

The Link

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About This Issue

"Write your own history!"

That was the mandate delivered last February by Edward Said of Columbia University to students at Palestine's Bethlehem University.

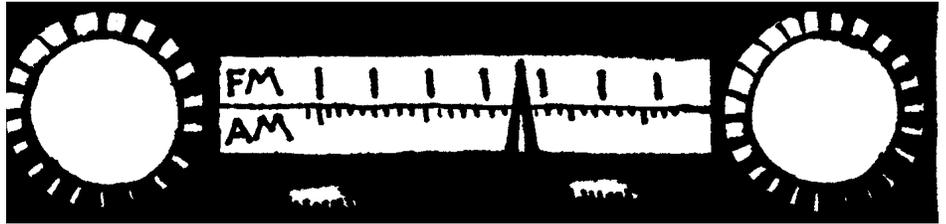
And he offered them an example: Each time I check my E-mail, I find copies of E-mail sent by a young Palestinian to radio stations, TV reporters, and newspaper editors, commenting on their coverage of the Palestinian issue. In his effective, electronic way, said Said, this man, Ali Abunimah, is writing his own history every day.

For the past four months, I too have been checking my E-mail each day in anticipation of Ali's perceptive, well-honed responses. Nor am I alone. By word of modem, as it were, Ali now has over 200 on his 'cc' list. Even NPR News interviews him!

When we asked Ali, a researcher at the University of Chicago, to write for us, he noted that it's one thing to type a 100-word reply and quite another to turn out a 10,000-word article, something he had never attempted. Consider it an "attachment," we suggested, a postscript to all those hundreds of E-mails that explains why a person devotes a chunk of his time each day to what appears to be an exercise in frustration, if not futility. That's the story we wanted to "download" in this issue.

Rod Driver (*Link*, July-August 1998) did not win the Rhode Island primary. But he did win. See page 14.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director



Dear NPR News...

BY ALI ABUNIMAH

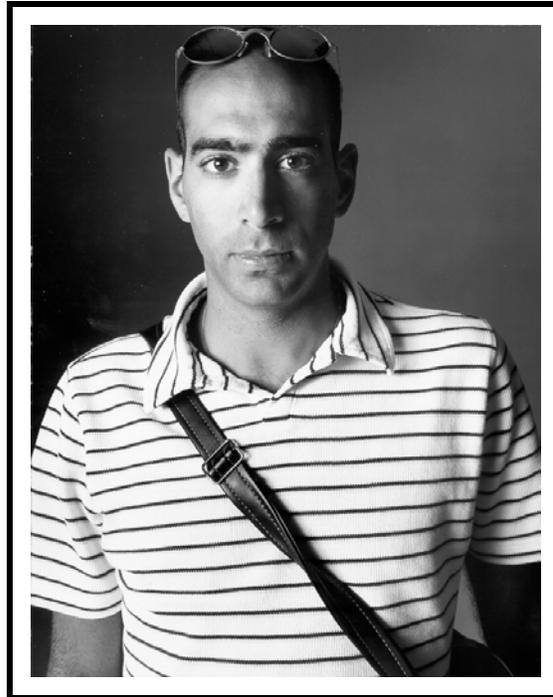
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Crossing the River

I don't know if I had expected to hear an appropriately evocative soundtrack of the sort that accompanies dramatic moments in movies. I remember being intensely aware only of the peeling sound of tires on concrete and the strains of the narrow metal bridge as the bus carried us across the River Jordan. September 6, 1996, was a day I had waited for and imagined for most of my 25 years.

It was the day I entered Palestine.

The Sheikh Hussein crossing between Israel and Jordan, far to the north of Amman and Jerusalem, is supposed to resemble a "normal" international border where tourists cross as a matter of routine. It has bureaux de change and a mural of giant doves emblazoned with the words "Peace, Shalom, Salaam." But it is a parody of a border. The other passengers and I were merely pretending to be tourists with our single-entry tourist visas granting us

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14-day visits. As the bus bounced across the metal bridge as though on a rusty spring mattress, the watchtowers and machine gun posts reminded us where we were going.

As soon as we stepped off the bus, I was singled out by the Israeli police, who all looked identical in fashionable Oakley sunglasses and crew cuts. My cousin Zaki, in his early sixties, was allowed to go through the regular line with the other passengers, mostly older Palestinians with Jordanian or Israeli citizenship coming or going to visit relatives and lives left behind on the other side of the river.

I was taken aside to a metal trestle table where all my belongings were laid out. The Israeli officer addressed me in heavily accented, incomprehensible Arabic. He barked an order several times, to which I could only respond with bafflement. Finally, exasperated, he pointed at his sunglasses. "Ah!" I said in Hebrew, "you want me to remove my sunglasses!" I took them off, and he spoke now in Hebrew, "A Jordanian who speaks Hebrew? That I have never seen." "Don't be so surprised," I answered entirely untruthfully, "most of us speak it. It is just like an easy

dialect of Arabic."

After a thorough examination of my clothes, batteries, razor blades, books (I made sure to bring several of my favorites by Edward Said, as I had just heard that the Palestinian Authority had banned them), and a lot of questions, I was asked to proceed to passport control.

"Where are you going?" the woman asked.

"To Jerusalem," I replied.

"How long do you plan to stay in Israel?"

"I do not plan to spend any time in Israel. I shall spend all of my time in Jerusalem and the Occupied Territories."

This elicited only a glare, and a warning: "Do not exceed 14 days or you will not get another visa."

As soon as we got to Jerusalem, I asked Zaki to take me to Lifta, my mother's village. Lifta was a town of approximately 8,000 people located just to the northwest of Jerusalem, not far from Deir Yassin. It was one of the first Palestinian towns to be attacked by Zionist forces in late December 1947. By January 1948, the residents had fled the frequent terrorist attacks and sought shelter with friends and neighbors on safer ground.

My grandfather took his family to stay in the Baq'a neighborhood of Jerusalem—until the massacre at Deir Yassin. "Then we left," my mother says, and—like all who tell this story—adds, "We didn't think we would ever see our home again." My mother's family went to Jordan, which proved to be a safe haven. Because my grandfather owned property in the West Bank and Jordan, the family was able to get back on its feet, despite the loss of everything they had in Lifta and West Jerusalem.

Lifta was built on a steep incline. Much of the upper village, where my mother's family lived, has been

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demolished or incorporated into Jewish West Jerusalem. Jewish families now inhabit the finest houses. The lower village remains derelict, but largely intact, waiting for its inhabitants to return and finish what they were doing the day they left 50 years ago. Marked by a sign erected by the Israeli Committee to Protect Nature, a rocky path leads down into the village, winding among empty houses and long grass. High above, the Israelis are building an overpass, and the entrance to Lifta is a staging ground for construction crews and bulldozers. Lower Lifta is uninhabited except by the crickets and lizards that never left. In the center is a waterhole where young Orthodox Jewish men come to swim, away from prying eyes.

No one bothers me that day as I climb down, leaving Zaki waiting at the top of the slope, where the taxi had dropped us off. It is intensely hot. I try to stay out of sight, and clamber among the ruins and the brush, the rusty oil cans and tattered plastic bags. Inside many of the houses that still have roofs are the charred remains of campfires and the debris left behind by squatters. In others houses, open to the sky, bright patterned terracotta floors are washed by the rain and swept by the wind, as if they were proud owners tending to their dwellings.

Sometimes I stand in what had been a bedroom, a kitchen, a front yard, or an alley between two houses. I try to listen for the sounds of Lifta, of the life my mother told me about, of children running home from school and women calling after them, of men returning from Jerusalem and drinking tea on shady porches.

I climb up a steep slope to a house that appears intact. There is a gate and the front door is open. I enter, my heart beating fast. I find a small library, full of Jewish religious books, a table, a few chairs and a sink. I think of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Fearing being caught and arrested within my first few hours in the country, I scramble up the hillside as fast as I can. I leave Lifta, determined to return with my mother. Scratched and covered with dust, I return to Zaki. At the main road we try to hail a taxi, but this is West Jerusalem on a Friday afternoon, and the drivers ignore us as they rush home for Shabbat.

