

# Palestinians Maligned by Hebrew Press

stream newspapers, which is to play down and ignore Palestinian national identity in general, whether expressed by Israeli citizens inside the green line or by residents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The mainstream Israeli press has a reputation in the West for being democratic because it is frequently critical of the policies of its government. Those who laud the democracy of the Israeli press rarely pause to consider its outlook on Palestinian issues. In that arena, its record is not impressive.

A brief survey of Israeli newspapers reveals that the major papers do not differ significantly from one another on Palestinian issues, despite substantial variation between them on domestic issues. Their democratic scope is narrow and selective. The "non-Jews" do not fall within its boundaries. On the contrary, the Palestinian population is generally ignored or slandered by most mainstream Israeli newspapers through various means — the use of demeaning terminology, favouritism for stories portraying Arabs in a negative light, reliance on only Israeli sources and "trial by newspaper," the practice of condemning detained Arabs for crimes before any evidence against them is confirmed. The two evening newspapers *Ma'ariv* and *Yediot Aharanot* and the new morning *Hadashot* are the worst offenders.

Antoine Shainat, a Palestinian journalist and a regular reader of the Israeli Hebrew press, told *Al Fajr*. "It is very sad that despite the fact that there have been major political changes in the national Palestinian struggle re-enforcing and publicising Palestinian nationalism, the Israeli press has undergone only superficial changes with regard to its attitudes towards the Palestinians." Hani Issawi, a Hebrew-Arabic translator for a Palestinian newspaper echoed the same attitude: "The Israeli newspapers have failed to rid themselves of their prejudices towards Palestinians and to deal with their affairs objectively."

Not all the Israeli newspapers are as biased as *Yediot Aharanot*, *Ma'ariv* and *Hadashot* in handling issues related to Palestinians. For example the Hebrew *Al Hamishmar* — the mouthpiece of Mapam *HaAretz* — an independent liberal paper, *Davar* — the organ of the Histadrut workers' federation and the English *Jerusalem Post*, which is close to the Labour Party, are more restrained than the evening newspapers. They don't often publish articles reflecting open anti-Arab hatred or urging the use of

force against Arabs, as *Yediot*, *Ma'ariv* and *Hadashot* are prone to do.

## Press Mirrors Government Views

Overall, the Israeli press is strongly committed to serving the interests of the state of Israel. "The close relationship between the Israeli press and the Zionist establishment and the fact that the Israeli press upholds Zionism explains why the Israeli press has served as the mouthpiece of its government," Michal Shwartz, an Israeli progressive and a local journalist, told *Al Fajr*.

The Israeli press does not separate itself from the Israeli Zionist establishment. The variety of opinions published in the Israeli newspapers does not alter this fact; they are differences of opinion over tactics rather than objectives.

According to Shwartz, the Israeli press willingly carries out self-censorship. For example, if the publication of a certain article might threaten "the security of the state" — given a broad interpretation by Israeli editors — they prefer not to publish it. Shwartz brought up the example of the number of soldiers who have been killed in Lebanon. She says that although the Israeli public does not believe the official figure for the number of dead, none of the Israeli

newspapers, liberal or extreme, have been ready to refute this figure. Even the existence of Ansar detention camp in south Lebanon was not published in the Israeli press "until it became the talk of the town," said Shwartz.

Well-known moderate writers like Zvi Bar'el, (*HaAretz*), Dani Rubinstein, (*Davar*) Yehuda Litani (*HaAretz*), Amos Kanaan (*Yediot*) and others who are critical of oppressive and discriminatory Israeli policies against Palestinians in the occupied territories reflect only their own viewpoints and often deviate from the official political line of their newspapers. It is true that Israeli democracy permits publication of dissenting opinions. But dissent has limits. Even these writers, who can be strident opponents of occupation, do not avow support for a Palestinian state under the leadership of the PLO. This is consistent with the general policy of all the main-

## Special Terms For Palestinians

The government policy of belittling all things Palestinian or nationalistic — characterised by Prime Minister Golda Meir's famous 1967 statement "There is no Palestinian people" — is carefully observed by the journalistic establishment in Israel. To avoid any mention of "Palestinians" or "Palestinian people," the Israeli newspapers, both liberal and right-wing, have opted for their own terms to deny the national existence of the Palestinian people. For instance, Palestinians who remained within the 1948 borders of Israel are described in ethnic rather than national terms, as the "Arab minority," the "sons of the minorities," "the Arab sector," "Israeli Arabs." The phrase "Palestinian personalities" or "figures" is never used to describe leaders or well-known people.

