

Reporting the Rushdie affair: a case study in the orchestration of public opinion

> 'A year after the organised demonstrations and death threats the affair rambles on, its origins increasingly mythologised, the protagonists stereotyped, the victim reduced to a cipher, not a man of real flesh and blood in perpetual hiding. We have a responsibility to disrupt this process, from wherever we stand in the shifting sands of ethnic identity, because *The Satanic Verses* row does not have, and must not be identified as having, only two sides.'
>
> Yasmin Ali, 'Many Muslim truths'[1]

The political fall-out from the so-called 'Rushdie affair' continues to reverberate across numerous sites of social debate, contest and struggle, whether at the level of local community relations, national party politics or international inter-state relations and disrupted channels of diplomacy. In Britain, a key concern, frequently refracted through the media portrayal of the Rushdie affair, has been the terrain of 'community relations' and those competing positions seeking to align public understanding and opinion along assimilationist, integrationist, multi-culturalist, anti-racist or separatist lines and projects. While some of the immediate human costs following in the wake of this affair have included the deaths and injuries incurred in serious rioting in Islamabad, Kashmir and Bombay, the murder of two imams in Brussels, increased incidents of racist violence and abuse both in Britain and abroad, as well as Salman Rushdie's own enforced hiding following Ayatollah Khomeini's *fatwa*,[2] the longer term repercussions

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have yet to be assessed. These are likely to include the impact upon those complex social and political processes in which communities and cultures seek to define, develop and defend basic identities and conditions of existence. What is clear is that the Rushdie affair has unleashed a torrent of opinion which, in its very profusion, has contributed to unsettling both liberal complacencies and radical orthodoxies alike. And yet, it is this very diversity of opinions, both within and without the Muslim community, that has failed to find public expression within Britain's mainstream news media.

Surprisingly little examination of this continuing media event has been forthcoming, though a notable exception has observed how the British press unintentionally 'united the Muslim community, created a new orthodoxy, and made every Muslim who wished no harm to Rushdie feel "inauthentic" and not a "true Muslim"'.[3] Other authors have also identified the press as partly responsible for furthering those homogenising processes impacting upon minority communities, while observing the particularly destructive effects upon those struggles currently engaged in by women within such communities:

> The racialisation of religion, especially Islam, has reached a new peak after the Rushdie affair. Communities which were previously known by national or regional origin – Pakistani, Mirpuri, Bengali, Punjabi – are now all seen as part of the Muslim community . . . Minority communities have therefore come to be seen not only as primarily defined by religion, but also as being internally unified, homogeneous entities with no class or gender differences and conflicts.[4]

Such criticisms have singled out the press from other media as especially instrumental within such processes, presumably because 'the press', whether broadsheet or tabloid, can respectively and readily be identified as furthering particular opinions and perspectives both through editorial columns and characteristic styles of reporting.[5] Television news, perhaps in part because of its added 'authenticating' dimension of visuals and heightened news credibility sustained by the occupation of a seeming 'middle-ground' or 'consensus' position of news reporting, appears exempt from such inquiry and analysis. Such exemption may be premature, especially when one considers the arresting quality, not to mention ideological potency, of some of those key images that have repeatedly condensed 'the Rushdie affair' into a series of narrowly defined, if culturally resonate, stereotypes and oppositions. Moreover, if television news does indeed occupy and speak from a 'middle-ground' position, it is at those very moments when reporting on issues involving alternative, oppositional or marginalised voices and perspectives that the characteristic boundaries and limitations of such a dominant mode of reporting become apparent.

Observing the construction of the lead news story produced and broadcast by one of the major five independent television companies in Britain gives insights which are of immediate relevance to television's news reporting of the Rushdie affair and which may well begin to throw light upon television news reporting in general. Paradoxically, it is those very journalistic practices which appear to 'balance' a news item by accessing 'independent' public opinions and outside voices that enable a news story to be constructed according to a journalistic preconception of 'the story' and its requirements. Far from 'representing' public opinion, such orchestrated 're-presentations' of opinion are the means by which journalists manufacture 'the story' in line with professional demands for news 'balance' as well as with unquestioned assumptions concerning the nature of public opinion. Such reporting fails to represent the diversity and complexities informing public opinion which encompasses both Muslim and non-Muslim voices. By such means, the 'many Muslim truths', encompassing a diversified population in excess of 939,500 people,[6] have been rendered into an undifferentiated and seemingly united mass opposing an equally undifferentiated, exclusionary and simplistically positioned 'public opinion'.

Observations from the field

The news story examined, though pursued originally by journalists as a likely ordinary news report, in fact developed throughout the day to become the programme's lead story by the evening broadcast. Initially informed by phone, the forward planning team alerted the newsdesk about a major rally in Small Heath park by members of Birmingham's Muslim population, to be followed by a march, against the continuing publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Though previous demonstrations had taken place, a reporter was assigned to this one, since it appeared likely to involve considerable numbers of Birmingham's Muslim population in a weekday protest. The exact form this story might assume, however, was as yet unknown. The reporter attended the rally with a brief containing technical and logistical details only. Having directed the camera crew over the shots sought at this mid-morning rally, the reporter later met up with the crew at the march destination, the public square outside Birmingham Council House and Central Public Library. Here a further demonstration was held and a petition delivered to a council meeting. An interview with the march organiser in the park was followed by one with a Muslim councillor outside the council house and this report was then dovetailed with a piece from a second reporter, involving an interview with the city's librarian and a number of impromptu vox pops. The following is the full transcript of the actual words broadcast in this

leading news item, including the introductory 'tease' statement.

Programme transcript: 'Rushdie'

Tease: Council set to ban *Satanic Verses* after thousands march in protest.

News presenter: Good evening, Central News this Tuesday. Salman Rushdie's controversial book *The Satanic Verses* looks set to be banned from schools and public libraries in Birmingham. The council's ruling Labour group has voted to consider the ban after thousands of Muslims marched through the city to hand in a petition. The National Union of Teachers has deplored the move, calling it a form of censorship.

Reporter: The vote is the first step on the way to a ban on Rushdie's book. It followed a march through the city by thousands of Muslims. Scuffles broke out between pro- and anti-Khomeini groups but march marshals quickly dispersed the rival gangs before the police were needed. Organisers said they wanted the book banned and were against the death sentence issued by the Ayatollah.

Interviewee [march organiser]: I cannot agree at all. That may be an excuse for the British government to come out and not accept their responsibility. What we are asking for is the British government is, first it owes allegiance to the British citizens. We are all Muslims living in this country for the last twenty years and we have a right over the government to ask them to protect our rights.

Reporter: The Rushdie affair had disappeared from the headlines recently but an action committee has been formed to keep pressure on politicians.

Interviewee: In our minds the book has to be banned. The book must be stopped from circulation.

Reporter: In order to do that a change in the law would be required; a change in the defamation laws. Do you think that is a realistic objective?

Interviewee: That is the only realistic objective. We are asking the government to change the law to include Islam as one of the religions to be protected from such vilifying attempts which are made against any religion.

Reporter: The march gathered more support as it was shepherded through Small Heath and Balsall Heath. Eventually, an estimated 4,000 converged on the council house, police flanking the demonstrators throughout. Inside the city council meeting a petition was handed in and a motion carried to consider banning the book from schools and public libraries. Muslim councillors deny the ban would

be an infringement of civil liberties.

Interviewee [councillor]: The community at large need to understand, I think, that, under the banner of the freedom of the press, the freedom does not give anybody licence to abuse or insult any religion. The situation here is that the author as well as the printer have misused the freedom of the press. And what we are asking is that this book should be withdrawn. That is the only solution if we want race relations and we want to live peacefully and in harmony.

Reporter: The city council encourages links between all ethnic groups. Some Labour councillors say the decision to consider a ban is simply meeting the demands of the city's 70,000 Muslims.

Reporter 2: Birmingham central library has thirty-six copies of *The Satanic Verses*, between fifty and eighty people are waiting to borrow the book although it is not on public display. The senior librarian says popularity of the book has come with publicity. But he believes in people's right to choose what they read.

Librarian: I personally have an opinion that freedom of expression is important for everyone. I don't know what the circumstances, as I say, at this time I don't even know what the city council decision is.

Reporter 2: Today it seemed anybody prepared to comment strongly opposed a ban in libraries or schools.

Vox pop 1: Well, I think the consequences will be with the Muslims in this country being totally alienated in our society and years of work of integrating Muslims into our society will be destroyed.

Vox pop 2: I think people should be able to read what they want. Given a choice of opinion about what they want to read, I don't think it should be banned at all.

Vox pop 3: If people want to read it, they should be allowed to. I don't think there is any harm in it. It's allowed to be published so I don't think people shouldn't be allowed to read the book.

Vox pop 4: Unless we can express our mind it's the end of democracy.

Reporter 2: Have you read the book?

Vox pop 4: Parts of it, I've been told the relevant parts.

Reporter 2: And what do you think about it?

Vox pop 4: It doesn't seem that important to me that anyone reads it.

Reporter 2: Meanwhile copies of Salman Rushdie's book are in short supply at city centre shops. Hudson's had sold out and W.H. Smith had only a couple of copies under the counter. A spokesman said, sale of the book had provoked some threats which are being investigated by West Midlands police.

The first general observation that can be made about this news story is, contrary to the impression promoted by the news item, the basis for asserting 'Council set to ban *Satanic Verses*' was of the slightest. Already aware of the public interest around the 'Rushdie affair', the reporter assigned to the march believed he had something of a scoop – that is, a story which would both regionalise and augment the undoubted interest over the Rushdie affair with a development which would prove both controversial and conflict-laden.

A reporter having attended the morning rally, an ordinary news report was filed and duly broadcast in the lunchtime bulletin. The essence of it was revealed in the news presenter's opening statement that 'Thousands of Muslims are in Birmingham for a rally over the Salman Rushdie book *The Satanic Verses*. Minor scuffles broke out between pro- and anti-Khomeini supporters but were brought under control by rally organisers.' This 'trouble' frame in which the story was set, though a particular construction of the event, was later superseded by the notion that Birmingham City Council appeared set to ban the book from public libraries and schools. At this point, both the reporter's and the newsdesk's interest increased considerably, and the story was promoted to a contender for the programme's lead news item of the day.

But the fact of the matter was that a petition had simply been delivered to a council meeting and a decision taken to refer the matter to the leisure services committee. At no point had the council appeared 'set to ban' *The Satanic Verses*, much less 'decided to ban' the book, as the second reporter informed her numerous interviewees before eliciting their reactions. The lead story, in other words, was the result of a collective journalistic pursuit of the latest Rushdie development and news scoop which failed to attend to the actual details of the developments.

As the chief librarian's office later confirmed, the decision to refer the matter to the leisure services committee for discussion could not conceivably be interpreted, contrary to the opening 'tease' statement, as 'Council set to ban *Satanic Verses* '. This, however, was exactly the 'story' as presented by the news account. If the general propositional thrust of 'the story' can, therefore, be challenged so, too, can the journalistic tendency to emphasise conflict and 'trouble', which becomes clear when the production process is observed close up. This involves both the collection and the subsequent editing of visual footage and verbal statements, as well as the imposition of a journalistic commentary or voice-over.

In the main, the visual component of this item involved two aspects. First, the close-up shots (head/shoulders) of interviewees when interviewed by one of the two assigned reporters and, second, selected shots of the assembled crowds at both the initial rally and the

march destination point. As to the former, no general observations are especially revealing other than their highly reduced visual involvement given the selected verbal 'bites' (snippets of interviews) included in the final news presentation. However, concerning the scenes of the rally and demonstration itself (witnessed both in person and through reviewing all the ENG rushes* shot by the camera crews), an obvious contrast emerges between the generality of such scenes and the scenes finally selected and broadcast. While the rally was generally peaceful and characterised by groups of Muslim men and male youths occasionally breaking into chants and shouts; march organisers and speakers addressing the crowd; reporters mingling with the crowd and each other, and small groups of police officers standing or on horseback at a distance, the scenes noticeably dominating this aspect of the news item are close-ups of an evident dispute between two demonstrators surrounded by onlookers and juxtaposed with shots of the police.

The close-up on the faces and shoulders of the disputants conveys the impression that the wider crowd was itself similarly locked in dispute, despite the fact that this was an isolated, and highly insignificant, incident at the fringe of the loosely assembled demonstrators. It is all the more interesting, therefore, that this visual image should dominate the opening scenes. And, when this scene is compared with another – the isolated burning of a flag by a demonstrator at the march destination point – it is apparent that such shots have been selected according to their perceived contribution to the 'news story' as conceptualised by the reporter. Only one flag was seen to have been burnt on that day, as was only one disagreement witnessed within the crowd. Both incidents, however, dominate the imagery and are juxtaposed alongside the sights and sounds of chanting youths holding aloft Khomeini posters, and police marshalling the crowds on their way to the council house.

Arriving at the rally separately from the ENG crew and witnessing the internal disagreement within the crowd, the reporter asked, 'Where's the crew, we need some pictures of this.' When the crew was asked later what scenes they were after, they candidly stated, 'We're after shots of the march, the banners, any trouble that there might be.' Relying on the 'news sense' of the film crew, in terms of both visuals and sound recording of Islamic chants and choruses of shouts, the pursuit of conflict finds a visual and vocal reference, notwithstanding its marginal nature during the events of the day. But this is enough to enable the reporter to 'frame' his initial report in terms of 'a scuffle' which supposedly broke out between 'rival gangs'. The fact that a

* Electronic News Gathering (ENG) video material.

march steward was involved in the 'scuffle' did not deter the reporter from describing 'rival groups', later changed to 'rival gangs', because, as he suggested in the editing room later that afternoon, 'it sounds better'.

Remaining for the moment with the visual dimension, it is also interesting to note that a conscious editing decision was taken which increased visually the sense of urgency and possible threat conveyed in the images selected. A selected front-view shot showing the first arrivals, in small groups, of demonstrators ambling into the city square was abandoned and replaced by a side shot of groups entering the square, thereby introducing a considerable sense of movement and pace. When combined with the voice-over commentary of 'an estimated 4,000 converged on the council house, police flanking the demonstrators throughout', the impression given is that the march constituted a massive presence purposefully taking up position outside the council house. While the march may have, according to police estimates, approximated 4,000 at its height, on arrival the assembled number could not reasonably be said to be more than a few hundred, and these included lunchtime shoppers and curious passers-by.

The constant pursuit of conflict and 'trouble', which arguably informed the initial interest in the Rushdie demonstration and was followed through in the selective construction of the morning's events between so-called pro- and anti-Khomeini supporters, is later superseded by the considerably expanded conflict supposedly ready to be unleashed between the Muslim community, who we are told seek to ban the book, and the wider 'public', who would resent any such imposition. The head librarian of Birmingham Central Library is introduced as believing in 'people's right to choose', while we are told that 'anybody prepared to comment, strongly opposed a ban in libraries and schools'. These comments, including the initial response sought from the National Union of Teachers which 'deplored the move' by the city council, are all marshalled effectively into an aggregate 'public' which is assumed to be opposed to the ban, while 'balancing' the item's earlier focus upon the demonstration and its declared aims as represented by the two spokesmen interviewed.