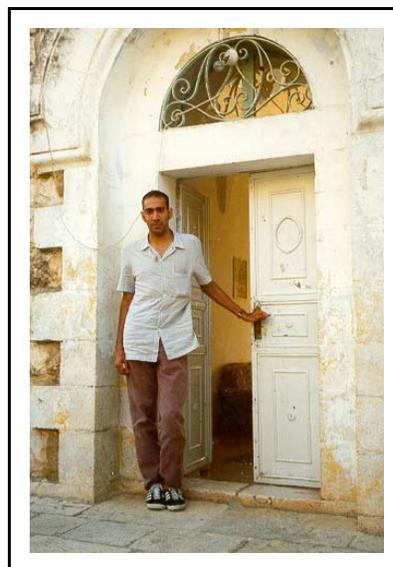
In the searing afternoon heat we begin walking, hoping eventually to encounter a route where an Arab minibus "servis" runs back to East Jerusalem. From behind, a car blows its horn at us. It is Zaki's son-in-law, Brahim, who has those most precious commodities—a Jerusalem identity card and a car with yellow license plates. These allow him the privilege of entering his own city, a right denied to most of the two million Palestinians who live in the occupied West Bank.

He is on his way home from the Israeli settlement of Ramot in the West Bank, just north of Lifta, where he and many other Palestinians do construction work in order to feed their families. Amazed by the coincidence, we greet him gratefully. He offers to drive us to Battir, my father's village near Bethlehem, where my relatives have prepared a feast for my first homecoming.

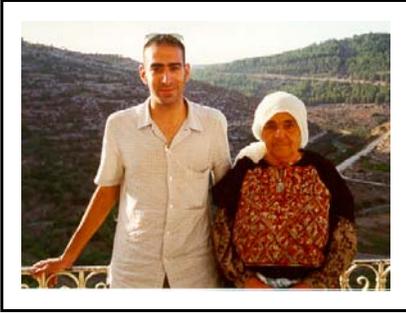
Over the next few days, Brahim would be our guide, and I would learn much about the system of roadblocks and pass laws that prevents Palestinians from entering the Holy City. "*Nseena al-Quds*" ("We have forgotten what Jerusalem looks like."), my aunt says later as we sit on her porch in Battir, eating fruits, drinking tea, and watching Jerusalem's lights blink on in the twilight.

I try to remember my emotions on that day. It wasn't the sadness or anger I had expected. I felt no hatred, even toward the Israelis enjoying a picnic and a swim in what had once been the center of Lifta. Coming across them enjoying a private moment, I had felt myself the intruder. We all are instilled with a sense of propriety and manners, and these feelings seemed to overtake my knowledge of history and the injustices that had transpired among those hills.

But perhaps I was too overwhelmed to feel anything and too busy trying to take as many photos as possible to bring back to my parents. I felt nothing as intensely then as I do now when I look at those pictures, or turn over in my hand the stones from Lifta's broken houses, or listen to the recording I made of my father's sisters singing joyful songs of welcome when I came to Battir for the first time. One sticks in my head and I hear them now as I think of the day I first crossed the river. My aunts clap and sway and sing:



The author at the entryway of the home where his father was born. – Battir, Occupied West Bank, September 1996



With father's
sister in Battir,
1996.

On the iron bridge I met him
On the iron bridge he met me
I saw him from afar
I said "That is Ali!"
I saw him from afar

They are five sisters who have lived in Battir through Ottoman, British, Jordanian and, since 1967, Israeli rule. They carry in their songs the stories of the village and of events and people long since dead. They married young and worked hard all their lives. They never had the opportunity to go to school; they do not read and write, but they are living encyclopedias of the history of Battir and its people. When the first of my aunts died last year, she took with her one-fifth of our history. As far as I know, the tape I made is the only recording that exists of her singing.

The following May, I did return to Palestine with my parents, who had not been to the West Bank since 1967, or to West Jerusalem since 1948. "I didn't think this city really existed any more. I never imagined it was actually possible to come back here," my father said as we stood in the Jerusalem railway station that he knew as a boy.

But I think it is a place he visits every day. And what is so strange about that? Palestine exists because Palestinians have chosen to remember it. But memories fade and people die, and some are better at remembering than others. Memory is no longer enough. It is time to write history and for each of us to become a historian.

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I became known to *The Link* because I send E-mail--quite a lot of it--to the news media, particularly to National Public Radio (NPR). Over the past two and a half years I have sent several hundred letters to NPR. That is my small way of documenting history. It is the best I can do from my desk here in Chicago, but it turns out that from such an ordinary situation you can do more than you would have imagined possible. *The Link* asked me to write about my motivation, my strategy, and

my successes. I do not claim to have a strategy, and successes are few and relatively insignificant when held up against the great setbacks Palestinians have suffered in recent years. But I cannot separate my motivation from a few experiences that made me determined not to allow others, particularly the media's representation of the Middle East, to decide what is, what was and what will be.

We all have the ability to resist injustice in small ways. Each of us has committed injustice and experienced it--so we know injustice when we see it. Once I discovered how far and fast the Internet allowed me to reach, the tool became irresistible. What I am doing requires no special skill or experience. Others are engaged in similar efforts in a thousand different ways every day: trying to tell the truth, to hold people in power accountable, and to be a witness for those who, because of their circumstances, do not have the freedom or the ability to speak. I try to follow the examples I see, and to be an example. I speak for no one but myself.

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I have seen the refugee camps in Jordan and the misery in which exile is lived. I grew up far from that, in the safety and security of Europe and the United States. This position of comfortable privilege coexisted with the feeling of never quite belonging, wherever we were. I was born in the United States but, because my father was a diplomat at the time, I could not be a citizen. I carry a Jordanian passport and, although I love that country, I have never lived there. I grew up in England and Belgium, but I have no right to live or work in either place. And the country my parents were born in, I am told, does not exist. So, perhaps I can be forgiven for cringing whenever people ask, "Where are you from?" It's not that I have any confusion about it. It's just that sometimes it's hard to explain that I come from a story, not just from a place.

Typical of their generation, my parents always put my education and my sisters' above everything else. They had seen its power in their own lives. After finishing high school in Bethlehem in 1955, my father became the first in his family to go to university, at the American University of Beirut. With its cosmopolitan buzz and bazaar of pan-Arab political trends and idealism, AUB was a universe away from rural Battir, where the passage of a motor vehicle through the village was a major event as he grew up.

My father's job gave us the opportunity to live and learn in different countries. We returned to Jordan every summer to visit relatives and delight in a life that seemed more exciting, if harder, than the staid and stable ways of Europe and America. Even as we acknowledged the

“normalcy” of our own lives, underneath we were every bit as shaped by the convulsions of the Middle East as those for whom fate had decreed that, when their world was blown to bits, the shrapnel of their lives should land in the refugee camps of Lebanon or Gaza.

When the *Intifada* began, I was in high school in Brussels. There, in the safety of the televised image, I saw the bullets and tear gas, the breaking of bones, and the smashing of homes. As I watched the *Intifada* unfold, I shared the elation of people rediscovering their dignity and the will to resist the brutality of occupation. It suited the idealism of a teenager, but I also felt guilt and frustration in being powerless to contribute to their struggle.

Politics was for politicians, and diplomacy for diplomats like my father. There was no Internet, and the television that brought me for the first time to Palestine simply reminded me of how removed from it I was. That would change when I went to university, in 1989, at the very height of the uprising. I moved from Belgium to Princeton, where I would get a quick education about the power and perversion of Middle East politics in America.

Rude Awakening

One night in the Spring of my freshman year there was a knock on the door of my dorm room. It was an officer from the university police.

“Where were you last night about 1 A.M.?” she asked.

“Why are you asking? What’s happened?”

“I can’t say. I was just told to come and ask you these questions.”

I was running for class office and a friend and I had been out that night hanging up campaign flyers. The next morning, I received a phone call from a reporter at the campus newspaper, *The Daily Princetonian*, or as it was commonly known, *The Prince*.

“Mr. Abunimah, there have been allegations that you were involved in a campaign to destroy posters placed around campus advertising an Israeli speaker. What do you have to say about that?”

I sensed immediately that this was related to a sharp debate about the Middle East that was taking place on the pages of *The Prince* and to which I was a party. I quizzed the reporter about her source and, after a tussle, she admitted that it was Michael Freund, a fourth-year student.

