

my grant application a few days late because I “have to go to a wedding” or “have booked a skiing holiday” etc. But now it appears that the University is going the way of GCSEs and A-levels, by introducing rules that make it almost impossible for students to fail. These rules caused considerable consternation when they were introduced at our recent exam board, because they appear to benefit students who do not bother to meet deadlines.

Let’s consider a student who does not hand in an assignment for a module, without any extenuating circumstances. If the assignment is more than two weeks late, our existing rules state that the student should get zero for it. And that is only fair to those who did manage to



do the work on time. But now, the University is insisting that students should have the chance to “redeem” themselves whenever they fail a module, for any reason.

So if a student fails a module because they could not be bothered to do the coursework, they are now given the chance to pass it by doing a similar assignment at a later date. This removes any incentive for students to hand in coursework on time. And staff have to set extra assignments for students who could not be bothered to do them previously; as “referrals” are not “repeats”, a new assignment is required.

So instead of tidily managing our teaching and marking, we face the prospect of perpetually setting and assessing extra assignments on a rolling basis throughout the year.

At the same time, our University wants to improve the “employability” of its students. Giving students deadlines that don’t matter, however, seems an odd way of preparing them for the world of work. With the new system of “referrals”, “resits” and “repeats”, a three-year degree could in theory last nine years before either the student passes the whole course or the University finally fails them. Of course, the University is taking their fees the whole time, which a cynic might deduce as the reason students are effectively unable to fail. They are far more likely

to run out of money before the University runs out of patience.

Where did these new rules for “referrals” etc come from? Who, exactly, in the University proposed them? I’ll bet they did not come from an academic who actually teaches – more likely from an “educationalist” somewhat removed from the chalk face. I’m all for giving a second chance to students who make an effort, or have extenuating circumstances. But those who simply can’t be bothered should fail there and then – for their own good and ours.

One State for Israel-Palestine?

In 2007 a group of concerned individuals, including both Israelis and Palestinians, signed up to the One State declaration – a declaration of principles for a just and enduring solution of the Israel/Palestinian conflict. The text of the declaration, and a list of signatories, may be accessed at onestate.net/pages/declaration.htm.

A panel discussion on this topic was held at the University on June 9. The speakers were Prof. Ilan Pappé (University of Exeter), Dr. Ghada Karmi (University of Exeter), Dr. Nur Masalha (St. Mary’s University College) and Prof. Smadar Lavie (Macalester College, USA). The event was organized by the Southampton University Amnesty International Group and the Southampton OneState group, which presently consists of myself, Malcolm Levitt (mhl@soton.ac.uk), and Oren Ben-Dor (O.Ben-Dor@soton.ac.uk).

Each of these speakers are prominent writers and activists. Pappé is well-known as a dissident Israeli historian. His “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine” (2007, One World) is an instant classic and in my view an essential starting point for anyone seeking to understand the conflict. Pappé recently moved from Israel to the UK, in part because of intimidation (although he stresses that anything he has been subjected to is trivial compared to the typical Palestinian experience). Karmi left Palestine as a child in 1948, and also now lives in the UK. She documented her childhood experiences in prewar Jerusalem and as a Palestine refugee in her wonderful book “In Search of Fatima” (2002, Verso). I regret that I have not yet read her latest book “Married

to another man: Israel's dilemma in Palestine" (2007, Pluto), but I will do so soon! Masalha is also a Palestinian living in the UK. One of his main fields of expertise is Judaism and Zionism. His book "The Bible and Zionism" (2007, Zed Books) is also highly recommended. Lavie is a cultural anthropologist, whose "Poetics of Military Occupation" (1990, University of California) was particularly influential. In the last two decades she has studied the situation of Israeli Jews originating from non-Yiddish speaking countries, mostly from the Arab World, known as the Mizrahim ("Orientals," Hebrew).

The evening started with short presentations by each speaker. I did not take notes so I will not attempt to summarize these presentations. I will only try to give some personal impressions of the evening.

Let me start by giving some personal background. I grew up in a fairly religious but isolated and ageing Jewish community in Hull. Like most English young people I had no interest in politics whatsoever. As is usual amongst Jews of my generation, my first experience of Israel was through working as a volunteer on Israeli kibbutzim (communal farms), picking oranges, enjoying the sun, and fantasizing about Israeli girls, etc. My political awakening came later when I did postdoctoral research at the Weizmann Institute in Israel. My bike-riding activities and environmental interests took me deep into the occupied/disputed territories, which were relatively placid at that time, although not completely "safe". Although it was far from my mind, I gradually became aware of the ruined Arab villages and heaps of stones dotting the landscape. And then a defining incident – I visited Hebron, and was immediately hosted and taken around by Palestinian youths. For them it was a matter of routine to be intimidated at gunpoint by young, nervous,

Israeli soldiers. For me, it was an experience I will never forget. It took a while to sink in, but eventually I realized that my naive, apolitical, view of Israel had been shattered. Many years later, I started to put the pieces together, and begin to understand the world again, with the help of seminal texts such as Chomsky's "The Fateful Triangle" (South End Press).

Since those days, we have had the two invasions of Lebanon, the two major uprisings (Intifadas), the Oslo accords, the "Peace Process", the "Withdrawal from Gaza", the democratic elections within the occupied/disputed territories, the refusal to recognize the result of that election by the USA and the EU, and by the main factions of the PLO. We now have the separation wall, the accelerating pace of settlements in the occupied/disputed territories (there are now about 0.5 million settlers), the destructions of houses and olive groves, kidnappings and murders by settlers and Palestinians, imprisonment and torture, hundreds of checkpoints and Jews-only roads. And we have had the inevitable consequences – shootings and bombings, killings from aircraft and missiles, and by explosive belts.