If the interview statements elicited by news reporters are scrutinised more closely and contrasted to the edited 'bites' reassembled into the final news package, it is apparent that much of the informing bases and differential nature of such opinions have been purposely edited away, to leave a simplistic and unrepresentative opposition between 'the Muslim community', on the one hand, and 'public opinion', on the other. This is not to suggest, of course, that a genuine and widely held antipathy to the proposed banning of *The Satanic Verses* does not characterise much public opinion. What is suggested, and can be established (see below), is that such 'public' expressions

are invoked artificially and re-presented in terms which, by and large, are undifferentiated, simplistically positioned and presented and packaged according to the journalists' own conceptualisation of the story and its requirements.

Observations from the cutting-room floor

To establish that 'public opinion' has, indeed, been selectively 're-presented', the edited interview bites woven into the final story package can now be considered individually. In addition to illustrating something of the selection choices informing the editing process, the transcripts also indicate lines of journalistic inquiry and interest, sometimes dropped or abandoned, which nonetheless furnish further insight into the journalists' craft and practice of story construction. The full transcript of each interview conducted is given below. The words in bold indicate the actual words edited into the final item, the rest being consigned to the cutting-room floor.

Interview: march organiser

March organiser: I am member of the Muslim Action Committee of Birmingham.

Reporter: OK. Why on this Tuesday morning are we faced with another demonstration regarding Salman Rushdie?

Organiser: So far in Birmingham all the demonstrations have taken place on a weekend and we just wanted to show to the people that on a working day all the Muslims will shut down their shops, they will take their days off from their work, they'll close their offices and they'll still come to the park and participate in the march.

Reporter: What good will this march do for the community?

Organiser: This march is the first of its kind because all the Muslims of Birmingham have joined into the Muslim Action Committee, an umbrella organisation representing all the Muslim organisations of Birmingham. This I hope will make it clear to the British government that we are determined to fight until the end.

Reporter: You say you're going to fight until the end, what end do you have in mind at the moment?

Organiser: Well, the end **in our minds the book has to be banned. The book must be stopped from circulation.**

Reporter: **In order to do that a change in the law would be required; a change in the defamation laws. Do you think that is a realistic objective?**

Organiser: **That is the only realistic objective. We are asking the government to change the law to include Islam as one of the religions to be protected from such vilifying attempts which are made against any religion.**

Reporter: You have been arguing your case for many weeks, even months. Do you think you're getting anywhere?

Organiser: Well we've achieved at least one objective so far, that is Muslims after every day that's passing are more determined to come out and express their disgust at the publication of the book and demand from the British government and ask for more support from our Members of Parliament and our representatives.

Reporter: It could be said that you've lost the broad sympathy of the British people because of the death threat which still lies over Mr Rushdie. Do you agree with that death threat?

Organiser: **I cannot agree at all. That may be an excuse for the British government to come out and not accept their responsibility. What we are asking for is the British government is, first it owes allegiance to the British citizens. We are all Muslims living in this country for the last twenty years and we have a right over the government to ask them to protect our rights.**

Reporter: And do you think you will get any support from the Lord Mayor to whom you are handing in your petition today?

Organiser: Of course, this is why we are doing so.

The interview above illustrates something of the generally compressed nature of 'typical' news report interviews and, even more, the severity of the editing process. The final transcript reveals that the response to the journalist's concern with the death threat over Rushdie, though elicited towards the end of the interview, forms the initial frame of reference in the broadcast item and is introduced accordingly by the reporter's 'link' statement. This aspect, as opposed to the organiser's attempts to claim 'citizen rights' for the established British Muslim community, is introduced as the main issue. The interview also illustrates the way in which an interviewee's statements can be 'clipped' from their surrounding context, with the consequent loss of the reporter's questions and even parts of the interviewee's opening, and as documented below, concluding parts of sentences. The severity of the editing process, as evidenced above, can also lead to ambiguities and confusions when interview statements are juxtaposed crudely against inserted voice-overs, as is apparent at the beginning of this particular interview when the clipped statement appears to disagree with the reporter's proposition in his linking statement. The near-total dependence of the interviewee upon the reporter's line of questioning

and subsequent editing decisions is further illustrated in the interview with a Muslim Labour councillor.

Interview: Muslim councillor

Reporter: You've managed to hand in your petition and, indeed, the council has agreed to discuss withdrawing the book from public libraries. Do you think you will succeed?

Councillor: Well I hope so because I think, the situation is, **the community at large need to understand, I think, that under the banner of the freedom of the press, the freedom does not give anybody licence to abuse or insult any religion. The situation here is that the author as well as the printer have misused the freedom of the press. And what we are asking is that this book should be withdrawn. That is the only solution if we want race relations and we want to live peacefully and in harmony.**

Reporter: Do you think that withdrawing the book from schools and public libraries would not actually add to the discord between the races and ethnic minorities?

Councillor: Well I don't see, I think the message is, I think the host community should try to understand that this book is not a literary work; it's just a filthy book, a fictional book and the author as well as the printers have sought to publicise this book simply for financial reasons. This is not an authentic book and therefore I can't see the need why this book should be available in schools and libraries.

Reporter: According to British law it's a legal book, do your, does your community not follow British law?

Councillor: Well, for example, this government only a couple of months ago had banned a certain political party in Northern Ireland that their interviews cannot be broadcast on television and radio. Where is the freedom of the press in that instance? Why are we two million Muslims being lectured about the freedom of the press – we are in favour of the freedom of the press, but what we are asking is that the freedom of the press should not give anyone a licence to print money by insulting other religions.

Reporter: Final question. There have been calls recently from the community in Small Heath and Balsall Heath for Roy Hattersley to change, if you like, his colours and come out in favour of banning the book. Do you think he will lose votes if he doesn't?

Councillor: Well that depends upon the residents and voters of Sparkbrook. What we are saying is, that there is a need for people to understand our stance, our logic. And our logic is that the book is a very filthy and insulting book, not only to our religion but to

Christianity as well because it abuses prophet Abraham and so many other prophets. So therefore there is a need for the host community

Reporter: Do you believe that . . .

Councillor: to understand this. It's a fictional and filthy book.

Reporter: Do you believe that, do you believe that the Muslim community should stop voting for Roy Hattersley?

Councillor: Well, I think there when the general election comes along it is up to the Muslim community how they feel they have been supported in this

Reporter: Would you vote for him, as it stands?

Councillor: hour of need by their members of parliament.

Reporter: Would you vote for him, as it stands?

Councillor: Well, I'm a Labour Party member

Reporter: So you'd vote for him?

Councillor: Being a Labour Party member, I'll still fight with other Labour Party members to get this book withdrawn.

Reporter: Thank you, (to crew) I'll need a two shot very quickly.

Interestingly, in this instance the reporter selects and edits an initial statement introducing and qualifying the idea of 'the freedom of the press' advanced by the councillor in support of his claim to have the book banned, though the subsequent reference to government restrictions on the reporting of Northern Ireland is not also selected. The three principal questions posed to the councillor concern the degree of 'discord' possibly unleashed if the protesters' demands are implemented, a direct invitation to the councillor to respond to the challenge 'does your community not follow British law' and, finally, a sustained and persistent attempt to elicit a statement concerning a possible Muslim-Labour Party rift involving Sparkbrook's MP, Roy Hattersley. This last line of questioning, pursued with some vigour, seeks to draw the councillor on this particular issue and, if successful, would have been instrumental in raising the political stakes involved while adding a further dimension of 'discord', between the region's 'races and ethnic minorities [sic]'. The persistence of this line of questioning did not, on this occasion, furnish the results sought and was dropped in the editing room by the reporter, who claimed: 'I can't use it; it won't hold up, he didn't go far enough.' The attempt actively to help an interviewee to 'go far enough', in providing a statement guaranteed to cause further controversy and division – all key ingredients to a 'good story' is further illustrated in the second reporter's interview with the city central librarian.

Interview: city librarian

Reporter: Brian Caldan, what has demand been like for Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*?

Librarian: We have thirty-six copies of the book, and to my information in excess of fifty reservations for it at the present time.

Reporter: What has demand been like since you took the book in?

Librarian: Well the demand has accelerated since the publicity. When we first had it, it was just bought as any ordinary book. But since this of course, we've had a considerable increase in publicity.

Reporter: Has this caused you to take on extra copies of the book?

Librarian: We haven't bought any extra but in the normal course of events it follows an increase in demand, we would do that. Yes.

Reporter: How unusual is it to have fifty to eighty people on a waiting list for a book?

Librarian: Not necessarily so unusual, but for a book by a modern novelist perhaps that is unusual, yes.

Reporter: What is your reaction to the decision of Birmingham city council to ban the book from this library?

Librarian: I don't know of that decision. I can't comment on it I'm afraid.

Reporter: On the basis that the decision has been made what is your reaction?

Librarian: My reaction is that this city council will do what they believe is the best thing to be done and I presume this is what they have done on this occasion.

Reporter: Do you support that decision?

Librarian: I'm not here to have an opinion on that matter. I'm here to support the city council in their decision.

Reporter: So whatever you think, you are sticking by the city council ruling?

Librarian: That is the case, yes.

Reporter: How do you feel about the fact that Birmingham city council has become one of the first authorities to ban the book from the library?

Librarian: I'm not in possession of that information that they are amongst the first at this time.

Reporter: A lot of people feel they have the right to choose what books they borrow from a library. What do you think about that?

Librarian: **I personally have an opinion that freedom of expression is**

important for everyone. I don't know what the circumstances, as I say, at this time I don't even know what the city council decision is. But I believe they act in the, what they believe to be the best interest of the city is.

Reporter: On the basis that you believe in freedom then, do you umm

Librarian: Sorry, you told me you weren't going to ask me this sort of question. I'm sorry I shan't answer any more.

The second reporter – having been assigned early in the afternoon, following the animation of the newsdesk over the erroneously perceived imminent ban – interviewed the principal librarian and all subsequent vox pops under the illusion that *The Satanic Verses* had, in fact, already been banned by the city council. This was information that the city's librarian was, wisely enough, not prepared to comment on until confirmed, though the subsequent vox pops were in no position to challenge the reporter's assertion of fact. The interview, having established a few 'facts' concerning the public's apparent interest in *The Satanic Verses* in terms of the library's waiting lists and so on, proceeds to elicit a response concerning the council's 'ban' and clearly seeks to secure a statement of opposition to the ban. With the librarian firmly maintaining a position which is not prepared to challenge the council's right to decide upon such matters, the best that the reporter can achieve is a 'personal' statement yielded after many attempts to get the librarian to commit himself to disagreeing formally with the council.

Interestingly, this 'personal' statement is the only one finally used and is clipped from its subsequent qualifying statement and numerous preceding statements concerning the city council's efforts to work for the interests of the city as a whole. The librarian's edited statement, in other words, has been produced and appropriated to suit the reporter's own conception of 'public opinion', assumed to be opposed uniformly to 'the ban', notwithstanding the librarian's evident dismay at this persistent line of questioning. The interview abruptly ended, with the transparent efforts of the reporter to elicit a statement of condemnation towards the ban 'On the basis that you believe in freedom then . . .'. The interviewee refused to answer any more questions and walked off.

If the librarian managed to maintain a degree of formal control over the interview and refused to be drawn on the matter, thereby providing only partial support to this construction of 'public opinion', the use of 'ordinary' people via a series of vox pops provided the reporter's conception of 'balance' to the demonstrators' aims. Of the eight individuals approached, outside the city library, four refused to

comment. All those approached, with one exception, were white, and none were asked if, or declared that, they were Muslim. 'Public opinion' at the level of the vox pop was not considered to include the ordinary voices of Muslims, much less the differences of opinion found within the Muslim community,[7] but was actively sought in terms consonant with the reporter's preconceptions concerning public opposition to 'the ban'. It needs to be remembered that all the street interviewees were approached under the opening question, 'Could I ask you for your reaction to Birmingham City Council's decision to ban Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* from public libraries and schools?' The fact that no such occurrence had taken place, and that the item was broadcast under the still exaggerated claim 'Council set to ban *The Satanic Verses*', did not temper the use of such interviews.

Vox pop as: selecting verbal 'bites'

Reporter: Can I ask you about your reaction to Birmingham City Council's decision to ban *The Satanic Verses* from libraries and schools?

Vox pop: **Well, I think the consequences will be with the Muslims in this country being totally alienated in our society and years of work of integrating Muslims into our society will be destroyed** because the British people have always been very evolutionary rather than revolutionary and this kind of protest doesn't do anything for the Muslim cause and doesn't do anything for the minorities in this country at all.

This first interview illustrates how the reporter's questions have been edited out, and only the initial part of the interviewee's response has been used. The informing base of ideas to this reaction has also been edited out from the final 'bite' used, although this formed the latter part to, and justification of, the proposition offered in this integral sentence. The ambiguous sounding claims offered in the first part of the sentence – is the interviewee concerned with the Muslims themselves or rather the 'work of integrating Muslims'? – become clearer in the second part of the sentence where an opposition is set in place between 'British people' and Muslims. That is, the opinion offered appears to be dependent upon a wider view of 'tolerant' British people seeking to 'integrate' minorities. While differing interpretations and criticisms currently may challenge or support such an assimilationist viewpoint, the public engagement with such a position is effectively denied by the editing process.

Vox pop as: first-hit success

Reporter: Can I ask you about your reaction to Birmingham City Council's decision to ban *The Satanic Verses* from libraries and schools?

Vox pop: **I think people should be able to read what they want. Given a choice of opinion about what they want to read, I don't think it should be banned at all.**

With the desired 'bite' in the can, this particular vox pop was not pursued, unlike some of the interviews noted above, and the interviewee was permitted to go on his way without further ado.

Vox pop as: constructing an informed confident stance

Reporter: Could I ask you for your reaction to Birmingham City Council's decision to ban *The Satanic Verses* from the libraries and the schools?

Vox pop: I didn't actually know they had. What, they're banning it from schools and libraries?

Reporter: Schools and libraries in the city.

Vox pop: Well I think that's very bad.

Reporter: Why?

Vox pop: Well I think it should be allowed. I know a lot of people are against it and so on. But everyone's got a right to read it if they want to, I don't think there should be any sort of banning of it.

Reporter: So what do you think about the fact that the city has given in to pressure from the Muslim community?

Vox pop: Well I don't really know the whole sort of story of it so it's difficult to comment, but **I think if people want to read it they should be allowed to. I don't think there is any harm in it. It's allowed to be published so I don't think people shouldn't be allowed to read the book.** That's all I can say really because I don't know a lot about it (laughs nervously) OK?

The woman interviewee, not surprisingly unaware of the ban, is encouraged to react to this situation and declares her opposition to the ban. Interestingly, however, her admitted lack of knowledge leads her to make provisional and qualifying statements to her position both preceding and following the final 'bite'. These have been edited away – in mid-sentence. If a position on the public banning of *The Satanic Verses* is to be aired publicly, it is important that the informing basis of such an opinion is also heard if rational deliberation, debate and public discussion, as well as genuine 'representation', are sought. This

clearly has not happened here, while the reporter's assumption, stated as 'fact', that 'the city has given in to pressure from the Muslim community', is unlikely to elicit a more considered viewpoint. It is likely, however, to produce the desired 'public opinion' sought actively by the reporter. The last interview edited and used in this part of the report is of particular interest because it clearly illustrates something of the extreme, not to say idiosyncratic, positions characterising 'public opinion' – and yet even here the reporter's desired viewpoint can be obtained.

Vox pop as: 'cranks' and creative editing

Reporter: Can I ask you about your reaction to Birmingham City Council's decision to ban *The Satanic Verses* from libraries and schools in the city?

Vox pop: I feel very sorry for what will happen in the future.