I had encountered Freund for the first time earlier that year. He was the founder and president of a campus group called the Princeton-Israel Public Affairs Committee (PIPAC), and edited a campus paper called

The Sentinel that published hard-line views about the Middle East. I responded to one such article and, to his credit, Freund published my letter. Shortly afterwards he called me and suggested we meet for lunch. Though I accepted, and asked him to set a date, it never happened.

Our second encounter was when PIPAC members called the university police because a fellow student and I were distributing leaflets outside a lecture hall where an event they had organized was taking place. Princeton carries on its books a rarely enforced rule that the Dean must approve all literature before it is disseminated. We had not sought the necessary permit. One might, possibly, understand applying this anti-democratic rule if there were evidence that the literature incited readers to riot or mayhem, or was patently offensive. We were distributing a *New York Times* op-ed piece by former Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban.

As soon as I got off the phone with *The Prince* reporter, I called Freund and asked why, since we were apparently on lunching terms, he did not call me before going to the Dean and the newspaper. He told me simply that I had been caught and that I would receive my just deserts.

The next day, a story appeared on the front page of *The Prince*, with a headline “University to Begin Investigating Destruction, Removal of Flyers.”¹ The sensational story was that the leaders of PIPAC, Michael Freund and Bradley Hames, and of another group, *Mohr Ha Torah*, had twice called the university police to accuse me of systematically destroying flyers announcing a speech by Yoram Hazony, a Princeton alum and Likud leader.

The article was loaded with accusations resting on the premise that I must be guilty because I was known to be an outspoken critic of Israel; no one claimed to have seen me do what I was accused of doing. The story also said the Dean of Students Office was conducting an official investigation.

I immediately called the Dean named in the story, Kathleen Deignan, and asked her whether it was normal for a student to be put under official investigation without being apprised of the charges, and to learn of the investigation through the newspaper rather than the administration. “I thought in America the accused have a right to answer charges laid against them,” I observed. “Well,” she said, “we were going to call you this morning.”

After this promising start, I endured, over the period of a month, one of the most unfair “disciplinary procedures” that a university could devise. Throughout the murky process, I never knew for sure what was at stake, and what punishments—ranging from censure to

expulsion—I could expect.

At all times I maintained my innocence, obtaining character references from professors and an affidavit from the friend who had been with me that night. For two weeks, the Dean had promised me copies of the written statements and “evidence” that Freund and the “eyewitnesses” had presented. Day after day, I called to ask for this “proof.” Finally I was given a packet of statements, including ones by Hazony, Hames and Freund, attesting to my “known anti-Israel viewpoints,” and quoting from letters I had written to newspapers.

I told the Dean that I believed I was the subject of harassment because of my ethnic origin and my views, and I demanded that she investigate. I offered evidence that other Arab students had been harassed in the same way. Just months before, a graduate student emceeding a speech by then little-known professor Hanan Ashrawi had asked Freund to stop heckling in the middle of the lecture. Charges were brought against the graduate student for “attempting to suppress the freedom of speech.” She endured an absurd three-month-long disciplinary proceeding, conducted in the utmost solemnity, that nearly resulted in her expulsion. She was not eager to take part in campus activism after that.

As the investigation dragged on, my meetings with the Dean became more surreal. “We don’t think,” she explained in response to my request for an investigation into allegations about harassment of Arabs, “that disputes between students should be resolved using the disciplinary procedure.” Meanwhile, a lively debate about the affair ensued on the op-ed page of *The Prince*.

After weeks of deliberation, Dean Deignan admitted that, “In the end, we have not found any evidence that you did what they say.”

“Does that mean I am innocent?” I asked, innocently. “Not exactly, it just means that we haven’t found any evidence that you are guilty.” I was exasperated and exhausted. The distraction was taking its toll on my first-year grades, so I concluded that accepting this decision was the best I could get from the Dean. At my request, she agreed to put the “verdict” in writing.

I called *The Prince* and asked that they print a story, with prominence equal to the earlier one, reporting that I had been cleared of the charges. The article they published was less than a vindication. It contained statements of outrage from Freund and his friends, as well as my denials, and Dean Deignan was quoted as saying she could not comment on individual cases. The university, which had been willing to say publicly that it was investigating me, refused even to say that they had not found any evidence of my guilt. But I had my own answer.

That week, on May 20, 1990, an Israeli terrorist had opened fire on a group of Palestinian laborers in Rishon Lezion, killing seven. In the ensuing protests, a further seven Palestinians were shot dead by the army. I wrote a letter to *The Prince* condemning the atrocities and, for good measure, took out a full-page advertisement with graphic quotes from *The New York Times*. The first message was clear. The second was that intimidation would not lead to silence. As for the letter from the Dean, for several weeks I called her office asking when it would be delivered. I was told it was coming. It never did. Eventually they stopped returning my calls.

Freund, Hames and their most committed colleagues graduated at the end of that academic year, and in the following years I did not experience anything quite so dramatic. Each year, a group of students and townspeople held vigils for the December 9 anniversary of the *Intifada*, where we read out the names of people killed by Israeli forces; when the list became too long, we posted it on a large board. We built bridges with other students, many Jewish, and faculty, who wanted to talk about peace with justice.

I had never been on the front lines of the *Intifada* or faced the physical danger of occupation, but I learned at Princeton that to speak out for Palestinian rights, even in the most privileged and protected places, is to put yourself at risk. I am thankful for these lessons. In my years of activism since, I have never had an opportunity to forget them.

As for Michael Freund, today he is Deputy Director of Communications in the office of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Oslo and Chicago: A Tale of Two Cities

September 13, 1993: I am driving west through Pennsylvania, on my way to start graduate school at the University of Chicago. There is a heavy, gloomy sky that sheds an occasional rain. My car is stuffed with books and clothes. On the radio, I am listening to live coverage of the signing of the Oslo Accords. “No more blood and tears” intones Yitzhak Rabin, as the small-town public radio station begins to crackle and fade and I scan the airwaves for another.

For my first two years in Chicago, I focused on my studies, much to the relief of my parents. I rarely wrote to newspapers and I avoided events about the Middle East. I was experiencing the Gulf War and Oslo-induced depression that seemed to affect the whole Arab world. Hopes raised by the *Intifada* and cautious support for the Madrid peace process evaporated when Yasir Arafat seized a lifeline for himself, the other end of which was tied around the neck of his people.

I knew no one in Chicago's Arab community. In my isolation, I was unaware that a network of Palestinian and Arab community organizations, sustained for 20 years on passion and determination, was withering. Many people were simply too exhausted and disillusioned to go on, feeling that they had struggled for years to see their hopes and rights traded for "peace," without an end to bloodshed and occupation, and "security," without an end to dispossession and exile.

At the same time, the closures, settlements, economic ruin and loss of hope that accompanied Oslo led more Palestinians to give up their struggle to stay on the land, and to emigrate to relatives in Chicago and other U.S. cities, where poverty and marginalization often awaited them. It was the other side of the reality I had seen in Palestine, where my 12- and 13-year-old cousins, who spent their summers in the West Bank lifting cinder blocks for 30 shekels a day in the settlements, quizzed me about the Chicago Bulls, whether I had a car and a girlfriend, and how they could get a visa to the United States.

In late 1995, I took a research job that centered on community-based initiatives in Chicago's neighborhoods. By chance, this brought me into contact with members of the Arab community who worked in social services. One morning, over bad coffee and singed French toast at a creaky diner at 63rd Street and Kedzie, Maha Jarad started my education about Chicago's Arab community. This was the heart of Chicago's south side Arab community. Maha's family is from 'AinYabrud in the West Bank, but she was born and raised in Chicago and she has the diphthongs to prove it. She lived in the West Bank during the *Intifada*, during the darkest days when the Israelis had closed all the schools. She was the first I met of an indomitable group of mostly women who had founded the Arab American Action Network (AAAN), an entirely Chicago-based organization, of which Maha was director. There is little prestige in that title, and a lot of hard work, as her office is one of the few places left where people come for assistance when they become casualties of the battle to survive and raise their children in this sometimes unforgiving environment.²

The people in Chicago, like Maha, involved in AAAN, the American Friends Service Committee, the Christian Peacemaker Teams, Voices in the Wilderness and many others show every day that activism for peace with justice is alive and well. It is made up not of heroes, slogans or leaders whose faces you will see on CNN but of determined individuals who choose to bear witness to the injustice they see around them. If my effort to hold media giants like NPR accountable is a small part of this community's effort, then I am happy to tell you something about it.

