

they won't be effective in their community. So why do you want us to talk with them if they aren't representatives of the mainstream community we deal with.

R: Right.

M: These are natural allies; or maybe to you, also as a progressive – but not to me as a religious Arab. And at the same time, failing to bring this up is also failing to target that even impressive numbers of non religious people. I don't want to say here that religious people are fanatic, but even within the Arabic community and I would assume the same within the Jewish community, there is this big chunk of people that would be able to communicate with each other or bridge differences. And, anyway if I knew how I would have done it. It's a challenge for both. I see that what activists are doing is just accepting each other and not going towards working within their own communities.

R: Mmmm

M: I've seen it within the whole leftist movement here. It's the same people that accept each other but are failing to go within their communities because...

R: It's harder.

M: Yes. So it's the same issue whether you're a leftist or progressive in any community. But the urgency I think, now is that they both have the lights on them. The media is focussing spotlights on both of these communities. Because nothing here that is happening far away is just happening far away.

R: Right.

M: It will affect people here. And it will affect even how people think here and how people react here.

RADICALISM

R: Right. Now, just to backtrack a bit, maybe when we talk about radicalism, what we're talking about is that balance between being willing to go into your community, taking the risks of bridging the religious differences that you might feel as a progressive, and being a kind of

ambassador. Which is often seen as a liberal position to take, right? Because it's about diplomacy and tolerance. There may be all these kinds of things that these religious folks believe in that are totally against any utopic agenda you might have

for revolution.

M: Mmmm

So when you go to these communities and tell them to bridge, they want to see the other go first. It's a kind of Catch 22.

R: But this definition of radicalism, I think really needs to shift if we're going to form a mass movement like you're describing.

M: Yes. But, radicalism in a way isn't a natural radicalism. Religion is politics in the Arab world. And even though many are politically and religiously inclined, progressive ideas have been prospering in the Middle East all through the 40s, 50s, 60s and even in the 70s. And the communities that are here actually represent that kind of middle class that carry these ideas.

R: Right, because they're the ones who left with the rise of fundamentalism.

M: But now, when they come here they get challenged culturally. And whatever happened on September 11th, forced this kind of challenge.

R: Yah.

M: So when you go to these communities and tell them to bridge, they want to see the other go first. It's a kind of Catch 22.

R: Mmm. Well, thanks so much Mughir. We could write many books and talk for hours!

M: Thanks to you too.



HEADS UP COLLECTIVE MEMBER REENA KATZ SPEAKS WITH AL AWDA'S MUGHIR AL HINDI ABOUT THE RECENT EVENTS IN PALESTINE AND ISRAEL. MAY 2002



SPEAKING OUT AGAINST THE OCCUPATION

R: Welcome Mughir, to Community Action Notes.

M: Thanks.

R: Would you like to introduce yourself?

M: My name is Mughir al-Hindi, and I'm 'Middle Eastern'. I describe myself like that because I was born in Syria, from a Syrian-Iraqi father and a Palestinian mother from Jerusalem, and a Charkas grandmother, and I've lived in Lebanon so I consider myself as a salad of Middle Eastern cultures and for the past 3 years, I immigrated here to

Canada, and I got involved in the Palestine Right to Return Coalition: Al Awda, which is a group that mainly focuses on the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees according to International laws.

R: Welcome.

M: Thank-you.

R: I'm Reena Katz. I'm a 3rd generation Jewish Canadian. My ancestors are from Poland. There are lots of Holocaust survivors in my family. I've been in the Jewish Women's Committee to End the Occupation since the beginning of the 2nd Intifadah.

GENERAL FEELINGS

R: So, today we're going to talk about Palestine and Israel. Maybe we should open with just some general feelings. How have you been feeling in these recent weeks?