With regard to the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, most of the Israeli newspapers now use the Likud's semantic terms "Judea and Samaria," or the phrase "administered territories." Recently *The Jerusalem Post* and *Al Hamishmar* have begun using both terms. The *Post* has been known to use three different terms — of varied political meaning — in the same article: West Bank Judea and Samaria, and administered territories. With the exception of *Al Hamishmar* and the weekly *HaOlam HaZeh*, a leftist paper that reflects the political viewpoint of its editor, Uri Avneri, who supports a Palestinian state under the leadership of the PLO, all Israeli papers avoid using the term occupied territories.

## A Leadership Denied

The Israeli press has always portrayed Palestinian national figures as nationalist extremists, thus preparing the way for action against them. Palestinians who cooperate with the Israelis, like village league members and the few mayors who cooperate with the Village

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League, are consistently depicted as moderate and rational. This applies also to Mapam's *Al Hamishmar*, which recently ran a series of articles by its West Bank correspondent, Pinhas Anbery, about the Jordan option. He terms those who support the Jordanian option "moderates" and those who oppose it "extremists."

Moreover, there is a definitely asymmetrical selection of newsworthy items on Palestinians. Little reporting on Palestinian culture or politics appears but news which depicts Palestinians in a negative light appears frequently and is given prominent coverage.

Family disputes and quarrels in Palestinian villages occupy an inordinate amount of press space compared to the destruction of Palestinian houses, confiscation of land, the closure of universities, arrests, or the severe lack of development in Palestinian villages, which are ignored by most of the papers. For example, the fight which broke out between two *hamulas* (extended families) in the Galilee village of Kufr Manda last summer was played up in the Israeli press. *HaAretz* ran a two-page feature with pictures in its weekly supplement.

### No Palestinian Sources

For many problems of concern to Palestinians, the primary sources of information for Israeli journalists are Israeli officials, the police, the military government or other establishment circles. This does not mean the Israeli press always lacks objectivity in covering Palestinian issues. *Al Hamishmar* and *HaAretz* might carry good coverage of a Palestinian demonstration being forcibly dispersed by the Israeli army, or an arrest campaign.

But this is not the journalistic rule. *HaAretz* and *Yediot* published a news item November 30 about the arrest of a Palestinian lawyer from Um al-Fahm which lacked journalistic objectivity. The papers published only the police view on the case, and reported that the lawyer was accused of heading a "violent cell which planned to settle accounts with people in the area on a personal and political basis."

The lawyer was released three weeks later and the charge proved baseless. *HaAretz* and *Yediot* used no source other than the police. They had not visited the village where the lawyer lives to meet his family and hear another view of the affair. This omission was especially grave given that the lawyer's colleagues were calling the arrest a

political frame-up.

In general, Israeli newspapers are satisfied with quoting only official sources about arrest cases and ignoring the victim.

### Incitement

The Israeli press is skilled at arousing public wrath against Palestinians, especially those living inside Israel. If a Palestinian flag is hoisted in a village in the Galilee or the Triangle; if a stone is thrown at an Israeli car; if a Palestinian is accused of murdering an Israeli; or if there is a demonstration against a land confiscation, the Israeli press rushes to fill its pages with condemnatory articles against the general Palestinian community in Israel, and warns against what is often called "unrestrained Arab nationalism." Terms such as "dangerous phenomenon," "time bomb," "the Israeli Arabs are becoming extreme and hostile to the state," often appear in Israeli papers.

### Trial By Newspaper

Recently two incidents swept the Israeli press into a whirlwind of incitement against the Palestinians in Israel: last year's kidnapping and brutal killing of Dany Katz, an Israeli teenager from Haifa, and the murder of a female soldier, Hadas Kedmi, last December.

In the first case, five Palestinians, three from Sakhnin and two from Haifa, have been charged. Although the prosecution has not yet provided concrete evidence linking any of the accused to the crime, the Israeli press, mainly the Hebrew dailies, promoted a fear-and-hate campaign against the Palestinian community. *Yediot* and *Ma'ariv* ran interviews with the child's father who made racist statements against Arabs, calling them "murderers" and "animals." He demanded the destruction of the houses of the accused and the expulsion of their families, and he threatened that "if they do not learn this way then all Arabs must be expelled." The papers highlighted what the police and the father said. None of the lawyers defending the accused were interviewed, nor were the families of the accused, despite the lack of evidence in the case. Statements issued by Sakhnin's local council and other local council heads condemning the murder and calling on the Israeli press to refrain from passing judgement

on the case before a verdict is reached, passed almost unnoticed in most of the Israeli newspapers.