Dear NPR

The news media is among the most powerful, and unaccountable forces in our society. The images they create become reality, and in few places has this been so damaging as in coverage of the Middle East.

Arabs are portrayed as instinctually hostile to the "West" without any effort to uncover how people's views have been shaped by the events in their daily lives and their experiences with those who possess power over them. The television image and newspaper photo most often seen of Arabs is of an angry mob burning a U. S. or Israeli flag. In all my travels in the region, I have never once experienced that scene. One can imagine the outcry if every portrayal of Israelis was of settler mobs shouting "death to the Arabs" or burning effigies of Rabin in a Nazi uniform.

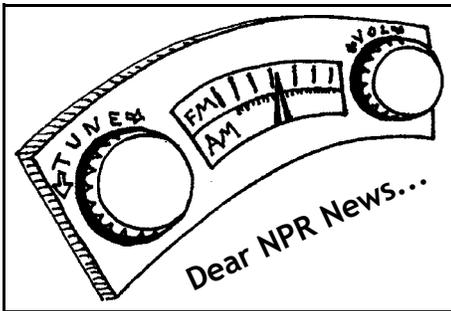
Israel is usually cast as the "us," the "Western democracy" with whom we can identify, and whose security needs are always portrayed as more important than those of its neighbors (who, of course, are cast as responsible for all of the violence and bloodshed in the region.)

Let me be clear: Israelis have suffered immense pain in recent years, particularly as a result of Hamas and Islamic Jihad's reprehensible and unjustifiable suicide bombings, and the misery they inflict on innocent people should be reported. But too often these horrors become an excuse to ignore or justify the damage that Israel inflicts daily under the rubric of "security." Palestinians are shot and killed by soldiers and settlers who are seldom punished, tortured by the Israeli (and now Palestinian) security services, and victimized by the apartheid-like laws that allow gun-toting, fanatic settlers to roam the Occupied Territories.

It was during the April 1996 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, that my "two-way" relationship with public radio began. It certainly wasn't any conscious effort. I was acting out of frustration at the total lack of objectivity in the way the events had been covered. Almost without exception, the American news media reported the Israeli assault as legitimate "retaliation," and the massacre at Qana as a "tragic accident," despite an independent U.N. investigation (and later a report by Amnesty International) that strongly suggested it was no such thing.

I started off by writing and calling a Chicago public radio host, Jerome McDonnell, with reactions to the Middle East coverage on his daily international affairs program. I left voicemails and sent faxes of news reports culled from Reuters or the BBC that contradicted

(Continued on page 11)



Settlers

10 Nov 1998

Dear NPR News,

Eric Weiner's report on All Things Considered today focused entirely on Israeli "security" demands and Arafat's crackdown on Hamas. Once again it ignored the concerted, government-backed settler campaigns to seize as much land as possible in the occupied West Bank prior to any withdrawal of occupation forces. This has now been prominently reported in the United States [. . .]

I am astonished and at a loss to explain NPR's absolute refusal to report the fact that Israeli settlers, protected by the Israeli occupation forces, have established five new settlements since the accord was signed.

The settlers quoted in the story I've attached make clear their intentions to sabotage the Wye agreement, and the head of Peace Now is quoted as saying that more new outposts have been established in the past two weeks than in the previous two years. [Editor's Note: The 10 Nov. 1998 Los Angeles Times article is omitted here because of space considerations.]

Also, wire services reported that on Monday bulldozers under guard by the occupation forces began clearing 40 acres of confiscated Palestinian land near Bethlehem to construct a Jewish-only bypass road.

Yet none of this is deemed newsworthy. Why not?

Despite the glaring and incomprehensible omissions in Eric's report, there were some minor positive elements that are worth mentioning. He paid more than usual attention to:

(1) The grim conditions of life in the occupied Gaza Strip and the absence of any visible benefits of "peace" and (2) widespread concern among Palestinians about the clear and flagrant violations of their human rights by the Palestinian authorities.

For once, Eric also mentioned that the Palestinians, too, have concerns about "security," but made no mention of the daily threat to their lives, land and homes from the occupiers. He referred only to the threat from the reckless actions of the Palestinian Authority. He went to the funeral of a 16-

year-old Palestinian boy shot dead last week by PA forces.

I am glad he reported on that. The world needs to know what the PA is doing to its own people. But when was the last time he reported from the funeral of any of the far more numerous victims of the settlers or the occupation forces? Or from the tent of a family made homeless by land confiscation and house demolition?

The character of your recent reporting has been pretty one-sided, with the occasional special feature on Palestinians tossed in as a bone. The reporting since the Wye agreement does not even contain the bones.

Isn't it time to redress this imbalance once and for all?

Sincerely, Ali Abunimah

Wye

3 Nov 1998

Dear NPR News,

I noted with some satisfaction that the introduction to Eric Weiner's report today (the second in a week on exactly the same subject) on heightened security around Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, referred to Yitzhak Rabin's assassin as a "Jewish terrorist."

Eric's report, managed to go on for five minutes, however, about new threats to Netanyahu's life from Jewish groups without once using the dreaded t-word.

He is not usually so coy when discussing Palestinians.

But that is not what I'm writing to you about today. Actually I'm a bit confused. The essence of the Wye deal is allegedly "land for peace" or as you sometimes call it, "land for security." So while you are reporting extensively on the "security" aspect, where are the reports on the land?

Since the deal was signed, Israel has announced further massive confiscations of Palestinian land and new settlements, both in occupied East Jerusalem and in other parts of the occupied West Bank.

On October 31, Israeli occupation authorities announced the confiscation of 4,367 dunums (about 1,100 acres) in the Jenin district for the expansion of settlements. Final go ahead was also given for the construction of 200 houses for Jews in the Ras Al Amoud section of occupied East Jerusalem, where settlers began fencing off land under police protection. Meanwhile settlers, are seizing more land, and setting up new bridgeheads throughout the West Bank [. . .]

Since Oslo was signed, Israel has confiscated about twice as much Palestinian land as it has turned over to direct rule by the Palestinian Authority (about 3%).

As you never tire of failing to report, these settlements and confiscations are violations

of international law and of explicit Security Council resolutions. But they also demonstrate the utter nullity and vacuity of the Wye memorandum, which states:

"V. UNILATERAL ACTIONS

Recognizing the necessity to create a positive environment for the negotiations, neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in accordance with the Interim Agreement."

In addition, I have heard no reporting or questioning of President Clinton's reported decision to provide Israel with an extra \$500 million in aid explicitly to build illegal bypass roads, which are today Israel's major pretext for confiscating land and demolishing houses.

Isn't this a major reversal of George Bush's loan-guarantee principle which was supposed to subtract from U.S. loans amounts spent on settlements in the occupied territories? Hasn't NPR thought to find one inter-viewee who can address these matters?

Perhaps only President Clinton, with his ability to parse the unparsable and to ponder the meaning of "is" can explain how land seizures and bypass roads are (1) not "unilateral actions" (2) so "helpful" to peace that U.S. taxpayers should now openly foot the bill for them.

I really wish someone would bother to ask.

Regards, Ali Abunimah

Sanctions

2 Nov 1998

Dear NPR News,

In his conversation with Morning Edition host Bob Edwards, this morning, Mike Shuster made it quite plain that he blames Iraq for in his words "dragging out" the UN inspection regime. Mr. Shuster is entitled to his opinion, but he has a duty to consider other viewpoints. For example, a former state department official when asked why he thought Iraq had made its latest announcement, answered:

Ed Peck, former U.S. Liaison to Iraq:

"The move was predictable. The reaction was predictable. I suppose that one of the things that we have to think about is why would Iraq do this? And I guess the reasons are perhaps unpalatable to the American public, at least, but the Iraqis don't see any reason to continue with the process.

Two presidents, Reagan—pardon me—Bush and Clinton have told the Iraqis that the embargo will never be lifted until Saddam Hussein is gone. They've said this publicly. So with

that as the underlying support for the whole program, the Iraqis know that inspections—no inspections, they're still going to be under that embargo, and they see no reason to participate." (CNN, 10/31/98)

This makes a great deal of sense from a logical standpoint. On Sunday, Iraqi deputy prime minister Tariq Aziz made essentially the same case. Mr. Shuster did not, in his answers to Mr. Edwards, consider any of these explanations. I hope he will agree to allow his audience to consider all the possibilities in future reports.