Reporter: What do you think will happen in the future?

Vox pop: We'll have to fight them you know. I think there will be a war.

Reporter: Why?

Vox pop: I study the human race you see, I have all my life. I think there will be a war.

Reporter: As a result of this?

Vox pop: No, not as a result of this. I think it's the inevitable consequence of what's happening. It's the profoundest tragedy that's happened to the English race is the sudden arrival of tens of thousands of people. It's damaged the very heart of what it meant to be an Englishman.

Reporter: So what about the banning of this book from libraries and schools?

Vox pop: It'll be a great mistake.

Reporter: Why?

Vox pop: Freedom of speech. **Unless we can express our mind it's the end of democracy.**

Reporter: **Have you read the book?**

Vox pop: **Parts of it. I've been told the relevant parts.**

Reporter: **And what do you think of it?**

Vox pop: **It doesn't seem that important to me that anyone reads it.** Have you read the book?

Reporter: I haven't. There's a huge waiting list for the book inside the library.

Vox pop: But wasn't that bound to have happened; wasn't that the inevitable consequence of the whole charade. You see it's my own opinion that they've got their big stick now. It's what they wanted all along. We've just seen the tip of an iceberg.

Reporter: You think Birmingham City Council has given in to pressure which they shouldn't have given in to?

Vox pop: The whole of the English nation has collapsed. It has for a long time. I've written poetry on this.

Reporter: Thank you very much.

If public discussion, debate and 'representation' are genuinely pursued by the use of vox pops, as claimed occasionally by professional journalists, 'opinion' cannot be divorced from the informing web of rationalisation, justification and general perspective or point of view upon which 'opinions' depend. In this instance, the fact that the interviewee apparently holds just such a matrix of beliefs, values and rationalisation informing his 'opinions' is conveniently edited away from the final selected 'bite'. Seemingly based within a colourful, indeed racist, invocation of 'Englishness', the reasonable sounding opinion 'unless we express our minds it's the end of democracy' takes on a different connotation and meaning when presented in the context of its original formulation. Ironically, this same statement, 'unless we express our views it's the end of democracy', has itself been subjected to the imposed requirements of another author and placed in the service of the journalist's own conception of 'the story' and its need for the 'balance' of a particular form of public opinion. This public opinion, as documented throughout the above discussion, was manufactured artificially and may have served to increase further the possibilities of racial 'discord' previously laid at the door of the Muslim community by the reporter earlier.

Conclusion

This detailed discussion has served to illustrate something of the dependencies and subordinate role afforded to those whose views form the raw material for the final 'package' constructed by television news producers. Initially selected as 'representative', directed in interview, subsequently 'clipped' and edited into 'bites' and finally juxtaposed and 'packaged' into an overall verbal and visual narrative, interviewees offer up their words to the journalist's craft and professional practices. This particular story, it has to be remembered, was itself based upon the erroneous foundation of, 'Council set to ban *Satanic Verses*', which acted as the springboard for the selective

construction and orchestration of 'public opinion' both within the item and beyond. As the lead item, the major regional news story of the day, the pre-existing interest and public disquiet surrounding the Rushdie affair were given a further twist which contributed little to the public examination and debate of the complex issues involved. While it would be supposition to claim that this media portrayal resulted in further misunderstanding, not to say antipathy, between the region's communities, it certainly provided little or no evidence of an attempt to unravel and explore the informing bases, and differentiated nature, of public opinion – including those 'many Muslim truths' referred to earlier and the different positions characterising public opinion in general.

In fairness to the journalists involved, it needs to be said that the story was manufactured under pressures of time, resources and item duration, involving the necessity to secure and package both visual and verbal elements into a final item ready for broadcasting that evening. Reporters had to work speedily and in a highly selective manner to achieve this end. Professional ambitions, institutional competitiveness and, ultimately, the political economy of audience ratings may also be indicated as informing parameters propelling the journalist's pursuit of a dramatic and conflict-laden news story.

Observing the development of the 'Rushdie story' throughout the day, it was apparent that both the journalists directly involved, as well as the newsdesk as a whole, became increasingly concerned and animated by what they perceived as a move towards the banning of *The Satanic Verses*. The story developed in the manner of a rumour within the newsroom, reaching its height with the dispatch of a reporter under the impression that *The Satanic Verses* had in fact been banned. The journalists involved showed themselves keen to capitalise upon pre-existing news interest already generated around the Rushdie affair, while developing possible new lines of conflict and controversy: anti- versus pro-Khomeini supporters; Muslim Labour supporters versus Sparkbrook Labour Party; Muslim voters versus MP Roy Hattersley; city librarian versus city council; freedom of the press versus censorship; 'public opinion' versus Muslim demands. The final story transmitted, though serving many of the requirements of a 'good story', embodying such perennial news values as conflict, unexpectedness, deviance and drama, offered little in the way of explanation or clarification of the complexities involved. The item was pursued and produced according to an overriding sense of what the 'story' was all about, leading to a situation where the reported story, and its rendering of 'public opinion', was in large measure the product of journalistic practices. In fact, 'the story' as broadcast was itself based on insecure foundations and, on that basis, merely served as the vehicle in the manufactured orchestration of public controversy and conflict.

References

The opportunity for observing the production processes and journalistic practices discussed in this article occurred when I was based at Central Television studios in Birmingham to carry out a PhD study into the portrayal of the problems and issues of the inner city, which involved a production study as well as cross-programme analysis of material broadcast over an eight-year period. This discussion, and the wider study from which it derives, owe much to the generosity of access and openness of Central's programme producers and personnel, and thesis supervisors Anders Hansen and Professor Halloran at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester. 'Television and the inner city' will shortly be published in book format.

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CHRIS SEARLE and ABDULGALIL SHAIF

'Drinking from one pot': Yemeni unity, at home and overseas

Outside of expatriate Yemeni communities, very little is known in Europe or north America about Yemen and its people.

The unification in May 1990 of the two separate Yemeni states, the Yemen Arab Republic in the north and the People's Democratic Republic of the Yemen in the south, created little interest in the establishment press of the West. And yet, this unity was achieved in an era of intense fragmentation of nations and secessionism in many parts of the world, including countries very close to the Yemen. It was also managed voluntarily, without war or rancour, and with each separate state willingly offering up its individual sovereignty.

In this interview, given in July 1990, Abdulgalil Shaif gives a perspective from the heart of the emigrant community on Yemen's anti-imperialist history and its new unity.

Sheffield has a population of 2,000 Yemenis, most of whom are the families of now redundant steelworkers, who arrived in the city during the 1950s and 1960s, and who are organised through two separate community associations that reflected their origins in the two formerly separated Yemens. The unification has been greeted with great joy by Yemenis abroad, and is seen as a powerful stimulus for their own community development in Britain and elsewhere.

Shaif's story is one of a small black community in the gut of a large British ex-industrial city, struggling for social justice in its new setting,

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as well as striving to maintain and revitalise its links with the homeland: the story of a people who have two homes and two struggles, and a story of two generations keeping faith with each other in the old/new land of post-imperial power.

* * *

Chris Searle: What were the main reasons for the movement of Yemenis to Britain, particularly Sheffield, in the 1950s?

Abdulgalil Shaif: The 1950s and 1960s were a period of industrial boom in Britain. As a result, many Yemenis, encouraged by the British, came over here to fill the labour shortage. They were looking for a better standard of living than that which British colonialism was giving them. This created a large influx of Yemenis to Britain at that time.

They left a Yemen that had become very backward in its social and economic conditions under British colonialism. For example, there were only one or two schools in the whole of Yemen to cater for Yemeni young people – and they were occupied by the sons of sheikhs and sultans whom the British were training to handle the colonial bureaucracy, to service their needs and the needs of international capitalism. People lived in very bad and ugly housing. In Aden, the suburbs and slums were overcrowded, as people were migrating into the city and the British naval base in order to work in the port. That was the only work that existed there. So employment was only available in one sector of the economy, working for the colonialists.

But most of the people who migrated to Britain were country-dwellers, from the hinterland outside Aden. They came from the Yafai province, the Shaibi province, Hadida and Dhala. They also came from North Yemen, from Rada, Gubin and from Shar. In the city itself, people were quite satisfied to stay and work in the port and service sectors, as these were the areas where there was work and the colonial economy seemed to be prosperous. These tended to be people with minimum skills who could handle the bureaucracy. But the people who came to Britain generally had no knowledge of reading and writing. They were mostly farm labourers, as most of the Yemen was dominated by farming. These were subsistence farmers growing fruit, citrus and potatoes, living in very backward conditions. They were poor, often hiring themselves out to aristocratic landlords who would pay them as little as possible and expand their lands at the expense of the peasants at the same time. So this also explains why some of the poorest of the farmers migrated to Britain in the 1950s: they had so little land that they found it impossible to make any kind of living from it. And to avoid the constant struggle with the aristocracy

– who had British military support – they decided to come and try life in Britain instead, as they were being encouraged by the British to come and fill the gaps in labour here.

They came to Sheffield. They also went to Cardiff, to Birmingham, to Brighouse and Scunthorpe and other parts of Britain, but in the 1950s Sheffield was seen as a boom industrial city. The jobs were here, in British Steel, Firth Brown's and all the other firms. There was the attraction then of finding five or six jobs in one day! That's how the Yemenis found it here. You could move around from one job to another in one or two days. This ease of finding jobs in Sheffield soon spread by word of mouth. People wrote home to their friends and relatives and told them to come.

CS: What kinds of conditions did the Yemenis find here?

AS: They had to take the worst jobs possible, those which had been vacated by British workers in the steel industry. They did the crane driving, they did the truck driving, the hammer stamping, the cleaning up – they did the most menial and dangerous jobs, working at close quarters to the noise and dust all the time. And all these jobs were done in twelve- and sixteen-hour shifts with the very minimum of pay – £10 or £12 a week, which was just enough to keep your family going, with no chance to save any money.

You see, when Yemeni workers came to this country, they came with a dream, a longing. The British and the landed aristocracy in Yemen told them that, by coming over here, they would be able to earn so much money that when they returned, they would be able to build their own castles in Yemen! Yet when they came here, they found that the reality of the situation was very different – it certainly wasn't like picking apples off a tree, as the people used to say. It was a case of having to work damned hard all hours in order to survive. So they found themselves in a similar situation to what they had known in Yemen. The only difference was that now they had new benefits like the National Health Service, which they wouldn't have had in Yemen at that time.

Yet, ironically, if you want the most concrete evidence of the conditions of the work which they did in Sheffield, you only have to look at their health *now*. Industrial deafness is 90 per cent among the working-class Yemenis. They had to put up with an average noise level of 40 decibels every single working day.

My father suffers with this deafness, so does my uncle and many, many of their friends and relatives. Coupled with this, they also suffered from the consequences of all the dust – with asthma. Some 30 per cent of our community suffer from asthma and this can pass to the children, so it's very worrying. Then there's also skin diseases – dermatitis – also caused by the conditions in which they had to work.

All this arose from that period of work. And if you come to the Yemeni Advice Centre, you'll see as people come in – one's lost a leg, one's lost an arm, another's lost a finger – all these problems. There's hardly one Yemeni ex-steelworker who hasn't had an accident at work. This is the evidence of how our people have suffered the consequences of British capitalism.

CS: What was the relationship of the Yemenis who migrated here to the struggle against imperialism in the Yemen? Did they contribute to it, or did they bypass it by coming to Britain?

AS: They were certainly out of the country during the time of the armed struggle between 1962 and 1967. Yet the struggle was going on well before that, in a different form and context. In the 1950s, there were the *intifadas* in the Hadramout area and elsewhere against the landed aristocracy, waged by the peasants. Some of our people here were certainly involved in these rebellions against those who ruled on behalf of British colonialism, so they also took part in the overall struggle to change the structure and remove the aristocracy. These *intifadas* were crushed by the planes, helicopters and tanks of British imperialism, in a very similar way to how the Israelis tried to crush the Palestinians. They were defeated largely because they lacked leadership. These were spontaneous revolts with no real goal or strategy.

People didn't really know where they wanted to go beyond getting rid of the local sheikh or sultan. There was no party that could interpret the process it was taking on. The 1962-7 struggle was completely different. It had the support of the revolution in the north of the Yemen, and it also had the support of the working class in and around Aden, as well as the peasantry and the intellectuals. It was also inspired by the nationalism of Egypt and the victory of Suez.

There is no doubt that most of the Yemenis here would have joined in that 1962-7 struggle, had they stayed in Yemen. They would have been part and parcel of the revolution. Even so, they made their contribution from here in the form of their solidarity. It was immense. Money was sent over to buy military equipment, to buy ambulances, to pay for propaganda. The Yemeni Workers' Union was formed in Britain not so much to maintain the culture or support the upbringing of young Yemenis in England, but to bring solidarity to the revolution in Yemen, help to organise these remittances and get the money across. Before that, people sometimes didn't send their money back because they earned so little and after their expenses here they had so little left.

CS: What was the impact upon Yemenis here of the independence of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen in 1967?

AS: The fact that two separate Yemens had developed was something

that our grandparents and ancestors had learned to live with. It goes back several centuries to the time when the Portuguese and Turks came into the Yemen, and later, when the British came in 1839. These were the imperialist powers who divided the Yemen between them, and, in dividing the country, they each tried to gain the most strategic positions. So, over the long period of this partition, different generations of Yemeni people have fought hard to unify the country, but these always failed because of the strategic strength of the imperialist powers and the trickery they used in dividing the people. There was the British diplomatic mission, for example. It knew how to play off the sheikhs against the sultans, how to play off the sultans against the people, the people against the British government. It left the people quarrelling and divided while they were exploited for nearly a century and a half. It worked hard to confuse the revolutionary movement, trying to buy off and cultivate links with one arm of the movement, FLOSY (Front for the Liberation of South Yemen), and to divide that organisation against the National Liberation Front (NLF). So the organisations turned against each other. British strategy was very cruel and caused the deaths of many of our people.

But the hearts of the people here were with the revolution. They couldn't be involved actively, but they supported it economically and through their solidarity and propaganda. Every bullet that went to the Yemen, they knew about it! They wanted the British out. Even though they lived here in Britain, they wanted the Yemen to be free and independent. And remember, at this time, there was a lot of nationalism and racism here in Britain, and for Yemenis here to take that stand against British imperialism took a lot of courage and commitment.

Our people here were not solidly organised at that time as a community, even though they always saw themselves as one Yemeni people. The first community organisation of the Yemenis wasn't established in Sheffield until 1971. Remember that, in September 1962, there was the revolution in the north that ended the monarchy and threw out the Imamic regime. Then, in October 1963, the armed revolution, led by the National Liberation Front, began in the Radfan mountains in the south. This eventually expelled the British in 1967. If you look at the dialectics of the situation, it is clear that the 1962 revolution gave rise to the 1963 revolution. The two revolutions cannot be divorced from each other. Yemenis believed that, and from here they looked at these events with joy. 'We're going to have unity soon!', they thought, because the principal aim of both these revolutions was to unify Yemen, once independence was secured and the revolutions had succeeded. That has always been the Yemenis' dream, one united Yemen. It wasn't just independence from the Imam as a monarch and from Britain as an imperialist power that motivated the

1962 and 1963 revolutions. It was that same dream of Yemeni unity. And people thought that, after those struggles, the division would end. Unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way, as the revolutions took two different paths.

CS: How did the Yemenis in Britain organise to improve their lives?