The incitement campaign reached almost mass hysteria with the unsolved murder of female soldier Hadas Kedmi last December. On December second, just two days after Kedmi disappeared, *Ma'ariv* presumptuously wrote: "There is fear among the investigators that the female soldier Hadas Kedmi was kidnapped by terrorists [Palestinians]." The paper opened its article by saying the soldier "disappeared last Thursday, the closing day of the Palestinian National Council in Amman, and this causes concern to the police and the IDF... the fear is that Hadas disappeared on the basis of a hostile action, to mark this event."

*Ma'ariv's* article was just the tip of an intensive and unrestrained campaign against Palestinians which followed.

On December 7 *Davar* dug up an old myth of murder as a political initiation rite among Palestinians. "Is it possible that the people who want to join the terrorist organisations attempt to prove their ability in kidnapping and murder of soldiers and civilians from isolated areas?" The writer answers this question with the help of a "terror expert" as follows: "The kidnapping and the murder incidents, according to Dr Marari (director of the terror project in the Tel Aviv Strategic Studies Centre), were perpetrated by extremists who operate out of national motivation."

As the campaign continued, *Ma'ariv* returned to the theme of a fifth column: "A senior officer in the Israeli police said that if it finally emerges that Hadas Kedmi's vicious murder was committed by Israeli Arabs for nationalist motives, then the state will not be able to evade the fact that there is new situation which necessitates reconsideration of internal security by those responsible."

The *Ma'ariv* writer added, "The results of this investigation will greatly determine the future of relations between Arabs and Jews in the state." The writer then quoted a statement made a few months ago by former Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan to back his viewpoint. Eitan asserted that the PLO's prerequisite for Palestinians trying to join "terrorist organisations" was that they kill a Jew."

These accusations, and many others, are not based on fact but on prejudiced ideas and prevailing Israeli opinion about Palestinians. There has been no single case in which it was definitely established that an Arab killed

a Jew in order to qualify for admittance to a Palestinian organisation. And in Kedmi's case, all this was written before the body was discovered a week later.

On December 12 *Hadashot* and *Al Hamishmar* reported that a "senior police source stated that the incident is connected with a criminal action, and not hostile terrorist action, as we thought in the beginning... especially when we take into account the fact that no terrorist organisation has claimed responsibility."

Despite the journalistic backtracking it is doubtful whether the impression created by the Israeli newspapers against Palestinians would be so easily erased from the minds of the Israeli public.

In conclusion, while relatively open as far as Israeli Jewish issues are concerned, the Israeli newspapers' handling of Palestinian issues is generally characterised by prejudice, ignorance and the tendency to pass baseless and hasty judgements. The shortcomings can be traced primarily to the fact that the Israeli press is inseparably intertwined with government policy and interests. Hence it is not surprising that the government policy of denial and discrimination is reflected in the pages of Hebrew dailies.

JERUSALEM POST FEB 6 1985 LETTER TO EDITOR

### THE PHALANGE'S INTENTIONS

To The Editor of *The Jerusalem Post*

Sir, - In an article entitled "Jury divided over how much Sharon knew" (January 21), a juror, Patricia de Loatch, told NBC-TV, "In my mind and in the mind of the rest of the jury, he knew (a massacre) would happen. I'm sorry, but he definitely knew."

I interviewed Major Etienne Saqr ('Abu Arz'), the leader of the Phalange's 'Guardians of the Cedars' in Beirut seven weeks before the Sabra and Shatilla massacre. In an article, "Great Expectation" (July 23, 1982), I reported the conversation. Allow me to quote:

"What about the PLO and the Palestinians?" I ask.

"We don't care what happens to the PLO, they are secondary; in fact, they are your problem. It is the Palestinians we have to deal with. Ten years ago there were 84,000; now there are between 600,000 and 700,000. In six years they will be 2 million. We can't let it come to that."

"What is your solution?"

"Very simple, *monsieur*. We shall drive them to the borders of 'brotherly' Syria and tell them to keep walking. Anyone who looks back, stops or returns will be shot on

the spot. The mere threat of this will force the Arab states to accept them. We have the moral right reinforced by well-organized PR plans and political preparation. After all, they have killed 120,000 of our people and displaced 500,000."

"Are you able to implement this threat?"

He does not blink an eyelid. "Of course we can. And we shall."

When I suggest that such harsh procedures might put the Christian world against them, he simply says: "We are the Christian World."

If a free-lance journalist can learn the Phalange's intentions, surely the Minister of Defence, Mr. Sharon, with many highly trained information services at his disposal, could have known what was likely to happen.

WIM VAN LEER

Jerusalem.

For article entitled "Great Expectation", see MPR Vol 111, No 31, p. 218.