Regards, Ali Abunimah

Confiscations

30 Oct 1998

Dear NPR News,

Jennifer Ludden's report on All Things Considered today, about the Israeli government's effort to confiscate land from Palestinian citizens of Israel was scrupulously balanced, well-informed, well-researched and accurate, beautifully produced and highly engaging.

She is likely to pay a heavy price for it as the howls of outrage begin to pour in from those who react to the truth as though they were vampires being confronted with a field of garlic.

The report allowed Palestinian citizens of Israel to tell their own story about their own land and gave an opportunity to Israeli government spokesmen to respond.

The Prime Minister's spokesman on Arab Affairs (an Israeli Jew) attempted to justify the confiscation of the land in Umm Al-Fahm by stating it was necessitated by the withdrawal from occupied West Bank land. This was a wonderfully absurd bit of spin that stands on its own merit.

Of course the Israeli army has vast firing ranges in the Naqab desert, and vast swathes of forest to the southwest of Jerusalem, all inside the 1948 boundaries of Israel that it could use for firing ranges before the need to confiscate densely populated and overcrowded land from its Arab citizens. With more lethal effect, it already uses occupied southern Lebanon to test all manner of ordnance.

Finally a quick note on the introduction to the report which stated that Israel faces land disputes with its one million Palestinian citizens, in addition to the Palestinians living in the occupied territories. Left out of this equation are the millions of Palestinians who were dispossessed in 1947-48 and are now in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt as well as in diaspora all over the world. They have not relinquished their claims to their lost properties, their right to which is internationally recognized (UN Resolution 194). These claims are similar to those of Jews whose property was

confiscated in Germany and Poland in World War II, but unfortunately they do not enjoy the same level of support from Senator D'Amato and friends.

I hope you will soon do a report on Palestinians trying to regain their stolen property in traditionally-Arab-disputed-somehow-mysteriously-now-Israeli-west Jerusalem.

Regards, Ali Abunimah

Terrorists

28 Oct 1998

Dear NPR News,

Eric Weiner's report this morning, on tightened security surrounding senior Israeli officials, in which he reminded us that Yitzhak Rabin had been assassinated by a "Jewish extremist" set me wondering exactly what heinous act an Israeli Jew would have to commit in order to be called a "terrorist" by an NPR reporter.

I did a little investigation, and found that it is almost impossible. The use of the term "terrorist" by NPR reporters (as opposed to sources) to describe acts by Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims is routine.

In the past two weeks alone, I found three such references by NPR reporters or hosts specifically to Palestinians or acts allegedly committed by them (10/24 WATC; 10/23 Morning Edition; 10/20 Morning Edition).

To find a reference to an Israeli or an act by an Israeli as "terrorist," however, I had to go all the way back to 1994, when on one single occasion, Baruch Goldstein, who massacred dozens of Palestinians in Hebron was described in the following sentence in the introduction to a report:

"Baruch Goldstein, the Brooklyn doctor who went to Israel and slaughtered Arabs at a prayer session on a holy day, was a member of the radical group Kach, a small and insignificant group of fanatical terrorists." (3/1/94, Morning Edition)

Insignificant perhaps to the reporter, but not I guarantee you to the families of the dead and injured, and those who continue to be terrorized by Kach in Hebron today. And certainly not insignificant to Kach's many supporters and protectors in the Israeli government, who have insured that the group and others like it have been able to terrorize and kill with impunity and hold the entire world hostage to their fanatic millennial vision.

On all other occasions, Goldstein was called a "militant" (e.g. 3/6/94, Weekend Edition), or an "extremist" (e.g. 3/17/94, Morning Edition).

There have also been several cases of settlers killing or attacking Palestinian civilians since 1994 which were either not reported, or if mentioned, not termed "terrorist." [...]

Regards, Ali Abunimah

Rubber Bullets

8 Oct 1998

Dear NPR News,

For a while you had been correctly referring to the ammunition used by Israeli occupation forces as "rubber-coated metal bullets." This is now widely accepted terminology, routinely used by AP, Reuters and the BBC, because it happens to be the correct description of these bullets which are often lethal, and cause serious, permanent injury such as loss of eyesight.

Recently, however, including this morning, you have reverted to the Israeli euphemism "rubber bullets." Has the ammunition changed, or just your description of it? If you are going to persist in this, then you should also refer to the rocks thrown by demonstrators as—yes, here is a good one—"impacted sand."

Regards, Ali Abunimah

Gaza

5 Oct 1998

Dear NPR News,

Thank you for Jennifer Ludden's very good piece on life in the Israeli-occupied Gaza Strip, four years after the beginning of implementation of the Oslo accords.

The report incorrectly stated that Israeli troops "left Gaza in 1994." As Ms. Ludden will surely have seen, Israeli troops have never left Gaza. They have withdrawn from only about 60% of Gaza territory, and remain in direct occupation of a large sector of the north of the strip, the entire coastline, and a hermetic strip around the land borders. You will grant me that this is not the same thing as "leaving Gaza," and as Ms. Ludden noted in the report, Israel still controls life there in a "thousand different ways." Ms. Ludden also did not mention that there are some 6,000 of the most militant and fanatical Israeli settlers still occupying some of Gaza's best land and coastline in settlements such as Morag and Kfar Darom.

Nevertheless, the report was very good for what it included—rarely heard voices and experiences of Palestinians—but could have been strengthened with the addition of some objective statistics from, say, the UN, UNRWA, the World Bank and other international agencies who have measured the precipitous decline in Palestinian standards of living since "peace" was declared.

According to UN estimates, GDP per capita in the occupied territories has fallen by up to 40% since 1993. According to the European Union, this loss is largely a result of Israeli closures and restrictions placed on

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Palestinian trade and exports in the name of "security."

While I welcome this rare report on Palestinian life, is it not time you reported on the severe upsurge in demolitions of Palestinian houses in the occupied West Bank and in occupied East Jerusalem, that has occurred since Mike Shuster's report in March? . . .

Regards, Ali Abunimah

Closures

2 Oct 1998

Dear NPR News,

Thank you for Jennifer Ludden's report this morning about Israel's new total closure of the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. Ms. Ludden stated that "the closure prevents two and a half million Palestinians from entering Israel." This is an incomplete and therefore inaccurate statement.

The closure prevents Palestinians from entering Israel and from entering occupied east Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is, as you know, an integral part of the occupied West Bank, according to international law, and of Palestinian economy and society. Most major Palestinian institutions, hospitals and many schools and universities are located in east Jerusalem, so the closure of east Jerusalem (which is more or less permanent) has a devastating effect on Palestinian life.

Also, because of the geography of the West Bank, the closure of Jerusalem makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians in the north of the West Bank to reach the south (and vice versa). In addition, Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza are permanently banned from travelling to the other territory, despite Israel's agreement to a "safe passage" between the two occupied areas in the Oslo accords, and reaffirmed in the Hebron agreement.

These circumstances, plus the recent upsurge of attacks and killings of Palestinians by settlers, are having a devastating effect on Palestinian morale and security. May I suggest that you occasionally report on these matters, as well as on Israeli security concerns?

Regards, Ali Abunimah

History

3 Aug 1998

Dear NPR News,

I greatly enjoyed Susan Stamberg's special report profiling the woman who discovered the diary of Anne Frank, today on Morning Edition. I hate to quibble, but Ms. Stamberg surely misspoke when she made several references to "occupied Amsterdam." I feel sure that Ms. Stamberg ought to have said "disputed Amsterdam," or even "Amsterdam, which Germany captured in 1940."

Or perhaps, "Amsterdam, which Germany said was part of the Great German Fatherland needed to ensure sufficient lebensraum for German settlers, while the Dutch claimed it as the seat of their monarchy."

So blatantly stating facts, as Susan did this morning, might open NPR to criticism that it is taking sides, or making value judgements. You should avoid this at all costs, even if it means changing words or obscuring facts of history, in order to have a "balanced" report.

Perhaps this was just one of those rare slips of the editorial pen, or are only politically correct enemies (nazis, Iraqis, etc.) capable of "occupation"?