There is no feasible two-state solution to this conflict now. Israel has dissected the occupied territories into numerous non-contiguous segments with almost no physical connections. Israel controls every detail of life in the occupied territories, which increasingly resemble nothing as much as a set of giant prison camps, on a monstrous scale. All movements, all economic activity, everything is controlled by Israel.

All this is well-known, or at least should be. Ilan Pappé made clear that the two-state solution is dead not by chance, nor because of the rogue actions of settlers. The possibility

of a Palestinian state was deliberately killed by Israel in a long series of systematic actions and policies starting immediately after the 1967 Israeli take-over of that part of Palestine left over from the 1948 expulsions and ethnic cleansing. The settlement blocks, the roadblocks, the walls and fences, the stifling bureaucracy, the prison and internment camps, the restrictions on any form of normal life – all was designed systematically to ensure that any Palestinian state, if it ever were to emerge, would be stillborn.

At the same time, an international consensus has developed around a two-state "solution". However, should this be implemented, and given the current balance of power and international support, the Palestinian "state" will be a mere complex of walled and fenced prison camps, perhaps with a flag



and token representation at the United Nations.

Israel has probably accepted that sooner or later international pressure will result in some form of "Two-State Solution" and is now managing the situation so that (i) the Jewish state keeps as much of the desirable land and resources (especially water) as possible (ii) the boundaries are drawn so as to imprison as many non-Jews as possible in prison camps outside the confines of the state, but still under its full control (iii) the inevitable resistance and violence can be blamed on the imprisoned population and used to justify even more expropriation of

property and land (iv) Israel will retain the right to execute economic blockades, and violent activity, to discipline the less well-behaved prison inmates and their families. Under these circumstances Israel will accept a situation in which a Palestinian flag is planted on top of the most important prison camp, which will be permitted to call itself a "state".

The scenario is already visible for all to see in Gaza, and is well on the way in other parts of historic Palestine. Unfortunately, and shamefully, it is fully supported by our elected governments, who even participate in an economic blockade of one of the prison camps.

Britain has, of course, a huge responsibility for this mess. As Nur Masalha said, Zionism has its origins in Evangelical Christianity. The early Zionists were Christians such as the 7th Earl of Shaftesbury, whose influence lies behind the Balfour declaration, in which Britain declared it would "use its best endeavours" to facilitate the establishment of a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine "it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine". These Christian Zionists adhered to the bonkers view that gathering the Jews into Palestine would somehow result in their conversion to Christianity and the Second Coming of Christ. Even today Zionism has its most reliable support from evangelical Christians (now mainly in the US). Now as then, such bizarre religious ideas only have leverage because they coincide temporarily with imperial interests.

The two-state "solution" is a recipe for endless war and ever-mounting bitterness. As Pappé said, it is bad for the jailed, but also bad for the jailers. It is unsustainable and cannot end in

anything other than a dreadful catastrophe, probably with global consequences.

Nevertheless it is important to realize that terrible as the situation is, the people of the region, Jewish and Arab, Israeli and Palestinian, have a lot in common. In particular, the Jews of Arab origin (Mizrahim) are an increasingly numerous and influential group in Israeli society, and who may hold the keys to an eventual solution of the conflict. The Mizrahim are linked by religion to the Western ("Ashkenazi") Jews, who still dominate Israeli political and cultural life. At the same time, the Mizrahim are linked culturally to the Arab societies, in which their families lived for centuries. This group retains the knowledge that it is possible for Jews to live peacefully and securely within the Arab world.

The road to One State is currently obscure, and proponents of One State have been criticised from some quarters for drawing strength away from the struggle towards a Two State settlement, which has wide international support, even though progress is currently blocked. Nevertheless, some proponents of One State are starting to sketch out feasible pathways. As a response to an audience question, Ghada Karmi indicated some possible scenarios – involving a two-state transition period, a binational state, etc. Clearly there is a very long way to go, and much work to do.

We have no illusions. It is unlikely that One State will happen in our lifetimes. One small event in a minor English city will probably be forgotten quickly. After all, it was just a few academics, none of whom actually live in the region any more. But there is always a tiny chance that we have witnessed the early stages of something significant.

*Malcolm Levitt
Southampton, June 21, 2008.*

Closure of the Textile Conservation Centre

The Textile Conservation Centre (TCC), which currently operates within the Winchester School of Art, is due for final closure in October 2009. Full details of the reasons and links to protests and background are on their website at <http://www.textileconservationcentre.soton.ac.uk/> but the problem, similar to that faced by all branches of artefact conservation, is a shortfall in the funding required for a fully realised operation and a considerable current deficit covered by subsidy from related areas. It has recently been announced that the conservation programme run by the Royal College of Art in association with the V&A may well close also in four years time. There is a well-researched and informative Times article linked on the TCC website.

A Prime-Minister's petition against the TCC closure was submitted by Mandy-Jane Patterson and attracted 3,334 signatures by the May deadline, a large number for a specialist area. The petition and the recent response may be found at <http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page15944.asp> and are reproduced here:-



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We received a petition asking: "We the undersigned petition the Prime Minister to keep the Textile Conservation Centre open."