AS: There were two different forms of struggle for Yemenis in Sheffield, and in the UK as a whole. The first period was from 1955 until 1971, which lacked any form of political organisation or leadership. It involved experiencing racism at work, exploitation at work, bad housing, experiencing all aspects of poverty and lack of finance, and experiencing the pain of divided families. This was the period of *experience* rather than struggle, of getting to know and understand the oppression of being black and working class in Britain. They had experienced oppression under the aristocracy in Yemen, now they began to know a different oppression here. It was not so bad, but they knew they were seen as foreigners, as immigrants, and if they started fighting and struggling and shouting straight away, they thought they would be sent back. There was always that fear. Remember, many had received no formal education. They were illiterate and didn't know their rights here in Britain. They didn't know how this country worked. They didn't know the history of working-class struggles here and what they had achieved. They didn't know about trade unions – they had come from a peasant background, remember – and they didn't know about the National Health Service.

But, by 1971, Yemenis here had become a lot more confident. They had seen one and a half million people expel the British and make the revolution succeed in the south of their country. They had seen the people of the north kick out the Imamic regime which had been ruling for hundreds of years, and which had the support of Saudi Arabia and the imperialist powers. So now, they felt able to carry the struggle forward here to improve their living conditions, and that of the other black and working-class people in Sheffield – even though the Yemeni revolution didn't have the support of the British people and many of the more reactionary regimes in the Arab world. Egypt and Nasser supported us, but others among the neighbouring states to Yemen were fearful of the revolution, and how it might affect them.

The first thing the Yemenis here wanted to do when they organised themselves in 1971 was to support the revolution and learn all about it. They could only learn in Arabic. So the first information and lessons that they gained in working-class consciousness and organisation was not about the struggle here in Britain. It was about how the Yemenis organised the revolution back home. That was what taught them how to organise themselves as working-class people first of all, and then they applied that to their life and experience here in Sheffield. But

they didn't learn about working-class struggle and development in Britain. They were divorced from that, and that was a part of the racism they faced. If local working-class organisations had helped to give them an education about organisation, about taking power, it would have integrated them into the movement and they would have developed with that. But it didn't happen that way. The British trade unions and working-class organisations didn't bother reaching them, so they took their inspiration from their own struggles in the homeland.

CS: What was the impact of the decline of the steel industry in Sheffield on the Yemeni community here?

AS: In 1978-9, we experienced the first real spate of redundancies in the steel industry. The Yemenis were hit harder by these than any other community in Sheffield, including the black communities. It was a situation of 70-80 per cent unemployment suddenly striking an entire working community. There was terrible demoralisation and people were unsure and unclear about what the future held for them. They found themselves suddenly unable financially to help their families back home, and had no prospect of any alternative employment here. They received £2,000-£3,000 redundancy payments – if they were lucky, £5,000 – and it seemed to them that their working lives were over. They either sent this money back home to support their families, or just put it in a bank for when they needed to go to the Yemen or bring someone from their family over here. The uncertainty and insecurity that resulted from all this created the need to organise the community in a way that hadn't happened before. It was an *unemployed* community now, and we had to learn to fight for our rights from the city council, from the Department of Health and Social Security, from central government and all the other institutions, like trade unions and insurance companies. So here were two phases: one, the experience of large-scale unemployment within the heart of the community, and two, the different kind of struggle that had to be launched in order to organise against that.

Circumstances were grim. Unemployment raised issues which weren't there before, issues of loneliness, isolation and depression. People found themselves walking the streets, sitting in cafés, playing cards, unable to retrain because of lack of opportunities, language difficulties and illiteracy – which has always been one of the biggest problems that the community has faced. Of course, if there had been this retraining or the existence of literacy classes, it would have helped in the creation of alternatives, or of a new direction for the community, but there was nothing for our people. For the Yemenis there were no opportunities, no encouragement or understanding for a new and changed future to suit their needs. So the Yemeni community

organisations, even as they exist now, were born out of those very real and concrete problems.

The other factor in causing us to begin seriously to organise ourselves was racism. We were beginning to see how corrosive and violent this was, not only in an institutional sense, in the ways in which we were denied jobs through it – so much so that some of our unemployed had to anglicise their names on application forms to stand any chance of getting work – but in the number of racist attacks we faced. This is what really made us come together, and we are now seeing them on the increase again, as if we are reliving them some twenty years later.

In May 1989, an elderly Yemeni, Musa Mohammed, was on a bus with a friend, coming from the Attercliffe mosque, when two youths set upon him, abusing him and ripping off his prayer hat and throwing it out of the window. They beat him and kicked him badly on his face, legs and chest, and two hours later he was dead, having had a heart attack. Six hundred of us came out on the streets after that, and we organised a lot of publicity, and meetings with the leader of the city council and chief constable of South Yorkshire. The police denied it was a racist attack, calling the attackers 'thugs' but not racists. Then there was the attack on the Metro Café in Firth Park. Five masked white youths burst in, while Yemenis were playing cards and drinking coffee. They wore leather clothes and motor-bike helmets, and, screaming 'black bastards', they smashed everything with hammers, chains and knives. I was there. Nobody could move, they were that stunned. So this pattern of violence hasn't abated since those early days of the community organisations, and has always made us much tighter as a community, much more disciplined and vigilant.

But it was largely a new generation of Yemenis who built these new structures in the community. They hadn't experienced work in the steel industry like their fathers had done, but they had experienced a state education. They began to identify the problems, because they lived with them within their families. They began to exchange and discuss analyses, insights and strategies, they talked to their mothers, fathers and older people in the community, and together they began to formulate a response to its genuine and most pressing needs. It was this leadership – young, conscious and Sheffield-bred – that developed new links between the generations and infrastructures across the community, that developed these new and vital organisations to fight for this new community of the unemployed. It wasn't the fathers, it was the sons and daughters who began to mobilise the resistance that was necessary. They refused to be obedient, they set out to challenge the system. They weren't like their fathers in this respect. Their parents, despite being hard, working-class people, *had* been obedient, had been reluctant to say no and fight back. They felt that their lives

and those of their families would be in danger if they made that challenge. So they didn't challenge the council, the employers, the unions or the government. Their children felt none of these constraints. This was the difference between our two generations. The young Yemenis looked at all these problems and said, on behalf of the entire community: 'We can't continue like this. Our circumstances are bad, they require us to struggle. We need to use the time and energy we have now to organise ourselves as working-class people who are unemployed and who need a better way of life.' It was the result of the conversations we had with our parents about such themes that caused us to build the community organisations that we still have now.

CS: How much of the motivation of this generation of young Yemenis was sparked off by the realisation that the school system had failed them? How have you tackled the questions of language and education?

AS: The young Yemenis were born into black working-class families. They could have easily followed in the same footsteps as their parents. In their lives at school they experienced racism, found failure and received a standard of education that was unacceptable to both themselves and their parents. There wasn't encouragement or opportunity. We can't look back and say that the school system served us well. For example, I was advised by my headteacher and other teachers to go on the Youth Training Scheme. I was adamant. I wanted to take 'A' levels. But they told me my CSEs weren't good enough. It was a chronic system of low expectations for black and working-class children. But I *knew* that, with encouragement and opportunity, I could do well. Even though I knew that when they looked at me, they could only see failure, without seeing or understanding my potential. That was typical, and it is still happening. I knew that if I went on YTS I would end up with the same kind of life and prospects as my father, and I also knew that he didn't come all the way from Yemen to Sheffield for that to happen.*

This made our generation want to put a lot of our life and commitment into building up the community organisations. We knew that in the Yemen there was a revolution and people there who would look after us. That link was so important to us. We knew those same comrades would always struggle and persevere to maintain and preserve it, and continue to develop it. But for us, we felt we had almost a revolution to get on with here, for our community. Let's get on with our lives here! Let's support what is happening back home, but let us also concentrate our minds and energies on what is happening to Yemeni people in England. We understood we couldn't

* Abdulgalil Shaif was awarded a PhD from Sheffield University in 1990.

have a revolution here in the same way as back home, but we could ensure that the standard of life for our community improved, being fully realistic and taking account of the circumstances of the system of this country and the city where we lived. We knew that white working-class people wouldn't carry the struggle for us as Yemeni people. We knew that our struggle had to be carried through by ourselves.

During the early 1970s, we had organised, in an ad-hoc manner, literacy classes in Arabic, run by volunteers. Otherwise, there was very little educational activity. The first issue we identified in the late 1970s was the need to continue, strengthen and develop this literacy work within the community. This was taken very seriously, and was organised without any help or funding from the local education authority. The thinking was that if people learned Arabic, they would be able to read newspapers from back home, write letters and keep in close contact with events and families in the Yemen. They would be able to pass on the Arabic language to their children – and this was seen as essential. It was always feared that our children would grow up without their language – and, therefore, without their culture and identity. Others saw it for different reasons. For example, my father urged me to learn Arabic so that I could explain to him in Arabic what was happening in Britain and how to work the British system of life. He took me with him to the DHSS, he took me with him to the tax office, even to the firm to get his wages – he took me with him, because he thought that someone would say something to him that he wouldn't understand. So we were there as interpreters, as translators, as a support mechanism to our parents. The parents felt proud and secure, having a bilingual child with them.

So the first community language schools developed in the late 1970s. They developed in the context of uninterest and discouragement from the local school system. It ignored our needs. I went to several schools to ask for support and to use their resources to open a community language class, and they said, 'No, if you want to open a class somewhere, go ahead, it's up to you. But we're not taking any notice of this.' I don't know whether it was the schools seeing these classes as competing with them, or whether they frowned on them because they were classes being run and provided by 'unprofessional' people. But, whatever the reasons, the assumptions were racist, that we couldn't run these classes properly, that they were unnecessary, or that these Yemenis are running their own classes today, tomorrow they might open a factory next door! Those sort of stereotypes flourished. The schools didn't see us as a part of the community that is enriching their school. But we saw it that way – that if the children learnt their own community's language, they would bring that bilingualism as a benefit into the mainstream of school life and

culture. They would develop much more quickly and deeply at school, and then be able to transmit their concepts and ideas in a much fuller way, thus improving and broadening what was going on at school.

I came through a community language school, and the ideas and skills it sparked in me I passed on to my younger brother and sisters in Arabic, to my cousins in Arabic, to my parents in Arabic, and the whole community has learned from them. If I had been educated in English only, I could never have transferred these things in this way, and they would have been isolated within me and the community would not have benefited. You see, we think education is about sharing, cooperating, learning from each other, passing on insights and exchanging thoughts, developing our community – we need our languages if we are going to do that.

Our first language school started in a hut in a park in Crookes, that we shared with the Caribbean community. It was the first example of cooperation between our two communities. It would take about forty to fifty children. It was far too small and the children would spill out into the park, and we had to teach them there. It was our first feeling of the struggle shared by both communities – they were speaking in Creole and we were learning Arabic. Unfortunately, this cooperation didn't develop – I wish it had done – but these are the kind of shared experiences which we need to discuss and learn from in the future.

Then, in 1985, the Yemeni Community Association began. There had been a change in receptivity and sensitivity within the Sheffield city council. They had started listening to us at last, and this was a very important development as it resulted in some funding for, and the renovation of, this building that we are sitting in now. It was also an important development for the white community, as they recognised us as a community, with specific needs and features. Before that it was as if they had never seen us, we were invisible to them. They didn't realise that Yemenis living here saw Sheffield as their home. We may have had a family and a home in Yemen, but we loved Sheffield too, it was our home also. I, like all Yemenis here, am proud to know this as my home. When I am at home in Yemen, I think of my home in Sheffield. It may be two homes, but so what? We're proud of that. If I can improve links between my home in Yemen and my home in Sheffield, I would love to. If I could help local white people to go to Yemen, I'd love to, that's the beauty of it. I support anything that benefits ordinary people in this country, as well as in Yemen – whether it's the development of their community, their education, housing, health and all other opportunities. This is why the 'Cricket Test'* idea of only supporting one particular people or group that Norman Tebbit

* In April 1990, Tebbit, then Tory Party chairman, suggested that loyalty to Britain was indicated by 'which side' in cricket Asians would 'cheer for'.

came out with would be unbelievable for me and all Yemenis. When I'm in Yemen, I miss Sheffield, I want to come back to Sheffield so much. Yet when I'm here, I long for returning to Yemen, particularly now as it is united at last.

Then two years ago we developed our literacy campaign. We had studied, and been inspired by the literacy campaign in the south of Yemen in the years following independence, which was very successful. Our campaign here in Sheffield came about through a collaborative approach, from both inside the community and sincere people inside the education system. It was a combined struggle by the older people who wanted literacy, the younger people who wanted further education and careers, and workers and administrators in education who were prepared to fight for resources for black communities.

These three elements were linked and organised together. Already, we have had sixty to seventy people involved, and out of these, 20-30 per cent have gone on to courses in further education, and others to various employment schemes. It has also radicalised a community that has always been culturally bound – especially its women. The Yemeni community has always been politically forward, particularly in its consciousness of being working class and internationalist – in its support for the miners' strike, for example, or for the Palestinians or the struggle against Apartheid, as well as in its solidarity with the Yemen revolution and the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. But we always had cultural issues that sometimes held us back and needed to be tackled, and the literacy campaign came at the right time to help us tackle them. It brought our young women to the forefront of the community. The school system had failed our young women too. It had never reached out to them or their parents, and built links with the communities and families to try to understand them or encourage them, to identify the ways in which they were culturally restricted, or to give advice or the career development that could push their daughters towards new paths in life. My younger sister wanted to be a doctor, but if I had not been around to help and encourage her, she would never have moved towards that aspiration. The school would not have done it. But I am certain that she *will* be a doctor, she has all the attributes, the intelligence, the determination and the patience.

Now the literacy campaign has brought the parents of the young people right into the heart of education. They are being educated by their own sons and daughters. The family and the community have become *one* in this campaign, the youngers and the elders. And the parents have now seen that the young people have the ability to teach, and the young people have recognised this in themselves. So, in a few years time, they can become qualified and come into the state schools as teachers, or take up other professional careers, like doctors and

lawyers, and eventually give service back to the community. All these possibilities are visible to them now. And what has been most radical is that the young women involved in the campaign as literacy assistants have been the most dynamic and successful elements. This has helped to remove the stereotype of passivity attached to our women from both within and outside the community.

CS: What about the successful struggle the community has waged around compensation for those whose health was damaged through their work in the steel industry?

AS: As we saw, the health problem within our community was directly related to the work problem, the exploitation of our people and the terrible conditions in the steel firms where they worked. I remember speaking to my father one day and he said to me, 'Are you speaking, or are your lips just moving without speaking?' 'I'm speaking to you', I said. 'Can't you hear me?' 'No', he said. So I took it seriously and went to the doctor with him. He said, 'You've lost a lot of your hearing, you'll have to go and see a specialist.' This was typical of hundreds of Yemeni workers in the deafening noise of the steel industry and those who worked in very close proximity to it. Why weren't they provided with muffs, with ear protection?