Ali Abunimah

Israel's Birthday

30 Apr 1998

Dear NPR News,

Regretfully, Linda Gradstein's report on Morning Edition today, about Israel's anniversary, contained several misleading and inaccurate statements.

First, Alex Chadwick's introduction boldly declared that "Fifty years ago today, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed" the independence of the State of Israel. Of course, fifty years ago today David Ben-Gurion did no such thing. The fiftieth anniversary of that proclamation will be on May 14th. That is the historic date of the event. Today's anniversary in Israel is according to the Jewish calendar, which is a liturgical calendar. Israel does not yet have the power to impose its own calendar on the rest of the world.

Second, Linda Gradstein stated that "Palestinians call the creation of Israel al-Nakba, or the catastrophe." I cannot speak for all Palestinians, but let me say that what we call "al-Nakba" is not the "creation of Israel," but rather the destruction of Palestine, and with it 418 towns and villages; the loss and depopulation of our major cities such as Haifa, Jaffa, Lydda, Ramle and the western part of Jerusalem; the creation of 700,000 refugees (three fifths of the whole Palestinian population), and their expulsion into a miserable exile of refugee camps where they remain to this day. This is our Nakba, and it is not different from the Nakba of the native Americans, the Australian Aborigines, the Maori of New Zealand, the original people of what is now Canada, the indigenous people of Mexico, Brazil, and all over Africa. But our Nakba is fresher, and more anachronistic. It happened long after the classical age of European colonization, and after the United Nations charter had allegedly secured for all of the people of this world the right to live in peace and dignity in their own lands, free from foreign occupation and colonization. To reduce our Nakba to being an objection to the "creation of Israel" is inciteful, provocative and just plain wrong.

Finally, Ms. Gradstein used the term "disputed East Jerusalem" to describe that sector of the city that has been illegally occupied by Israel since 1967. I am prepared to lift my objection to this term, but only if you use it equally and fairly. This would mean that I would expect to hear references to disputed Haifa, disputed Nazareth, disputed Jaffa, disputed Akka, the disputed Negev (Al- Naqab), disputed western Jerusalem, disputed Bet Shean (Beisan), disputed Beer Sheba (Bir Al Saba'), disputed Ashqelon (Majdal), disputed Tsfat (Safad), disputed Lod (Lydda), disputed Givat Shaul (Deir Yassin), disputed Gevat (Jibta), disputed Shefar 'Am (Shifa' 'Amr), the disputed Galilee, in fact to cut a long story short, disputed Palestine.

You cannot decide that whatever Israel wants and claims becomes "disputed" regardless of history, facts, and international law, thereby legitimizing the Israeli claim, while that which was taken by Israel by force, is never questioned as being an "undisputed" part of Israel. This is unfair, I think you will agree.

Sincerely, Ali Abunimah

Collective Punishment

31 Mar 1997

Dear NPR News,

This morning you reported that Israeli occupation forces demolished the house of the man who allegedly blew himself up in a Tel Aviv cafe ten days ago.

What you made no mention of whatsoever, was that it was the house of his wife and four children who are not implicated in any way by the Israeli authorities of assisting in the crime that the father allegedly committed. They are now homeless.

International law prohibits such measures of collective punishment. Although an appeal against the demolition order to the High Court of Israel was rejected by the judges, one member of the panel did dissent, confirming in his view that such demolitions were against international humanitarian law.

Why do we never hear on your station reports about the Israeli version of due process? For example, can we imagine, today as his trial begins, US authorities going to demolish the houses of Timothy McVeigh's sister or parents because it would "deter" other terrorists? This is what the Israelis do routinely, and not just in the cases of the worst crimes such as terrorist bombings.

While in the US we enjoy the protection of the Bill of Rights, those living under Israeli occupation live with the knowledge that the sins of the fathers shall always be visited on the children.

Sincerely, Ali Abunimah

(Continued from page 7)

statements that guests on his show had made. I also challenged him to include voices from the other side, which were often missing.

I did this for a few months with no response. One day I called and left a message that I wanted to buy him subscriptions to two publications, one chosen by me, the other by him. He accepted immediately, explaining that information from every perspective was the lifeblood of his show, and that limited funding kept him from acquiring everything he wanted. We settled on Middle East International and The Guardian Weekly. This opened the door for a dialogue with an institution I had previously seen as an inaccessible monolith. I've even been on McDonnell's program, pitted against two gentlemen from the Anti-Defamation League and the Israeli Consulate. In the context of Israel's 50th anniversary, we debated the history and continued repercussions of *Al-Nakba*, "The Catastrophe" of the Palestinians' dispossession in the 1948 War.

Soon, I began writing to NPR. It's not that their coverage was always terrible, or even the worst, but, as an authoritative voice, it needed to be challenged when it erred. Some of the reports NPR has done, particularly during the Al-Nakba anniversary, have been excellent, and I have always made a point of writing in praise as well as criticism.

But, too often, NPR leans heavily on Israeli viewpoints and priorities, and seldom reports on Palestinian life under occupation. Analysis of NPR transcripts reveals that in the two years up to September 28, 1998, for example, 49 of its reports on Israel/Palestine referred to "security," 33 referred to "terrorism," 32 referred to " Hamas," and 36 referred to "Dennis Ross." By contrast, only six reports referred to "human rights," eight to "closure," one to "Shin Bet," two to "live ammunition" or "rubber bullets," three to "torture," and two to "demolition." Of the 42 reports that speak about Israeli settlements, 18 also contained the word "security," while only one report contained the word [land] "confiscation;" another contained the word "timeout" and two contained the word "expansion." The term "illegal" never appeared in connection with Israeli settlements.

Similarly, people holding views sympathetic to Israel are interviewed far more frequently than those who are critical. Robert Satloff of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, closely aligned with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), has been interviewed 11 times. Professor Rashid Khalidi was the critic of Israel who came closest, with only five appearances.

I began to challenge these patterns, writing detailed letters about every report I heard, analyzing content, the voices included or excluded, and even individual words. I also zeroed in on the terminology used in NPR's reports. For instance, NPR often used the Israeli term "disputed" in talking about the West Bank rather than the internationally accepted "occupied." Similarly they referred to occupied southern Lebanon as "Israel's security zone."

To its credit, NPR no longer employs these usages, although it still insists on referring to "disputed" East Jerusalem. "Disputed" status, however, is never conferred on formerly Palestinian areas of West Jerusalem. NPR producers have told me that the use of the word "occupied" brings them immense criticism from supporters of Israel, for whom any reporting that questions exclusive Israeli control of Jerusalem is deemed to be evidence of irredeemable bias and hostility.

Another example is the current use of the harmless-sounding term "rubber bullets" to describe the ammunition, used by the Israeli army against Palestinians, that is no less lethal because its metal core has a thin rubber coat.

Many reports by NPR correspondents in Jerusalem feature extensive soundbites from Israelis, and only brief paraphrases or nothing at all from Palestinians. Killings of Palestinians, demolition of homes, closures and curfews are seldom reported, giving the audience no way to connect with the realities of daily life under occupation. Attacks on Israelis, by contrast, are given top billing.

Since I E-mailed my letters to NPR, I began to share them with a small list of friends, which has grown to several hundred directly, and perhaps several thousand as the letters travel through the electronic underground. I have been amazed by the response they've gotten, but the most valuable return is copies others send me of letters they are writing to the media, sometimes with notes telling me that my efforts encouraged them to be more vocal.

I think this is leading NPR to think about how they cover stories. On one occasion, for example, Israeli commandos launched a nighttime seaborne raid deep into Lebanon. Lebanese army and militias fought off the attack, killing 11 Israeli soldiers. A number of Lebanese civilians were killed and wounded. NPR reported the incident as a tragedy and a shock for Israel, and made it sound as though Lebanese had landed in the middle of Tel Aviv and slaughtered the sleeping soldiers. I wrote to All Things Considered (9/5/97):

Your exclusive focus on the Israeli angle and the

mourning for the dead soldiers [...] is simply inappropriate. How do you think the Lebanese feel about Israeli commandos landing on their beaches in the middle of the night to do God knows what? Of course you didn't ask that. I have never heard you do a report on how the Lebanese feel when their fighters are killed fending off Israel, for instance.