M: Well, for us it's definitely like emotions run high. But, I remember the 1973 War when I was 3 years old. I was in Damascus then. Even though I was 3 years old, I remember the raids on Damascus and my uncle going missing in Golan Heights, and later moving to Lebanon. So

for me, war has been a daily kind of life. And it just stopped when I came to Canada. But still, we have this umbilical chord so we live it on a daily basis here. But, we somehow got this kind of – not resistance- but, we adapt ourselves to certain emotions and that’s how we look on the current issues - rather than responding or reacting to certain things that happen. Because

anyway, even though maybe what ever happened in the past months has been more relevant to the world, I think things that happened earlier in Lebanon in 1982 have been even

worse and didn’t get that much attention. The invasion in 1982 had more than 18,000 killed in 3 months. So, it’s not that there’s a feeling of indifference, there’s still a feeling of agony. But, we know it’s going to be a long battle and we got used to it.

R: Yes. That makes a lot of sense. Personally, I’ve been feeling exceptionally in despair recently. Mostly because I just see the arm of colonialism dividing communities, and how my own Jewish community for the most part is totally brainwashed into believing that we have an entitlement to Israel, number 1 and number 2 that somehow a

piece of land can be Jewish. This is the predominant media and community propagandistic fact, and I’m really sick and tired of it. Recently, there was a big march in North York, I don’t know if you heard about it...?

M: Not yet.

R: 2000 Jews in Earl Bales Park in a march for Israel. So, 6 women from the Jewish Women’s

...ownership has only been to Arabs and Jews which is something I think both communities should address and tell the rest of the left in Canada.

Committee went and stood silently with our banner and got hurled abuses of all kinds; verbal and physical. This happens all the time when we confront other Jews about the Occupation. So I do feel like from my end, being a

very sheltered Canadian things have really escalated. And, I’m lucky to know a lot of progressive Jews and progressive other people - but in general, it just feels quite dire. I feel like it’s going to get a lot worse before it gets better.

M: The involvement of the Canadian society on the left has only been restricted to Canadians of Arab origin or Jewish origin. And, somehow I don’t see the left coming forward -maybe now more apparent than before- towards this issue. So, ownership has only been to Arabs and Jews which is something I think both communities should address and tell the rest of the left in Canada.

If we are both working together for that, why aren’t you showing much support around this?

LABOUR ISSUES IN PALESTINE

R: What about groups like the International Socialists and the Marxist/Leninist League? They often have discussions about Palestine. Have you ever attended one of these events?

M: Yah well, I remember when I first came here and I didn’t know anyone here. I started searching over the net for kind of Communist groups, and I attended some seminars around these issues. But, even when I got a chance to speak- I would get rebuffed that the solution would only be when the proletariat of Palestine would join hands with the proletariat in Israel.

R: laughs

M: It’s been restricted to that kind of...

R: Dogma.

M: ...dogma for so many of the Communist parties. And, this situation doesn’t exist there. The Palestinian workers aren’t unionized. The biggest union in Israel, the Hatzadrut doesn’t recognize them. And anyway, that’s part of the system. That’s why Israel has kept the West Bank for so long. It’s because it’s the main source of cheap labour. So, I hope their stance will change or they will get more insight on this

wasn’t there initially. It imposed itself.

R: Right.

M: Millions got imposed and ethnically cleansed other millions out. So what we see is a long term dream we have of nationalism. All these movements and even the early stages of the PLO and all Fatah groups, P.F.L.P. – until now, P.F.L.P. calls for one secular state. The Fatah movement used to call for one secular state for Arabs and Israel and the flag that used to be raised in the early 70s is the current Palestinian flag, with the star of David, the Muslim Crescent, and the Cross. That was the official flag in the early 70s of the Fatah movement. But in 1974 and later they dropped that because they were involved in the civil war in Lebanon and more challenges arose. But still, until now that’s what we envision. Not as Al Awda’s, but as Arab progressives. You have people who were herded to the Middle East not to their consent, and you have Zionists who choose to move to the Middle East. Whereas those who were born in Israel are...even Sharon, you know was born in Palestine; for me, he’s a Palestinian. He may not be someone I agree with, but in the future...laughs

R: laughs

M: You know, these people have a right to stay now where they are. And there’s enough space. Even now in Israel, more than 78% of the land is still empty. So there is

enough space for all to live, but in a different political environment.