It wasn't until 1978-9, when the majority of Yemenis were being made redundant, that the employers started providing this. By this time, it was too late for most of our fathers. They had worked for thirty years without any protection at all. I read in the *Guardian* about the problem that white workers in similar jobs were having. So I thought, 'Well, what about the Yemenis?' People were coming to see me at our advice centre about problems with the DHSS, etc., and I suddenly thought to myself, 'Why am I talking so loud to these people?' They were coming right close, putting their ears next to me and asking me to repeat everything I said. So I phoned the occupational health project, and they said, 'Well let's test ten people.' We did, and they were all deaf. So we did a lot more tests, week after week. Then we realised that almost the whole community of ex-steel workers were deaf. So we contacted lawyers and said, 'Can we get our fathers and uncles compensation for this?' They said, of course we could. So we made eventually over a million pounds for people within the community who had suffered industrial deafness. Most of this money has been sent to families back home, to buy tractors for their farms, or to buy themselves houses here. It was seen within the community as a real victory, and a reward for struggling and not giving in.

But it also showed another injustice. People who made their compensation claims from insurance companies could get it, but those who claimed through occupational pensions from the DHSS could not

get it. There was a time limitation – they had to make their claim within five years of being made redundant. By 1986, when we waged this compensation campaign, that time had passed for most of our ex-workers. The trade unions they belonged to – the Transport and General Workers' Union was the main one – not one of them had informed them about this limitation, so millions of pounds of potential compensation was lost. Over 700 claims were turned down by the DHSS. This was the real evidence of the neglect of the Yemeni workers by trade unions, by other workers and by progressive white organisations generally. It was also further proof of why we had to build and struggle through our own organisations rooted in our own community life.

CS: How did you work to overcome the divisions in the community here in Sheffield, that had been caused by the fact that there were two separate Yemens, with differing state ideologies?

AS: Because the revolution in the south of the Yemen took a different course to that of the north, similar dialectics were set in motion within the Yemeni communities of Britain. The main principle of both revolutions was Yemeni unity, so even though we found ourselves in two different community organisations, we were, in fact, struggling for the same things. Many of us were ashamed to say that we were either from the 'North' or the 'South'. We found that very difficult to come to terms with; we always saw ourselves and our identity as simply Yemeni. We came from the same country with the same culture and language, the same religion, family structure and attitudes. And in Britain, too, we faced the same struggle – for better housing, or for better education for our children, to develop the language schools and literacy. So, although we organised separately, there was always this link, this collaborative approach, this exchange of information and strategy. It was the political agenda, hidden at the back of our heads, that was different, with some of us taking a socialist path of development, some of us taking a more Islamic and traditional approach. This wasn't only in Sheffield, this happened everywhere else in Britain where there were Yemenis – two different organisations, two different management committees.

But as soon as the unity talks and negotiations started happening in earnest in Yemen, then they happened in our communities too. In Sheffield we said, 'For God's sake, this revolution came in order to avoid these divisions. Let's come to our senses, why should we be divided when so many of our people have sacrificed their lives for unity?' In all the campaigns we worked together – in education, welfare, housing, in the compensation issue – in every concrete struggle we organised together, so we thought, why on earth should we be divided in this way? It didn't make sense. So as soon as the

ideological issue was sorted out in Yemen through the unity talks, it was also sorted out here. As soon as it was decided that having two countries in one single land wasn't a good idea, then we moved to ensure that we wouldn't have two separate Yemeni communities in one city here. So we had our unity talks too. We now have one overall steering committee that guides our work, even though we have still retained the infrastructures of our original organisations, as it is these that continue to mobilise our people for all the community activities. But, as Salim Kasheem, the chairman of the Yemeni IG Union, the other community organisation, declared at our joint celebration of Yemen's unity last month, we're drinking from the same pot now!

So from Sheffield, too, we appreciate and thank the leadership of President Ali Abdul Saleh of the North and Ali Salim Albeed, the General Secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party, for bringing forward the unity of our people here too. These are relatively young leaders, in their forties, who were involved in their respective revolutions from their teens onwards. It was their consciousness, their common feeling, common aspirations, their understanding of the mistakes of the past and that the two revolutions had the same aim of Yemeni unity, that has achieved it at last. They came to power in their two different governments at exactly the right conjunction to take this huge step forward and create a political solution for our people. They knew that, in the past, because of the divisions fostered amongst our people by imperialist interference, our revolution consumed its own children. We are determined that this shall never happen again.

CS: What is your hope now for the future, following the establishment of a unified Yemen?

AS: The new country faces a huge challenge. All the political groupings and social and economic forces that support unity are exercising their democratic right to enter the political arena. That democratic opportunity needs to be consolidated and developed. Of course, the same unity and growth in democracy is also happening in miniature in our community here in Sheffield, as in other Yemeni communities in Britain. It is, of course, much easier for us, because, on most things, we have always been united and now our political differences have gone. We shall never return to those old, artificial and nonsensical divisions again – neither here nor in the Yemen. We have always said that the progressive laws and developments that have taken place in the Yemen, both in the north and south, will be consolidated and not lost. These are the fruits of the revolution and the population wants them preserved.

But, having said that, we also understand the truth that there are reactionary forces in the Yemen which will try to cause obstacles to progress and try to turn back these reforms – and there are, of course,

also powerful and hostile external forces in the Arab world and elsewhere who don't like the idea of a united Yemen, and who know we have rich reserves of oil and have their designs on it. So, strategically, there are enemies of the revolution and our unity who work both politically and economically, and who will not accept the truth that there are certain resources that will need to be controlled by the state, that we're not a capitalised, industrialised country where the market can play a role. We're still a backward country economically, with limited technology, and the state has to ensure that the economy operates for the benefit of all our people, not for this or that group of rich men. If we allow the fruits of our economy to dictate the path of our development, we will live as the slaves, and not the controllers, of our material wealth.

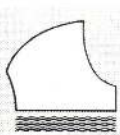
It's a common fact in the Arab world that the remittances of Yemeni emigrants like us in Sheffield form over 50 per cent of the budget. It's one of the dynamos of the economy, and one of the strongest links which binds us back to the Yemen. There's a whole ministry of state, a very important ministry, devoted to issues related to emigrants, with an excellent minister from the Yemen Socialist Party, and an ex-deputy prime minister of the south, Al Sayli. That's how much importance is given to Yemeni communities outside Yemen – enormous time and energy is devoted to this work.

Emotionally, this unity for us is a dream come true. It's been a dream for centuries. No Yemeni will make a speech without mentioning or celebrating the nation's unity. Yemenis as far apart as Tanzania and Indonesia – where there are substantial numbers of our people – always yearned for this. It's made us whole again as a people. We can now feel more confident wherever we live – in Sheffield, too, of course – to struggle for better things for our people. And for others too. We are now a united people on the world stage. We understand and struggle with other divided peoples. We understand and support the Palestinians in their efforts to win back their land from the Zionists, like we are beside the South African people in their struggle against the apartheid system. Yet we also stand side by side with other black and working-class people in Britain, and with our nation *one* again, we feel deeply inside ourselves that our contribution will be stronger, more determined, and with greater purpose and meaning.

Since this interview was conducted, the Yemeni community in Sheffield has experienced turbulent times. During the run-up to the Gulf War the community became the target of increased anti-Arab racism. Their community centre was daubed with racist slogans and individual Yemenis were frequently insulted and received threatening telephone calls. A few days after the outbreak of war in January 1991, the minibus bringing Yemeni children to their evening Arabic language school was

attacked and stoned.

In Yemen too, the war has caused dire problems. Over one million Yemeni migrant workers in Saudi Arabia were expelled and returned to Yemen as a vindictive measure against the Yemen government's position of neutrality in the war. The sudden arrival of these large numbers of unemployed workers and the loss of substantial remittances to the national economy have created serious setbacks for the new government of national unity.



Commentary

A Black perspective on the war*

This is not our war, this is not the war of Black and Third World peoples. This is not a war for us, this is a war against us wherever we are – whether in Europe, the United States or any part of the Third World. That is my first point.

Secondly, the terms of debate on which this war is being conducted are not our terms of debate. They are not our questions, they are not our principal concerns. We are not concerned with whether or not Saddam Hussein is a dictator so much as with who put him there. We cannot be concerned with Iraqi small power designs on Kuwait to the exclusion of American big power designs on the Third World that the 'liberation' of Kuwait is going to entail. It is not our question whether the incursion into Kuwait and the occupation of Palestine are linked. It is not our question whether Israel has the right to exist or not.

Of course Israel has the right to exist. Israel does exist. It is the one existence that none of us can deny. It exists in our everyday lives. It exists in every consciousness of our being. It exists in the maiming of our children, the dispossession of our old people, the brutalisation of our young. It exists in the decanting of the Palestinian population from Palestine through justifiable homicide, through judicious and judicial imprisonment, through political exile – as once the Caribbean was 'decanted' of the Arawaks, the Americas of the Indians and Australia of its Aboriginal population. Israel exists.

Israel exists, above all, in the collective unconscious of the oppressed and the exploited as once that consciousness existed in them. Israel exists, above all, as an object lesson to us that we do not ourselves become oppressors in the name of our oppression.

Of course Israel has the right to exist. That is not a problem for

* Text of a speech given at the inaugural meeting of Black People Against War in the Gulf, Camden town hall, 5 February 1991.

us, for Black and Third World people. We do not deny Israel's right to exist. What we do deny is Israel's denial of the Palestinians' right to exist – in Palestine.

That for us is the crux of the matter. The rights of the Palestinian-people to their land and to their existence – that is central to the concern of Black and Third World peoples in this war and after this war.

As for the question of linking the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, that is not really a question for us. Because everything in our lives is linked. The invasion of Kuwait is linked with the occupation of Palestine, the invasion of Lebanon is linked with the occupation of Grenada, the invasion of Panama is linked with the occupation of East Timor. Hunger and famine are linked to exploitation; race and power and poverty are linked. The presence of Third World peoples over here and the presence of multinational corporations in the Third World are linked. They are all links in the chain of imperialism.

And racism and imperialism are linked. We see the links in our everyday lives, we know the links viscerally, in our guts. We have no problem with linkages. Our problem is to stop the white powers-that-be from de-linking us from ourselves, detaching us from our histories. That is our problem.

Nor is the question of whether Saddam Hussein is a dictator or not of so much import to us as who put him there. For if he is a dictator, he is a dictator created by, and kept in situ by, American capitalism – like all the dictators of the Third World, like all the authoritarian regimes, pseudo-parliamentary or openly totalitarian, in the Third World – in Chile, Haiti, Sri Lanka, South Korea, El Salvador, Guatemala. The names are legion. In every single Third World country almost without exception the powers that rule us are the powers that have been installed by American imperialism and the satraps of American imperialism. Getting rid of our dictators does not get rid of the system that put them there. Black dictatorship and white imperialism are two sides of the same coin. Our problem is to get rid of both.

Our problem is to decide our own governments, to make our own choices, our own mistakes – and put them right as and when we think fit – to make our own histories. We need to have the political freedom to decide our governments, the economic freedom to make our choices, the cultural freedom to make, and remake, our histories. That is what democracy means to us – not the 'democracy' that is foisted on us, for our own good, by those who know what is best for us. Not the democracy that pretends to fight a war for democratic values while denying those values in the very act of prosecuting the war. For not only is this war a war of sanitised warfare, bereft of real people, but a war also of sanitised values, bereft of real morality. Not only is

this a war being fought on the basis of technology, but our consent to the war is being bought on the basis of technology. The technology that fights the war on our behalf is also the technology that disinforms us as to why we are fighting it. The controllers of the technology of communication condition not only what we see and hear but how we think and feel – or, rather, by conditioning what we see and hear, they make sure that we do not think or feel any differently from them. We are in a time of technological authoritarianism.

Men and women are going off to die in a war that they were led to believe could not be avoided for a lie they were led to believe in. They are as much unwitting cannon fodder as those who died on the fields of Flanders. And foremost among them are the Blacks, the Hispanics and the poor whites, those victims of Reaganite policies who have no employment, no prospects, no way out of the ghetto. Is it any wonder that they should swell the ranks of the so-called volunteer army of the U S of A? Or that African-Americans should represent 25 per cent of the fighting force (when they are only 12 per cent of the population) or that they should be the majority in the front line? What choice do they have? What democracy for them?

What, then, if these are not our terms? What are our terms, what are our concerns? How should we look at what is happening today? How should we look at this war from the Black and Third World perspective – from the experience of our own history and our own consciousnesses?

What concerns Black and Third World people is not just the war but the new order, the new imperium, which is emerging from the ending of the cold war. I see this war as an interlude – or, rather, a rite of passage from the old American imperialism to the new. The ending of the cold war has left the United States the sole super-power in the world. The contestation between the West and the East is over, and the West is free to range over the South, marauding it at will. This war, the war with Iraq, is a flexing-of-the-muscles exercise, a casing-the-joint exercise, a testing of the opposition, a sounding of the hangers-on. It is an exercise in establishing the unipolar, monolithic super-power hegemony of the USA. It is a dry run for the second American century, but this time under the pretended aegis of the United Nations.

Remember, once before, when Britain ruled over us, how, by inveigling us into its way of life, its language, its beliefs, it made us, the subject peoples, a party to our own subjugation – the black skin, white masks syndrome? Today, it is not the peoples of the Third World who are being won over but the states of the Third World, and not so much through a cultural imperialism that denotes a way of life as through a cultural imperialism that denotes a way of governing. It is a sort of political cultural imperialism – the imperialism, that is, of a political

culture which, on the one hand, defines as non-democratic, and therefore untenable, any regime that does not serve Western interests and is prepared, on the other, to overlook, and indeed sustain, the most brazen dictatorships so long as they serve Western interests. And it is that same political culture which, at another level, holds that all nations are equal in the United Nations but that those who serve Western interests are more equal than others. Once more we are being set against each other and made accomplices in our own despoliation.

At the very moment that Western powers have acknowledged that the United Nations has something to say in the settling of international disputes, the United Nations has ceased to say anything to us. From being ineffectual and irrelevant, the UN has now become a pliant tool of American imperialism. And the new uncontested American imperium is going to land the Third World with the rulers that it does not want, a standard of living which is barely above starvation level, and with ecological devastation to keep Western petticoats clean.

Only a few weeks ago, at the GATT talks in Geneva, the industrialised countries warned that if Indonesia continued to ban the felling and export of raw logs so as to protect its own environment, the corporations in the USA which needed timber for raw material would be hit; Indonesia would have to remove its export ban on logging or face trade sanctions. Another aspect of the new imperium was also evidenced at the same talks when William Brock, a senior GATT negotiator, pointed out that 'We must get away from the anachronism that developing countries need to feed themselves, given the ready availability of US cereals.' He therefore called for the removal of government subsidies on food production in Third World countries. Let them eat wheat, was his curt message, American wheat!

If the war in the Gulf is a passage to a new political and military order, the GATT talks are the passage to a new economic and commercial order.

But that is not to say that the war in the Gulf is not also an economic and commercial war over the price and availability of petroleum and, therefore, a war about the standard of living of the American peoples and the peoples of the West – and not just because America needs oil for energy, but because Western life-style is petroleum-based. Your shirts, your furnishings, your nylons, your curtains, your fabrics, your insecticides, your fungicides, your fertilisers, your washing-up liquids, your detergents are all petroleum-based. The West's economy is founded on petroleum-based industry, petroleum-based agriculture, petroleum-based life-styles. And the US consumes 25 per cent of the world's oil while producing only 4 per cent.