You quoted Netanyahu saying that "terrorists claimed the lives of the finest of Israel's combat soldiers" in Lebanon. My understanding is that the Lebanese Army and many civilians were heavily involved in the defense of Tyre. Is it appropriate to air a comment like that without giving a single Lebanese person the right to respond? Do you think it is a reasonable position to hold that the Lebanese Army fighting off an Israeli landing party on a beach 40 kilometers north of the Israeli-occupied zone can be justifiably termed "terrorism?" And regardless of what we think of Hizbullah, they did not invade Israel yesterday, they fought with Israeli marine commandos who decided that they could go to Tyre, 50 kilometers deep into Lebanon.

It was also inappropriate and unbalanced that you interviewed only Chemi Shalev, an Israeli journalist, about the events in Lebanon. Once again, as so often, there was no Lebanese voice. Mr. Siegel [the NPR host] asked Mr. Shalev if the recent events might not lead to some kind of emotional "overload among Israelis." Wouldn't it be a fair question to ask Lebanese (and for that matter Palestinians) if Israeli actions (Grapes of Wrath, yesterday's assault, the siege and closure, etc.) also lead to similar feelings?

The next day, All Things Considered interviewed a Lebanese newspaper editor, Tewfiq Mishlawi, and I could not help thinking that some producer may have read my letter, or one like it.

What did NPR think? It took several months and dozens of letters before I received a direct response from anyone. It was a terse note from a producer explaining why a report from Israel correspondent Linda Gradstein had to be cut for timing, rather than editorial reasons, just before it got to the part about Israeli prohibitions on non-Jews purchasing land in Israel.

Buoyed by my experience with local radio, I thought I could open a dialogue and called the producer. Unfortunately, when I told him my name, he said, "Yes, I know who you are. You've made a very bad introduction of yourself, and I've no wish to speak with you." He hung up in my face. I took that as an invitation to write more letters. With time, I began to get E-mails from producers, editors and correspondents rebutting points or explaining choices they'd made.

Though I have never asked to be on air, my efforts eventually convinced someone that I had, at least on one occasion, something worth telling NPR's audience.

My phone rang at 3 a.m. on the morning after

Clinton's missile strikes on Sudan and Afghanistan. It was NPR's Foreign Editor, Loren Jenkins, with whom I had developed a cordial relationship, even though he and his correspondents often bore the brunt of my harshest criticisms. Morning Edition needed a guest to talk about Arab responses to the bombing. I obliged, explaining how many Arabs saw a double standard in the U.S. response to events such as the Israeli bombing of Qana, as compared with its quick resort to violence and sanctions against any Arab or Muslim transgressor.

Later in the day, CNN and several local newspapers tracked me down asking for interviews. I began to understand how "experts" and "talking heads" are created. But I didn't have long to enjoy my moment before NPR and I were dragged into a "scandal."

Although I save most of the personal E-mail I receive, I usually do not share it without the author's permission. On one occasion I did, and it lit a spark that for a few days engulfed NPR in a media fire. In June of this year an NPR report featured so-called "terrorism expert" Steven Emerson, producer of the PBS documentary "Jihad in America," whose methods as an "investigative journalist" are challenged by many of his peers.

Author and journalist Robert Friedman has exposed many of the distortions and errors in Emerson's work, and credits him with a "role in creating mass hysteria against American Arabs."³

This view is shared in the Arab and Muslim communities, particularly because of Emerson's outspoken fingering of Arabs and Muslims as culprits in the Oklahoma City bombing. On April 19, 1995, Emerson told CBS This Morning, "I think the presumption is that it was a terrorist act, and there is increasing information leading authorities in the direction of a Middle Eastern-oriented attack from extremists based in the United States."

In 1990, less than three weeks after Israeli forces had shot dead 21 Palestinians in a single day at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, allegedly for throwing stones, Emerson concluded on the basis of reprisal stabbings of several Israelis by Palestinian individuals that, "[T]he Palestinians are not interested in or capable of living in peace with the Israelis. Most Palestinians have sheer hatred for Jews."⁴

Some of the publications Emerson writes for have proven equally indiscriminate. The Journal of Counterterrorism & Security International, for instance, which often publishes Emerson's work, recently wrote in a sidebar to an article based on some of his testimony to Congress that "the Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee has emerged as an equal opportunity

champion of nearly all Middle Eastern terrorist groups, in particular lauding openly both Hamas and Hizbullah."⁵ Naturally it did not provide any citations or evidence to back up this charge.

Spurred by Emerson's accusations of terrorism against several Tampa residents, John Sugg, editor of Tampa's Weekly Planet, has written a series of investigative pieces showing his allegations to be without substance. He has presented evidence that Emerson has, among other things, tried to pass off his own work to Associated Press journalists as FBI documents, and that Emerson has plagiarized the work of others.⁶

As a result of his work, Sugg, like a number of other journalists, has been peppered with letters from Emerson's lawyers asking him to retract statements and refrain from further publications about Emerson under threat of "legal recourse."⁷

The Economist, in a review of Emerson's book "The American House of Saud," wrote that, "The conspiracy theory of history always finds believers—blame the Jews, or the communists, or the blacks, and thus seek absolution. Mr. Steven Emerson, a one-time assistant to the Senate Sub-committee on Foreign Economic Policy, who now 'specializes in investigative writing,' blames the Arabs."⁸ The New York Times Book Review has scarcely been more generous to him, writing that his book "Terrorist" has a "pervasive anti-Arab, anti-Palestinian bias."⁹

Despite this record, NPR has featured Emerson as a commentator on six occasions. I wrote to All Things Considered objecting to their use of him as a "terrorism expert." I also called the producer and the national news editor to express my concern. Both acknowledged that it had been poor judgment to use Emerson and said that they had received much mail about him, a sample of which would be read on air. When they failed to read a single letter, I wrote another more impassioned E-mail, explaining that they already had a credibility problem with their Middle East coverage and did not need to make it worse by having Emerson on, and then not allowing any criticism of him to be aired. Feeling I had made my point, I let the matter drop.

But on August 20, the day of the missile strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan, Emerson popped up on NPR's Talk of the Nation. I wrote to remind them of my earlier contacts and to again strongly object to Emerson's being used as a "terrorism expert." Producer Ellen Silva responded. We exchanged several notes in which she apologized. I replied that I had already received apologies, and wanted to know if Emerson would appear in that capacity again. She wrote back saying: "You have

my promise he won't be used again. It is NPR policy."

I understood those words to mean that it was policy, as it should be in any reputable news organization, not to invite as a guest anyone with Emerson's record of inaccuracy and bias. So I forwarded the note to my E-mail list to ask others to listen to NPR and hold it accountable.

A few days later, I received an E-mail asking me to confirm the note was genuine. I replied that it was. Later I realized that my correspondent was Boston Globe columnist Jeff Jacoby, who had a long history of writing extremist pro-Israeli columns.

That afternoon, I received a note from Silva retracting her words and stating that she had "misspoken" in her earlier E-mail, a message she had copied to several NPR executives. I suspected that Jacoby had already been in touch with her. When his column appeared a few days later, it decried "The Blacklisting of an Investigative Journalist by NPR."¹⁰ It alleged a "conspiracy" between NPR and Arab organizations such as AAAN—which had nothing to do with the whole story—and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—with which I have absolutely no affiliation—to censor "courageous" journalists like Steven Emerson.

Posing as a defender of "journalistic integrity," Jacoby insisted that Emerson's views are "unobjectionable" to anyone except "Islamic terrorists and their supporters" and that my letters to NPR had been the result of CAIR "urging its adherents to go on the attack."

The 300 words The Boston Globe allowed me in its issue of September 2, 1998, were sufficient to provide some citations on Emerson's record and to condemn Jacoby's tactic of smearing and stereotyping Arabs who criticize Emerson. NPR's response was not printed until two days after mine, and in the meantime I took the initiative to call one of the senior NPR executives to whom Silva had copied her retraction.

He informed me of the gale of protests and criticism NPR was receiving from organizations that he would not name. NPR was obviously concerned to protect its integrity and not appear as though it were being pressured by one side or the other. Their spin was that the Talk of the Nation producer had "erred" in her E-mail to me and that there was no NPR policy against using Emerson or anyone else.