It is this political, economic and military penetration of Third World countries by Western governments that has begun once again to

dispossess and displace our people and lead to the vast and rapid-fire shift of whole populations in our part of the world – from countryside to town to oil-rich country and to Europe and America. And it is these migrants from the more impoverished parts of the Third World – Palestinians, Egyptians, Philippinos, Indians, Sri Lankans, Pakistanis, Vietnamese – who have built the infrastructure of the sheikhdoms and serve in their homes as servants and slaves. In Kuwait alone there are over 1½ million (72 per cent) non-nationals, over half of whom are from the Middle East and over a third from Asia. Given that the population of Kuwait is just over two million, the number of Kuwaitis who actually work must be even less than the number of Kuwaitis who actually vote. And yet no Western commentator on this war has bothered to remark on these Third World workers left stranded and close to starvation in huts and tents, or on the consequences of that to their dependants back home. This is not their war either.

Nor is it the war of the migrants and refugees and asylum-seekers who have been thrown up on the shores of Europe and serve as the flexible and disposable work-force of post-industrial capitalism. And yet it is these people, designated as 'Pakis' or Arabs or Muslims (anybody dark would do to qualify), who are being subjected to an increasingly undifferentiated racism in the media and on the streets. Mosques from Marseilles to Batley have been fire-bombed, women have had their head-scarves torn off in the middle of our city centres, individuals are stopped at random and beaten if they do not denounce Saddam Hussein, Arab community centres are daily receiving death threats.

The arbitrary rounding-up, detention and deportation of Middle East nationals by the government has further sanctioned the idea that we have here in Britain a fifth column, an enemy within. But then, anti-Arabism and anti-Islamic sentiments have never been far from the surface of British life – as was shown in the Rushdie affair, when everyone from street thugs to politicians and 'intellectual socialists', with varying degrees of brazenness and coyness, gave vent to their racist sentiments against Muslims and Arabs. We are once more in the midst of a Crusade against 'the barbarians' (the phrase belongs to the Belgian Minister of the Interior).

As a consequence, all the bits and pieces of racist belief have become telescoped into each other, and every stereotype reinforces another. The Arab gets telescoped into the Muslim, Iranians become Arabs, Khomeini and Islamic fundamentalism gets mixed up with oil sheikhs holding the West to ransom, the Turks who clean the streets of Western Europe and provide domestic help to its middle classes are suddenly become part of an invading army. All Asians are 'Pakis', and 'Paki' passes as a synonym for mad Muslim. And all Muslims are Iraqis.

This new racism makes no distinction between one Black and another, between refugee and settler, between Muslim and Hindu. Our fight, then, is not only against the new imperium, but against the new racism, the anti-Arab racism, the anti-Muslim racism.

We are all Muslims now!

A. SIVANANDAN

Vision wars

It has become almost a cliché that the Gulf war has been presented as a video-game, fascinating viewers with images of targets being 'surveilled' and 'taken out'. At the same time, journalists' self-censorship has largely denied us meaningful knowledge abut the effects on the victims, attributing the lack of information to a natural 'fog of war' which the mass media actually helped to construct. The overall effect could be called 'disinformation', but high-tech methods have also redefined what counts as 'information'.

For decades, the USA has been developing electronic surveillance technology for identifying potential enemy threats. Although the US government has often promoted satellite technology in the name of peaceful purposes, such a justification has been mocked even by the military: 'Space for peaceful purposes – what a bunch of goddamned bullshit that was!', said US air force General Bernard Shriever in 1983.

Now satellite images serve to turn an entire country into target information. Vision technologies – photography, infra-red imaging, radar imaging – have become central to the Gulf war, both militarily and ideologically. They promote a new high-tech version of Orientalism, dehumanising the Arab population, who become 'collateral damage' deserving of destruction because they hide from the West's enlightened vision.

In the five months preceding the January 1991 attack on Iraq, the US war-machine devoted laborious 'software work' to mapping and plotting strategic installations there. Given the US's ultimate aim of forcing Iraq into submission to imperialist control of the Gulf, the notion of 'legitimate military targets' extended from military bases to symbols of Saddam Hussein's rule (the presidential palace), major highways, factories, water supplies and power stations. As a base for policy independent of the US, and as symbols of a modern state, Iraq's entire industrial infrastructure was cast as a threat. Although some potential targets were considered higher priority than others, all were reduced conceptually to visual 'information'.

In the process of visually reconstructing Iraq's infrastructure with computer-aided techniques, the plotters could remain morally indifferent to whatever or whoever would be destroyed by the resulting attacks. Thus, through information technology, the recasting of 'information' itself has been crucial for conceptualising Iraq as a 'target-rich environment'. Only within that mentality could the intensive bombing of Iraq rest ideologically on repetitive claims for the 'pin-point accuracy' of the bombing.

In the western media there has been scant critical comment about the allied forces' destruction of water and electricity supplies in Iraq's cities. On reflection, the likely result of that bombing – major epidemics – could be considered an indirect form of germ warfare against the Iraqi people. Yet the video-game presentation of the war has made it easier for people to avoid such reflection. In most people's minds, the spectre of biological warfare remained a threat coming from Iraq, and even became a rationale for the West to remove Saddam from power; such warfare was not perceived as a step already taken by the West against Iraq.

In his analysis of the Nazi Holocaust (*Modernity and the Holocaust*), Zygmunt Bauman describes how otherwise ordinary Germans methodically carried out their allocated tasks in a routine technical division of labour, whereby virtually no one needed to see how their actions ultimately destroyed other human beings. At the same time, the victims were conceptually dehumanised as subhuman, as a pollution of the German nation, to be cleaned up with social hygiene measures; the 'Final Solution' depended less upon overt hatred than upon moral indifference. Thus, contrary to accounts that portray the Holocaust as an irrational aberration of western civilisation, Bauman roots the genocide within the trajectory of a technological rationality that makes the victims psychologically invisible.

As Bauman also argues, modern long-range weaponry likewise achieves a moral dissociation which protects the perpetrators from sight of the resulting human carnage. The killing is done at long range, through technological mediation, without the shock of direct confrontation. Thus, those who plot targets, programme cruise missiles or even guide missiles to their targets can all insulate their psyches against the traumatic moral responsibilities of war. Meanwhile, the warriors, and their cheerleaders back home, can identify with the attacks through films shot from a B-52 bomb bay, as during the Vietnam war.

The video-game images of the Gulf war have taken that technological rationality much further, in paradoxical ways, with their 'surgical strikes'. Here we have an apparently greater visual proximity between victim and attacker. Indeed, the missile-nose view of the target simulates an extra-real proximity which no human being could ever

attain. Yet this remote, mediated vision sustains the moral detachment of earlier military technology; it maintains an insensibility to the agony, smell and taste of burning and death. Through the long lens, human bodies lose their immediacy, their materiality; even if they are seen in bodily form, the enemy remains a faceless alien.

The home viewer can experience such close-up images with a similar moral detachment. At the same time, he or she is encouraged to identify with the technical success of all those involved in selecting and precisely hitting the target. This feeling of close-up involvement draws upon the ruling fantasies of an entire political culture – as exemplified by militaristic video-games and the recurrent demonisation of 'the Arab'.

'Disturbing' images

Public acceptance of the Gulf war has depended upon a tenuous remote involvement. Thus, the 'war editors' who run Britain's mass media have sought to avoid any visual reminder of the human consequences, even those from other wars. When Britain's television networks systematically withdrew scheduled programmes relevant to war, this was far more than self-censorship. Indeed, although the deletions seemed absurd at the time, they may well have been necessary, in order for the video-game images to suppress more grisly war images in people's imaginations.

Even some of the remote images from video-guided missiles came too close for comfort. 'I am now going to show you the luckiest man in Iraq on this particular day', General Schwarzkopf bantered to the world's media, as he showed film of an Iraqi vehicle passing through the cross-hairs of a bomb-sight on a bridge, shortly before the bomb 'took out' the bridge. A similar camera also saw the horrified face of another lorry driver – the unluckiest man in Iraq on that day – as the missile flew into the cab of his lorry. That image was kept unavailable for public viewing (*Sunday Times,* 10 February).

Yet the video-game images were seriously undermined by the first-hand television reports of the massacre at the Al-Amiriya air-raid shelter on 13 February. Limited by their own technocratic mentality, US officials were hard pressed to explain away the hundreds of shrouded corpses; they could respond only by insisting that the shelter really was a military bunker and that the missiles had hit it precisely. The officials seem to have missed the irony that only such precision – with a missile entering the ventilator shaft – could have turned the shelter into a human incinerator.

For the first time since the war began, British television programme-makers had to acknowledge that the censorship was theirs, not the Iraqi government's. They explained that they had omitted some images of Al-Amiriya because viewers might find them

'disturbing'. Indeed, it was not simply people's moral sensibilities, but also the video-game portrayal of the war which might be disturbed by close-up images of immediate death.

As BBC2's Alan Yentob eventually acknowledged (*Guardian* 21 February), British television had prepared the public for the war by glorifying the West's weaponry as 'clever toys which will surgically destroy the enemy at great distance, while we will hardly get hurt at all'. Although the task was becoming more difficult and messy than originally predicted, it was still necessary to screen out contrary images that might undermine the sanitised ones.

As with technology in general, the remote vision guiding the US offensive serves as an ideological weapon, as an icon of cultural superiority. The visual technologies become a global Panopticon confirming the bearer's civilised values, in contrast to barbarians who attempt to hide the truth. When Saddam decided to avoid a direct military confrontation with the coalition's air offensive, the western media described him as 'hunkering down' or 'hiding', as if Iraq were deceitfully cheating the West's enlightened, rational plan.

Time magazine (4 February) managed to describe Iraq's restraint through racist stereotypes of secretive Arabs:

> Saddam Hussein's armies last week seemed to be enacting a travesty of the Arab motif of veiling and concealment. In the Arab world, women often veil themselves . . . The true treasures are concealed. Saddam similarly appeared – or wished to appear – to be masking his strength, hiding it in bunkers in the sand . . . [he] makes a fairly gaudy display of mystique.

In contrast, the magazine asserted, presumably western 'Generals and Presidents need a clear eye for the truth'. Thus, an otherwise clever military strategy becomes an obstacle to the West's truth-seeking, a violation of its rational game plan. More insidiously, anything hidden from the West's Panopticon becomes a sign of guilt, a suspected military asset, and hence a legitimate military target.

Post-Gulf vision wars

The western gaze upon the Third World is becoming linked to advanced weaponry ostensibly developed to counter the 'Soviet threat'. Amidst the debate over whether SDI could ever work reliably against incoming nuclear missiles, technology critic Vincent Mosco warned: 'The many technical shortcomings that critics have identified may not keep Star Wars from working militarily against the Third World' (*Science as Culture*, pilot issue, 1987). While US strategists may never have intended such technology to be used primarily against the USSR, now they speak openly of using their anti-ballistic missiles elsewhere: 'They *can* work, especially against the kind of Third

World threat we're more likely to face than an all-out Soviet missile attack', says Kenneth Adelman, director of arms control during the Reagan administration (*Newsweek*, 18 February).

When US commanders of the anti-Iraq coalition stated that they were seeking 'air superiority, preferably supremacy', this goal meant more than eliminating all Iraqi aircraft from the battlefield. It also meant destroying all air offensive and defensive weaponry, for total freedom of action against further targets, whatever and wherever they may be. For such an aim of military domination, in turn serving political domination over the Third World's resources, the West will develop weaponry with even more sophisticated targeting. At the same time, anti-imperialist forces will seek ways to evade being targeted under western eyes, and to challenge the putative rationality of the West's surveillance systems. Such vision wars – both material and ideological – will make or break the global Panopticon.

LES LEVIDOW and KEVIN ROBINS

Supporting 'Our Boys': the *Sun* and the Gulf war

The day that the American aerial bombardment of Iraq began, Wednesday, 16 January, the *Sun* appeared with the Union Jack covering its front page. At the centre of the page was the smiling face of a young squaddie and, printed above it, the invocation to 'Support Our Boys and put this flag in your window'. This ploy was obviously intended to establish the *Sun* in the eyes of its readers, from Day One, as the paper 'That backs Our Boys'. The paper was playing the patriotic card to increase circulation and to involve its readers in an outburst of jingoism. War is apparently cause for patriotic celebration. In fact, circulation was to slip, but by way of consolation the paper quickly found itself involved in a lively campaign against all those who did not share in its mindless warmongering.

The Union Jack front page was reprinted inside the paper the following Wednesday, with readers once again urged to put the flag in their windows at home and on the wall at work. By now, it was also carrying stories of readers who had found themselves involved in arguments and disputes for 'flying the flag'. On the front page, the paper reported how 'True Brit' Ann Thompson had been suspended from work for sticking the *Sun's* front page on her shopping bag. She had been ordered to remove the bag from her bench 'in case it offended Muslim workers', but had refused. The same issue also

reported workers at the Crown Berger paint factory at Darwen in Lancashire going on strike after being told they faced the sack 'if any posters supporting Our Boys in the Gulf are put up'. All this was accompanied by an editorial, 'Fly your Union Jack with pride', which attacked Crown Berger and those 'Left-wing fanatics of Islington council', who had banned the *Sun* front page from a council lorry 'on the ground that it is "jingoistic" to love your country'.

The following day, Thursday, 24 January, the paper reported how hundreds of True Brits had 'flooded *The Sun* with calls pledging unflagging support for our crusade to fly the Union Jack with pride'. This same issue carried a feature, 'Pride of mum with 3 sons in front line', about Helen Gourdie from Galashiels in Scotland. Purporting to be a 'family at war' telling the *Sun* of their heartache, the story was, as the *New Statesman* revealed, lifted from the *Observer* newspaper and concerned a mother who had not only refused to interviewed by the *Sun*, but would not allow that paper into her home.[1]

To give its readers an opportunity to demonstrate their patriotic fervour, the paper attempted to inaugurate its own '*Sun* Flag Day'. On Tuesday, 5 February, it informed readers that the coming Thursday was *Sun* Flag Day, when five million one-inch stickers of its Union Jack front page would be available free from newsagents throughout the country. Readers were urged to 'Support Our Boys with FREE sticker and stuff Lefties'. By now, however, the failure of the bombardment of Iraq to result in a land war had actually driven the conflict off the front page.The Gulf war was pushed into second place that week by more important stories about the infidelity of a minor Royal, Mick Jagger *not* having cancer, Viscount Lindley wearing lipstick and the 'Blind Date' TV show. *Sun* Flag Day completely misfired. Various government ministers and Tory MPs were reported wearing stickers but otherwise coverage was confined to less than half a page on 8 February (the day after 'Flag Day').

The *Sun*'s efforts did, however, receive academic endorsement. The 8 February issue also carried a whole page article, 'Why we should all be proud to fly a Union Jack', by Norman Stone, professor of modern history at Oxford. Here, Stone bravely attempted to prove that he could be every bit as prejudiced and ill-informed as the paper's regular correspondents. He poured scorn on those who believe that ours 'was a divided and racist society' and proclaimed that, on the contrary, 'Britain is a wonderful country. . . It invented most things to do with the modern world.' It might be necessary, he warned, to 'pass laws to enforce patriotism'.

One last aspect of the *Sun*'s flag-waving deserves mention: the special part that women have to play in supporting 'Our Boys'. So far, the paper has established a Gulf Lonely Hearts Club so that women readers can write to the troops, urged them to 'Flash your knickers

for the Boys' and send in the photographs, carried a knitting pattern for a 'Willy Warmer' to send out to the troops and launched its own patriotic Red, White and Blue diet plan under the headline, 'Bums away girls.'

Bastards of Baghdad

This celebration of British patriotism has been accompanied, of course, by the dehumanisation of the Iraqi enemy and, in particular, of Saddam Hussein himself. Predictably, Saddam has received the *Sun*'s routine '20 things that prove Hussein's insane' treatment, in the form of an alleged 'profile' of the 'mad, bad and totally insane . . . Butcher of Baghdad' (24 January). This catalogue of crimes failed to mention the fact that, only six months before, Saddam was regarded as an ally to be courted by the West. Indeed, the *Sun* has remained consistently silent with regard both to this and to the radical transformation that has occurred in official attitudes. Another report described 'Saddam Hussein's threat that Iraqis will torture, kill and even EAT allied pilots who are shot down' (16 January). The man is a monster and there is an end of it.

What the paper has been searching for is a headline to rival its infamous 'Gotcha!' that celebrated the sinking of the *Belgrano* during the Falklands war. The nearest it has managed to get to this so far was on 22 January with a front-page story about the appearance of battered British prisoners of war on Iraqi television under the headline 'Bastards of Baghdad'. The paper called on the Allies to hang Saddam and his henchmen 'long and slow'. It reported how 'an entire torture industry had swung into action . . . specially to deal with prisoners of war' and quoted an intelligence source as saying that 'The Iraqis are evil bastards, renowned for their torturing techniques'. The paper even outlined the '10 ways beasts try to break them', a catalogue of torture that 'may' and 'will' be used on Allied prisoners of war. There, was, of course, no evidence that torture had actually been used, but the story helped sell newspapers and clearly identified the Iraqis as a cruel and barbaric people who deserved no mercy.

Concern about Allied prisoners of war surfaced again on 1 February during the skirmish at Khafji. The *Sun* reported the capture of a woman US marine under the front-page headline 'At the mercy of the beast'. This was clearly intended to convey to readers the message that a white woman had fallen into the hands of monsters. She was 'at the mercy of brutish Iraqi troops', the word 'brutish' coming loaded with connotations of animalistic, sub-human, ape-like and, of course, black. Moreover, readers were told that 'Allied military chiefs think the Iraqis – who treat their OWN women appallingly – might abuse or even rape their captive'. On the same page, the paper reported gleefully that B-52s were going 'to hammer Baghdad'.

The *Sun*'s war coverage arguably reached the depths with its reporting of the destruction of a packed air-raid shelter in Baghdad on 13 February. Reporter Trevor Kavanagh produced yet another '10 facts to damn Saddam' and 'proved' that the shelter was a military command bunker, that 'the victims were sent to their deaths by the Iraqi leader himself' and that Saddam had cunningly 'arranged TV scenes . . . to shock and appal'. The paper's 'Thought for the Day' was 'Bunker Bunkum'. This shameful exercise was duplicated throughout the British tabloid press with the exception of the *Daily Mirror* (*Daily Star:* 'Sacrificed'; *Daily Mail:* 'Victims of Saddam's war'; *Daily Express:* 'It was a military bunker'; *Today:* 'Entombed by Saddam').

Of course, the *Sun* has not confined its patriotic outbursts to abuse of the Iraqis. It has also found time to attack both Germany and Belgium for not being wholeheartedly behind the war ('Menace of the Germans', 29 January; 'Despise them', 30 January). There have also been some reservations expressed in the paper about the Saudis and the Kuwaitis. On 5 February, the Saudis were branded 'You hypocrites' for denying British soldiers access to alcohol and to 'their favourite newspaper, *The Sun*', and on 7 February the paper's political columnist, Richard Littlejohn, while supporting the war, lamented the fact that 'we are fighting to defend a loathsome bunch of Arabs'.

We'll bomb till they drop

Another feature of the *Sun*'s coverage of the war has been its glorification of violence and celebration of bloodshed. The first day of the conflict was reported under the headline 'The day it rained bombs' and told of 'large numbers of casualties in Baghdad . . . hundreds of terrified families pack their bags and prepare to flee Baghdad as another night of bombardment begins'. That first day was '24 hours in which Iraq and Kuwait were hit by a bombardment bigger than that unleashed on Hiroshima 50 years ago' (18 January). On 21 January readers were told 'We'll bomb till they drop', and of how 'Baghdad, the fabled city of A Thousand and One Nights, is now dying 1001 deaths because of the air blitz'. There was none of this nonsense about minimising civilian casualties in the *Sun*.

Later reports boasted of the bombardment of Iraqi troops in Kuwait: 'Hundreds of Iraqis fried in their tanks yesterday' (31 January) and 'Thousands of Iraqi troops were dead or wounded last night as the might of the Allied bomber force relentlessly blasted their columns' (2 February). And, just in case any readers had not got the message, on 13 February they were told of a three-hour bombardment which had 'Blitzed . . . devastated . . . pulverised . . . shattered' Iraqi positions and 'killed hundreds of Iraqi troops'.

While the bombardment continued, 'Our Boys' were getting ready for the land offensive. On 1 February the paper told of a young British soldier, Vincent Stott, '17 and he's out to kill Iraqis'. He might be too young to see an adult movie, 'but Vincent Stott is armed to the teeth and ready to kill'. The story was accompanied by a photograph of this youngster, rifle and bayonet clutched in his hands. The obscenity of a 17-year-old boy being sent unnecessarily into battle completely passed the *Sun* by. Another story, 'Calling card of death', told of American troops carrying 'chilling calling-cards to mark their enemies in death', the ace of spades to leave on the bodies of those they killed. This macho affectation obviously impressed the *Sun*'s reporter. Both these stories reinforce the impression that the *Sun* regarded the war as some sort of spectacular game, as a real-life acting out of 'Top Gun' or of a Rambo movie, rather than as something completely and terribly different.

To hell with traitors

Inevitably, the *Sun* seized upon the war as an opportunity to mount a patriotic assault upon the 'Enemy Within'. Initially, the targets were the Labour Left and the BBC, but once the 'fly the flag' stunt was underway, it quickly became clear that throughout Britain many Muslims were unsympathetic to the paper's crude warmongering jingoism. On 18 January the *Sun* reported that 'True Brits at a factory were ordered to RIP DOWN their *Sun* Union Jacks yesterday – after Muslims complained'. This was followed by a stream of stories where Muslim workers had objected to the display of the *Sun*'s Union Jack. The paper's 25 January issue, for example, under the headline 'Union Jacks banned at tornado factory', reported how even workers at Lucas Aerospace, making Tornado parts, were banned from displaying the *Sun* Union Jack because it 'might offend ethnic minorities'. On the same page, the paper reported that security guards employed by Birmingham city council had been told to remove a flag 'in case it insulted Muslims', that workers at Flight Equipment and Engineering had been banned from displaying the flag because the firm had 'a multi-racial workforce' and that workers at a Kipling cake factory had been likewise banned because the firm had 'a racially mixed work-force and the flags might have caused tension'. While the paper was careful not to editorialise on this issue, it nevertheless managed to present a carefully contrived and totally false image, day after day, of Britain as a country where Muslims were dictating to decent patriotic white men and women and were preventing them from demonstrating support of 'Our Boys'. The 'real' Britain, where Muslims are daily subjected to routine abuse and attack by white racists and where the war led to an increasing number of such incidents, was not shown in the *Sun*. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the paper's racist

caricature of the situation contributed to this.[2]

The *Sun* actually commissioned a National Opinion Poll survey into Muslim attitudes towards the Gulf war. The results, published on 25 January, showed that the great majority of British Muslims opposed the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and rejected any idea of a *jihad* against the West, but that most also opposed the Allied attack on Iraq. On the question of which side they wanted to win, only 28 per cent replied the Allies, while 19 per cent said Iraq and 54 per cent did not know. Once again, there was no editorialising. Instead, it was left to one of editor Kelvin Mackenzie's confidantes, TV reporter Gary Bushell, to draw a conclusion: 'If war doesn't make us question the sense of flooding the UK with people who refuse to integrate into British society then nothing will.'[3]

The *Sun* continued its long-standing vendetta against the Labour Left. The climax with regard to this aspect of its war coverage came on 30 January when the actual war was pushed off the front page by the headline, 'Town that shames Britain'. This was a hysterical attack on Harlow district council for ordering two council workers to take down a Union Jack from their portable cabin. The paper's editorial read: 'The town of Harlow is supposed to be part of Britain . . . the bosses of the town hall have not a scrap of respect, affection or loyalty towards their country . . . Instead of stabbing our forces in the back, why the hell don't they depart these shores for a country they like better. *The Sun* would be happy to pay their fares to Baghdad.' The paper's 'Thought of the Day' was for 'The oppressed people of Harlow'.

This abuse continued the next day when the *Sun* sent a patriotic expedition made up of journalists and 'Page 3' models in to liberate Harlow and devoted a two-page spread to the stunt. (The paper devoted more space to Harlow than it did to the Khafji skirmish.) The efforts of the council chairperson, 'Sour' Sid Warner, a veteran of the Second World War, to protest his patriotism were buried beneath a deluge of hype. The *Sun* portrayed itself as patriotic, good humoured and fun-loving and the council 'Lefties' as a bunch of killjoy traitors.

One last aspect of the *Sun*'s war coverage deserves mention: its welcoming response to Neil Kinnock's wholehearted support for the war. On 18 February, a feature, 'Kinnock on the warpath', reported how the Gulf war had brought out the 'beast' in him. The article quoted an admirer saying: 'Neil puts the fist into pacifist . . . the Gulf War has brought out the British bulldog in him.' He was warmly praised for sacking or silencing critics of the war in the shadow cabinet, but the article reminded him that 'the biggest enemy he faces is in his own party'.

The Sun *never sets?*

The *Sun*'s success derives not so much from its chauvinism and right wing politics as from the humour, gossip, scandal, success and sex stories that it wraps around them. Most of its readers regard it more as a comic than as a traditional newspaper. From this point of view, its political interventions can best be seen as a kind of ventriloquism: it regards its readers as so many dummies and then proceeds to put words into their mouths, to speak on their behalf. However, in a poll conducted for the *Independent* and reported on 16 February, the *Sun* achieved the remarkable distinction of having more of its readers not trusting its Gulf coverage at all (35 per cent) than trusting it a great deal or a fair amount (29 per cent).

24 February 1991 JOHN NEWSINGER

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1 'The *Sun* does it again'. *New Statesman* (1 February 1991).
2 For an excellent account of the *Sun*'s racism, see Chris Searle, 'Your daily dose: racism and the *Sun*'. *Race and Class* (Vol. XXIX, No 1, Summer 1987).
3 Since the outbreak of the Gulf war, Bushell has also used his column to call for the internment of opponents of the war (18 January).

Book reviews

Israeli Cinema: East/West and the politics of representation

By ELLA SHOHAT (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1989). 312pp. $30.00

From the outset, the development of Jewish film-making in Palestine has been economically dependent on, and ideologically entangled with, Zionist institutions. Caught up financially in the state propaganda apparatus, most contemporary Jewish Israeli film-makers are so imbued with the authorised vision, so enfeebled by self-censorship, that their films rarely reflect more than political catatonia. With the exception of a few over-rated films which have exceeded the forbearance limits of the Israeli censor, Jewish cinema in Israel is merely an extension of the Zionist enterprise.

Yet, if film buffs do not think much of Israeli celluloid output, they should, nevertheless, take note of a formidable Israeli film critic. In her excellent, if massive, exposition, Ella Shohat exploits the best part of Israel's cinematic fiction to debunk the very Zionist myths which it promotes.

Fear of the Levant pervades all cultural expressions in Israel. It underpins Israel's political alliance with the West and haunts both the 'Left' and the Right of the Zionist European elite. Indeed, the view that Jewish immigrants from Arab countries display 'chronic laziness and hatred for work' and are 'only slightly better than the general level of the Arabs, Negroes and Berbers in the same regions' is common to most Zionists.[1] Israeli film-makers, Shohat demonstrates, merely disseminate the ideological apprehensions and prejudices of the Israeli European elite. Israeli cinema only mirrors the colonial attitudes of Israel's political leaders, as summed up by David Ben Gurion: 'We do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant which corrupts individuals and societies, and preserve the authentic Jewish values as

they crystallised in the Diaspora.' The invalidation of Arabs, particularly the Palestinians, and the marginalisation of the Sephardi Jews are maintained by the same social class which bred most Israeli film-makers. But in Israeli cinema, as in Israeli politics: 'If the Palestinian has been displaced, and the Sephardi is misplaced, the European immigrant and the Sabra, ironically, feel out of place.'

From the early propagandist Zionist documentaries to the later narcissistic melodramas of the so-called 'personal cinema', Palestinian Arabs and Sephardi Jews (especially immigrants from Arab countries) figure as mere extras, acting supporting parts to the main European-Jewish protagonist. These early narratives unfolded against suitably arid locations where the Utopian struggle of the visionary pioneer hero 'to make the desert bloom' is undermined by dehumanised, irrational, menacing Arabs (almost invariably impersonated by Sephardi Jews).[2] The European pioneer hero then gave way to the dreamer-redeemer Sabra (Ashkenazi) warrior who, in accord with official ideology, has 'no choice' but to engage in a perpetual war of self-defence against fanatical Arab hordes (mimicked by Sephardi Jews).[3] This genre, which Shohat terms 'The post-1948 heroic-nationalist', is marked by an inordinate Israeli compulsion to project a positive self-image abroad – a compulsion compounded of Israel's overtly expansionist policy and its hidden agenda of Arab expulsion.

The victory euphoria of the 1967 war, however, and the economic prosperity following it led to a Hollywood-oriented film practice (bigger budgets, larger casts, quick-paced editing) in which the image of the Jew on the defensive has been upstaged on screen by a larger than life Israeli soldier. With material aid from the Israeli Defence Force and in parallel with the shift to the right in Israeli politics, the new Sabra hero makes no apologies – for 'the only language they [Arabs] understand is power'. And his own moral superiority, bolstered now by mythological qualities such as manly comradeship in arms, courage and self-sacrifice, is all the more evident when juxtaposed against the cowardice and sadism of his Arab counterparts (roles usually assigned to Sephardi Jews).[4]

But, battle-fatigued and wearying of the collective Zionist burden, the film-makers of the 1970s turned against the prevailing tide by side-stepping the Israeli-Arab conflict altogether. In Yigal Burstein's words: 'It was a political act to be apolitical.'[5] Accordingly, the Sabra-Ashkenazi alienated anti-hero inhabits chic, closed interiors à la nouvelle vague, where only a judiciously placed oriental rug may betray the film's location. Indoors, sheltered from politics which film makers would not face or could not handle, the disillusioned protagonist was free to contemplate his own navel as peacefully as the outside (Sephardi) underworld or the intrusive (Sephardi) housemaid would allow.[6]

In 1982, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon polarised public opinion and generated a spate of award-winning films which featured the Israeli-Arab conflict, albeit as a backdrop to the Sabra experience. Well-intentioned Israeli film-makers attempted in these films to negotiate politically taboo subjects, and succeeded in augmenting the reductive stock of Palestinian images with some of Palestinians as blond, blue-eyed and super-positive. In a sense, the space secured for Palestinians in Israeli cinema is greater than that which is permitted in Israeli reality, but it is marginal nonetheless. The centre-stage is still occupied by an Ashkenazi Sabra, albeit a newly enlightened peace activist. His quest for peace is hindered by Sephardi Jews who are, as prominent leaders of the Peace Camp are on record as saying, 'fanatic' 'Arab haters'. As the narrative dwells on his predicament and dilemmas, it turns out that the plight of the Palestinians is ultimately his burden.[7]

In the annals of Israeli cinema, these films represent the proverbial giant leap forward, but their makers, like their main protagonists, remain in step with the Zionist Peace Camp consensus; as in the 'personal' films, they are trapped in a dead end. Their critical perspective never extends beyond a nostalgia for the so-called 'sane Zionism' of bygone days. So meek is the critical thrust of these films that even the Israeli right-wing establishment was quick to appreciate their export value as decisive proof that Israel is a pluralist democracy where dissent is not just assured, but even patronised.