I told the executive that I had not answered any of the calls I had received from reporters. "I'm just a lonely little guy down here," I said, borrowing George Bush's famous phrase to describe his plight when faced with the might of the pro-Israeli lobby on the Hill. My position

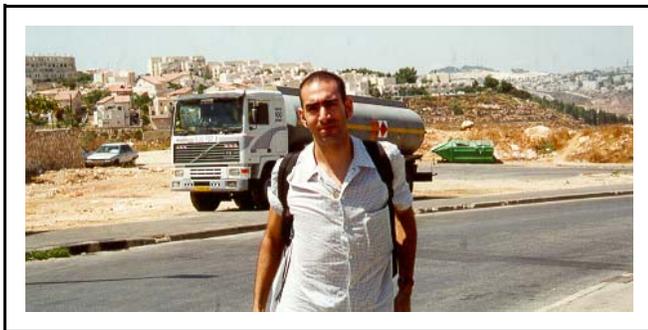
was that to respond to Jacoby's absurd charges would lend them credence and feed a story that was developing a life of its own.

NPR's response to the Globe, signed by Head of News Jeffrey Dvorkin, was more craven than I had expected. He wrote:

The guest in question, Steven Emerson, did appear on "Talk of the Nation." He has never been banned from NPR and never will be. Emerson is one of many commentators available to NPR on events involving his area of expertise (terrorism and counterterrorism). No doubt there will be other opportunities for him to appear again.¹¹

I understood that this was a gale that NPR was not prepared to weather. It had been savaged before by pro-Israeli groups, such as CAMERA, posing as independent media monitors, and NPR had gone to great lengths to respond to its charges of "anti-Israel bias." Perhaps they had no appetite for another round of irate calls from voices in the Israeli lobby threatening to cut off the last shreds of their public funding. So what people inside NPR knew and were prepared to say about Emerson privately, they would not defend in public. As a result they are now committed to feature, again and again, a commentator who in the opinion of reputable journalists all over the country, including some within NPR, has lost any claim to credibility.

Fact is not what legends are made of, and the story spread throughout the pro-Israeli community. Soon after Jacoby's column appeared, I received calls and E-mails from The Forward and Washington Jewish Week, which printed reports embellishing Jacoby's claims and citing the incident as evidence of a vast Arab/Muslim effort to intimidate the press. The Jerusalem Post published a feature on September 11, 1998, in which the author



Link readers with Internet access can receive Ali Abunimah's daily media critiques by sending a request by E-mail to him at <ahabunim@midway.uchicago.edu> (Photo taken in Gilo settlement, Occupied West Bank, September, 1996.)

ENDNOTES

1. The Daily Princetonian, April 19, 1990.
2. The Arab American Action Network (AAAN) has published the first ever comprehensive social, historic and economic needs assessment on Chicago's Arab community (Meeting Community Needs, Building on Community Strengths, Chicago: Arab American Action Network, 1998). Copies are available from the Arab American Action Network, 3148 W. 63rd Street, Chicago, IL 60629, or E-mailing aaan@aaan.org.
3. The Nation, May 15, 1995.
4. Newsday, Oct. 25, 1990.
5. The Journal of Counterterrorism & Security International, Spring, 1998.
6. Examples, all from the Weekly Planet, include "Jihad Journalism," April 9, 1998; "Dissection of a Lie," Sept. 3, 1998; and "Ties to Spies," May 21, 1998.
7. "Mea Culpa," Weekly Planet, March 19, 1998.
8. The Economist, Feb. 8, 1986.
9. The New York Times Book Review, May 19, 1991.
10. The Boston Globe, Aug. 31, 1998.

DRIVER UPDATE

Rod Driver, who told why he ran for Congress in our July-August 1998 *Link*, lost the Rhode Island Republican primary by 1,285 votes. But his 40% of the total was a lot more than most had expected. Rod had used his campaign to focus on the brutal demolition of Palestinian homes and the torture of Palestinian prisoners.

Many *Link* readers wrote or phoned Rod; some donated to his campaign. One letter, which he had reprinted in The Providence Journal the day before the election, came from a former *Link* author, Norman Finkelstein, whose parents had been Holocaust survivors. We reproduce the citation below in tribute to Rod Driver's personal courage.

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 1998

"If more Germans had shown Rod Driver's courage and integrity, there probably wouldn't have been a Nazi holocaust."



"I am the son of survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto, Auschwitz and Maidanek concentration camps. I strongly endorse Rod Driver's candidacy for Congress. If more Germans had shown Rod Driver's courage and integrity, there probably wouldn't have been a Nazi holocaust."

Norman Finkelstein

Norman G. Finkelstein, Ph.D., Princeton University, teaches political theory at Hunter College, City University of New York. He is the author of three books on the Nazi holocaust and on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Vote in the Republican Primary tomorrow for

Rod Driver

A Conscience for Congress

Paid for by Friends of Rod Driver, James Lewis, treasurer, (401) 539-7985

attacked NPR for interviewing me on Morning Edition and accused me of delivering "the customary anti-Israel harangue." I wonder if NPR will defend its right to interview me with the same zeal it upheld its decision to use Emerson.

I have since had one occasion to challenge publicly NPR's Middle East coverage. On September 8, I appeared as a guest with Loren Jenkins on Boulder-based KGNU radio, whose program Horizons invited me to talk about the U.S. media's coverage of the Middle East.

This had been arranged weeks before Jacoby's column was published. Jenkins was invited at my suggestion, as I wanted to challenge him publicly for answers to questions I asked every day by E-mail. The one-hour show was cordial but combative, and allowed us to return to the real substance of the debate, which is how the Middle East can be reported objectively. Jenkins and I could not agree on that, and I don't expect we will any time soon.

But in the morning I will be up early, listening to NPR, while I scan the newswires on the Internet. It won't take long before I hear something that requires a response. Check your E-mail in a little while; you might find it already there, waiting in your inbox.

The original *Link* issue used this page to list books being offered for sale at discount prices by Americans for Middle East Understanding. Please consult AMEU's book catalog elsewhere on this website.

Video-Cassettes (VHS)

Middle East Council of Churches, **Disabled for Palestine** (1993, 21 minutes). A Palestinian doctor shows cases of Palestinian civilians who have been maimed for life by Israeli bullets, beatings and tear gas. List: \$25.00; **AMEU: \$10.00.**

Middle East Council of Churches, **Christian Families of Palestine** (1993, 34 minutes). Documents expropriation by Israeli settlers of the land of two Christian Palestinian families. Good for church groups and tourists preparing to visit the Holy Land. List: \$25.00; **AMEU: \$20.00.**

IRA, **Children of the Cradle** (1996, 30-minute report on embargo of Iraq). **AMEU: \$3.00.**

Masri, M., **Hanan Ashrawi: A Woman of Her Time** (1995, 51 minutes). One of Palestine's most articulate representatives shows that Israel's occupation is far from over – and far from benign. List: \$65.00; **AMEU: \$35.00.**

Munayyer, F. & H., **Palestinian Costumes and Embroidery: A Precious Legacy** (1990, 38 minutes). A rare collection of Palestinian dresses with accessories modeled against the background of Palestinian music, with commentary tracing the designs back to Canaanite times. List \$50.00; **AMEU: \$12.50.**

AIC, **Seeds of War in Jerusalem** (1997, 20 minutes). The struggle to save Abu Ghneim and Arab East Jerusalem. **AMEU: \$17.50.**

PHRM, **Jerusalem: An Occupation Set in Stone?** (1995, 55 minutes). Graphic account of Israel's plan to uproot Palestinian presence from Jerusalem. **AMEU:\$20.00.**

DMZ, **People & the Land** (1997, 57 minutes). This is the controversial documentary by Tom Hayes that appeared on over 40 PBS stations. **AMEU: \$25.00.**

Studio 52 Production, **Checkpoint: The Palestinians After Oslo** (1997, 58 minutes). Documents the post-Oslo situation with off-beat humor and historical insights provided by Palestinian and Israeli activists like Naseer Arad and Hanan Ashrawi. **AMEU: \$27.00.**

Kelley, R., **The Bedouin of Israel** (1998, 2 hours). Never-before-seen film of how Israel has treated its Bedouin citizens, including interview with the notorious Green Patrol. **AMEU: \$30.00.**

Driver, R., **TV Political Ad** (1998, 30 seconds). This is the powerful 30-second spot that Rod Driver aired on Channel 12 in Rhode Island during his campaign for Congress. Also included are his six "Untold Stories" newspaper advertisements. **AMEU: \$8.00.**

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