Indeed, the image of Israel as 'the only democracy in the Middle East', where peace-seeking refugees from war-torn Europe, make something out of nothing while being besieged by hostile, backward Arab states, owes its potency largely to Israeli cinema. Although not substantial in volume, it is a cinema which is replete with elaborate subterfuge. As Shohat deciphers the myriad of codes, she subverts them to bring into sharp focus the mechanisms whereby the conflict between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jewish communities in Israel is overridden by the perceived expediency of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. But she does so with so much justice and so much sympathy for those whom she upbraids that the criticism itself becomes that much more compelling. This is not a book on the cinema alone, but on Middle Eastern history and politics as well – so comprehensive is its scope, so informed its arguments, so astute its analysis.

Jerusalem

M. HUTZPIT

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2 See, for example, Alexander Ford's *Sabra* (1933) and Baruch Dienar's *They were ten* (1961).
3 See, for example, Thorold Dickinson's *Hill 24 doesn't answer* (1955) and LarryFrich's *Pillar of fire* (1959).
4 Examples are Koby Jaeger's *60 hours to Suez* (1967); Rafael Nussbaum's *Target Tiran* (1968); Mauricio Lucidi's *Five days in Sinai* (1969); Menahem Golan's *The great escape* (1970) and his *Operation (Entebbe) Thunderbolt* (1976).
5 Yig'al Burstein, interview in *Kolnoa* (Summer 1987).
6 See Yehuda Ne'eman's *The paratroopers* (1977); Mira Rekanati's *A thousand little kisses* (1982), and Eitan Green's *Till the end of the night* (1986).
7 See, for example, Dan Wolman's *My Michael* (1974); Daniel Waxman's *Hamsin* (1982); Nissim Dayan's *A very narrow bridge* (1985); Raffi Bukai's *Avanti popolo* (1986), and Uri Barabash's *Beyond the walls* (1984).

Beirut Fragments: a war memoir

By JEAN MAKDISI (New York, Persea Books, 1990). 224pp. $17.95

Twenty years ago, if you told a Briton or American that you lived in Lebanon, the chances were high he or she would not know where Lebanon was. Today, the word 'Beirut' has passed into the world vocabulary as code for mindless violence, an end-case of societal breakdown. The irony of this apotheosis is that it hasn't added much to understanding. The new 'knowledge' stops far short of curiosity about the historical causes of violence, or of recognition of western and Israeli responsibility. Especially in the media, there has been an exclusive focus on westerners caught up in violence, such as hostages, without a corresponding degree of concern for thousands of indigenous victims.[1] Another irony is that recognition of an unbearable level of violence hasn't generated much interest in the survival of Lebanon's heterogenous population: what human and cultural resources enable the people inhabiting this dangerous environment to stay sane and carry on their projects? Anger at western self-distancing pulses through Makdisi's text:

> Outsiders look at Beirut from a wary distance, as though it had nothing to do with them; as though, through a protective glass partition, they were watching with immunity a patient thrash about in mortal agony, suffering a ghastly virus contracted in *forbidden and faraway places*. They speak of Beirut as if it were an aberration of human experience: It is not. Beirut was a city like any other and its people were a people like any other (emphasis added).

Devotees of this battered, cosmopolitan, corrupt and lively city will appreciate the love and skill with which Makdisi represents it. She is perhaps the first writer to make tangible the attaching quality of the city and its people: what makes so many stay on here in spite of an

apparently unstoppable conflict. Though written in English, presumably for a non-Arab audience, *Beirut Fragments* is recognisably the product of a specific social category and socio-cultural milieu. The milieu is West Beirut, with its multi-national, multi-sect, poly-cultural population, and permeable class boundaries. The category may be termed 'radical intellectuals', a group characterised by their progressivism and political/cultural Arabism. Sustained economically by a large complex of teaching and publishing institutions, enriched by exiles from several neighbouring areas (notably Palestine), Beirut's 'radical intellectuals' have been exceptionally productive over the last four decades. Makdisi speaks from and for them, not in terms of official manifestos, but in her concern for socio-economic inequality, in her sensitive descriptions of 'ordinary' people, and in the testimony she offers to the continued vitality of the 'radical intellectuals'' moral world. Staying on, *sumood*, has not been an easy option for anyone, and Makdisi well conveys the depression those who stay suffer as friends depart. Yet, in the end, *sumood* has its rewards: 'Those who are outside looking in see only the war. For us, there are people, friends, activity, life, production, commitments, a profound intensity of meaning.' Where the Beirut-stereotype suggests a world of individualism gone wild, Makdisi reveals functioning institutions, vital relationships, and purposes upheld.

One of the strengths of Makdisi's narrative is that it conveys both what is specific about Beirutis' way of living the war – their code for describing it, their attachment to parties, hair-dos and anecdotes, their sympathy with the fearful – and also what is universal: parental worry, fear, boredom, disillusion with politicians. She catches the awful humdrumness of unrelieved tension ('I have a constant headache and have noticed lately that my right eye . . . blinks repeatedly . . . My smoking gets on my husband's nerves almost as much as his complaints about it get on mine'). At the same time, her descriptions of the Beirut scene and atmosphere are sharply perceptive. She tells many *nuqat*, the jokes and anecdotes with which Beirutis entertain each other, relieve tension and engrave events in popular memory. One of these perfectly conveys the war's surrealism: a large car-bomb has just exploded near West Beirut's most luxurious beach club. Hardly have the ambulances 'carried away the human debris . . . than another procession of cars started arriving at Summerland. The YWCA Green Thumb Club was holding its annual spring flower show.'

In an introduction about *how* a war as destructive and terrible as this one can be written about, Makdisi says she first thought of making a collection of *nuqat*, but rejected the idea as bound to mask the war's true, everyday horror. This she does not blench from, writing of the death of friends, burned babies on television and the disintegration of

a once-beautiful city.

A second strength of *Beirut Fragments* is the way it interleaves social description with personal narrative. Makdisi's autobiography reflects the displacements and disjunctures that have torn apart the modern Middle East: her subjectivity is both imprinted by violence and reflects upon it. Born in Jerusalem, she can just remember the war of 1948, its effects upon her parents and family. Exiled in Cairo, she attended English school and Protestant church (as the Allies attacked the Suez Canal, the pastor preached the defeat of Pharaoh's army). From Cairo she moved on to a liberal arts college in America, and her first experience of American anti-Arab racism. In a fourth stage, she married and returned to the Middle East. Her outsider/insider status in the Arab world (Protestant, foreign-educated, female) endows her reflections on issues such as tradition and gender with a special acuity. On biculturalism, for example:

> Thus I became hostage to a past from which I might have been freed, that I might have shed as naturally as a snake its old skin, had I – or it – been left in peace. Under attack, we were shackled together, the past and I.

Not the least interesting part of Makdisi's personal narrative is what it reveals about her as 'Middle Eastern woman'. A feminist, she nonetheless criticises an American woman's lecture on feminism as 'missing the point . . . she had produced not an argument based on the real experience of women here, but an ideology ready for immediate consumption'. Her own feminism emerges obliquely, partly through pride: 'Women grew in the war.' The attacks against Beirut, her adopted city, have the effect of welding its history to hers: 'Sharing that pain, and writing about it, I came to love the place. Writing about Beirut, I attached myself to it . . . and made it mine, and myself part of it . . . A new woman grew up in me.' Far from passive victims, Middle Eastern women are shown confronting violence, refusing its logic, creating themselves anew.

The abundance of women's writing about war in Lebanon suggests how much the (male) politicians' inability to stop the violence has opened the way for women's voices. Several discussions of this phenomenal uprush of creativity have appeared.[2] *Beirut Fragments* points to yet another characteristic of women's writing about the war, its bypassing of 'official' forms (history, chronology, memoirs, political manifestos), in order to focus on war as lived, personal collective experience. Makdisi does not totally ignore the sanctified, male-dominated sphere of politics, but she doesn't prioritise it. This is not a book of 'information': few political leaders are named, political parties and militias aren't systematically listed, nor their platforms outlined. In insisting on writing testimony, Makdisi implicitly over-

turns the public/personal hierarchy, ideological underpinning of patriarchy, that has held sway for so long, here and everywhere.

Beirut ROSEMARY SAYIGH

References

1 It would be unfair not to credit journalists who have held out against head offices' obsession with the hostages: Julie Flint in the *Guardian*, Robert Fiske in his *Pity the Nation* and Jim Muir on the BBC have all, in different ways, 'spoken for' the local population.

2 See especially M. Cooke, *War's Other Voices: women writers on the Lebanese civil war* (Cambridge, CUP, 1987) and E. Accad, 'Guerre et sexualité dans le roman libanais' in *Les Cahiers du Grif* (no 43/44, spring 1990).

Teaching Black Literature

By SUZANNE SCAFE (London, Virago, 1989). 111pp. £5.99

Educational institutions, Scafe argues in her exploration of the teaching and writing of black literature, rob intellectual thought and traditions of both their political content and their historical context. What has been selected and taught as 'literature' in British schools is no exception. It is based on a tradition which assumes that 'great' literature transcends ideology and aspires to universal value. This is the context within which black writing has to function. But because black writing is often overtly political and expresses opposition, both in content and in form, it has been relegated to the margins of what is acceptable as 'literature'.

Where schools and colleges have moved on from a monocultural approach, the introduction of a few black texts into the literature curriculum has posed all the problems of the kind of multicultural education which has so often been criticised in this journal. Scafe points out that it is hardly surprising that many black students reject the introduction of these few black texts as little more than tokenism. For it leaves the norms of the curriculum unchanged, the assumptions of traditional 'literature' unchallenged, and the oppositional nature of black writing unexplored. Black students understand perfectly that these works do not have the same status as the accepted body of literature and that they are introduced as a concession, to give them something to identify with from 'their culture' so that they can develop 'positive self-images' – without any consideration of the socio-historical and political circumstances which deemed their cultures (and so their 'self-images') inferior in the first place. In the process, the texts become an ethnography for teachers, an illumination of the sociological and economic problems in black communities. They are

seen as having a 'particularistic' rather than 'universal' function, and thus are devalued as 'literature'. Furthermore, black students are not, as teachers have widely assumed, culturally deficient: their culture has its own integrity but they know it has no place in the classroom. Students' refusal to take these works seriously is either because its introduction reinforces their feelings about 'otherness' and 'inferiority', or because it allows teachers to take over an aspect of their culture which has been used to subvert.

Scafe's argument is that black literature is of real value to English teaching when it compels students, reading it alongside other texts, to question not only the form and nature of black literature itself, but also the 'universal' assumptions of an 'English literature' which has excluded a range of cultural experiences. Students are helped to challenge the safe interpretations handed down by tradition, but only if the full challenge black literature offers (in its deliberate opposition to dominant literary modes) is acknowledged and understood. Most black writers treat the practice of writing as central to their community's political life; hence the distinction between the literary and the political becomes blurred. Their texts should be read as they define themselves: active participants in larger social and historical processes.

The great merit of this book is that it explores arguments, in all their complexity, which are vital not just to all teachers of literature, but also to educationalists in the debate about multicultural education. My only disappointment with Scafe's work is that, in the necessity to assert the full challenge of black literature, there is a tendency to let it be assumed that black literature, by its very nature, is oppositional. This precludes a discussion of the problems of reading works by black writers who are the 'mimic men' of the canon: Naipaul for example, into whose work (satires of post-colonial societies) is projected an education that affiliates him with middle-class, metropolitan society.

Middlesex Polytechnic TAMARA JAKUBOWSKA

Sickle Cell Disease: a guide for health workers, patients and carers.

By IAN FRANKLIN (London, Faber and Faber, 1990). 128pp, £3.99

Sickle cell disease, a group of inherited blood disorders, primarily affects those of African origin, although others such as people from Asian and the Mediterranean can be and are affected. It derives its name from the fact that under certain conditions the red blood cells, which are normally round, become sickle shaped and subsequently

block some of the tiny blood vessels in the body. This leads to severe pain in a situation known as 'crisis'. Although sickle cell can be severely debilitating and the complications potentially fatal, it remains firmly on the bottom of the health care agenda in the allocation of resources, research funding and service provision, even in those areas which house large black communities. Those who have the disease continue to be marginalised, mismanaged and often mistreated when they arrive at their GP's surgery or in hospital casualty departments for assistance. For sickle cell is a disease strongly associated with Blacks, which supports the idea of a Black pathology, and the NHS, despite its claims to provide equal and free treatment to all, has failed consistently on both race and class grounds. Black health needs have always been neglected and Franklin's claim that this book is 'the first of its kind' is an ironic testimony to this neglect.

It is in this sense a valuable book, well overdue, which provides both health care professionals, sufferers and their families with a detailed description of the disease, beginning with aetiology – as a defence mechanism against malaria in countries where malaria is endemic – and concluding by questioning whether there will ever be a solution for this as yet incurable condition. In between, the book is packed with facts, explaining the spread of the disease throughout the diaspora, via slavery initially and later postwar immigration, and its transmission through genetic, not infective, processes. The full medical effects of the disease, such as kidney failure and anaemia, are noted, nor is its social impact omitted – children suffer loss of schooling, while for adults occupational opportunities are reduced due to prolonged or frequent absences.

For the providers of care, treatment procedures are outlined, whilst for the patient, clear and practical advice and reassurance are given on a range of issues (for example, fertility, pregnancy, enuresis, priapism), as is information on the available benefits and the pros and cons of disability allowance. Useful comparisons are made throughout between the UK and US, such as on the ethics of testing. In the US, individuals with positive results have been the target of discrimination by insurance agencies. In the UK, testing remains unorganised and arbitrary, with those screened often oblivious of the results or the implications of either having the disease or being a 'healthy carrier'.

A chapter is dedicated to pain relief, attempting to highlight the problems patients face in getting adequate analgesia (usually potentially addictive opiates) from staff influenced by stereotypes about 'Blacks' and 'drug abuse' or who do not believe how severe the pain can really be. The 'fear, uncertainty and distrust' of the mainly white staff when dealing with mainly Black patients is discussed, and the author argues for the need for improved communication links between the two if any appreciable changes are to be made. Franklin

emphasises throughout the importance of all patients, not only Blacks, taking a more active role in their health care. Also important is Franklin's acknowledgement of the part environmental and social factors, such as poor or damp housing, play in precipitating crises and exacerbating the condition.

One of the concluding chapters is dedicated to the role of self-help groups like OSCAR, the Organisation for Sickle Cell Anaemia Research, which have helped achieve whatever small gains there have been over the years. The book explores further what can be done to expedite the slow process of change when 'resources and services are already lagging ten years behind demand', and recommends education to increase understanding and awareness amongst health care professionals, the Black community and the general public. One wonders, however, how this is to be achieved without a deeper understanding of racism in general. For, ultimately, the book fails to comprehend that health care does not exist in a vacuum outside the wider societal structures of entrenched racism. Nevertheless, it remains a useful and practical handbook in an area where there is a dearth of resources.

London ANITA MAYNARD

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