R: Structure.

M: ...and structure.

ONE SECULAR STATE

R: So, your vision is a secular state; one secular state. How do you see diasporic communities – Jewish diasporic communities, Arab diasporic communities- progressing themselves towards that end to help make that happen?

M: Well when I moved here, although I found it nice to have communities preserving their cultures, I found it very weakening to being progressive. It was still only working within communities. And that’s in a way why we don’t see a Canadian movement coming up. That’s still also one of the limitations we have and hurdles we have as progressives in both communities. My community is imposing it’s own ghetto in let’s say, Mississauga or wherever.

R: Right.

M: It’s like working as a separate community with another community. So, even though I think it might be hard for a progressive Jew to take me into his community because he’s so much protective of his own community, but at the same time what I think is...it shouldn’t be a lone community’s work. But the interaction that can happen would be getting communities more

politically involved because the communities aren’t particularly...at least the Arabic community isn’t very politically involved. It is only active along emphasizing their identity or religious identity. Which is imposed anyway by the structure of being a community not interacting with others. The Canadian government actually wants to facilitate this. So, what we have experienced in 2 years is when we exposed both to each other it’s like: even though we live in one country, it’s the first time we interact.

R: Mmm Hmm

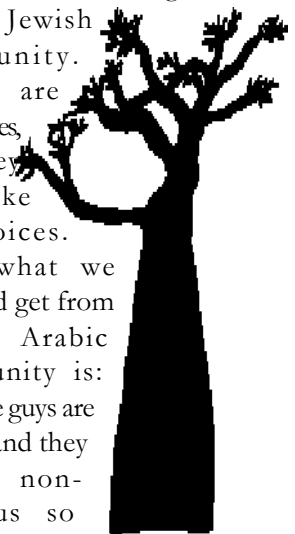
M: It’s the first time they explore the others politically and come across the acceptable Other.

R: Mmm

M: So, that’s the challenge and it’s a challenge in both communities in a way. So the active emphasis should be on introducing others. But at the same time, what I’ve seen is there is a challenge within the Jewish community.

Many are progressives, but they are like non-voices.

And, what we hear and get from the Arabic community is: ok, these guys are leftists and they are non-religious so



Jewish state: That's also colonialism. You live in a kind of settlement. Israel itself is like a big kind of settlement. Irrespective of the West Bank. We're talking about - Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt. After more than 20 years of peace with Egypt, there is still no relation between the 2.

R: Mmmm Hmm

M: And that has nothing to do with education books, with anything. So, these are the questions that I would ask. We are not bringing them up here with groups we work with, but I think it's a shortsightedness of so many groups that they don't want to discuss this.

R: Right.

M: But, what will happen later when we face these obstacles?

ARAB NATIONALISM

R: So what's your solution? What's your ideal concept of how to work things out in that region?

M: Well being progressive, and maybe we should come later to talk about nationalism here in Canada – in the Arab world...in the rest of the world, nationalism is looked at as something as backwards. In the Arab world it's not because, what we're suffering from is actually a kind of regionalism or localizing. These countries haven't existed before colonialism: Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia, Libya. We're one

nation. And, what actually the Americans and the Israelis have, has been a project to destroy Arab nationalism. And U.S. later went into the Middle East to destroy this because it wanted to destroy the emergence of one big nation, that's the Arab nation. We're beyond millions. We don't have any cultural differences between us, language differences, whatever. So for us, nationalism or Arab nationalism is something we look towards because we're in a much regressed or backwards situation where we're separated. My family is divided half between Syria and Lebanon. I have Lebanese family members just because when the borders were drawn, we were on both sides.

R: Right.

M: So when we talk about nationalism it's about creating the whole Arab world, it's something very progressive for us. It's a target we look forward to. And here, we find that we have a spot, that's Palestine. That's in the middle and the heart of the Arab world. Not because it has Jerusalem which is a religious city. Jerusalem was abandoned by the whole Muslim world as a religious site for more than 400 years. It's

My family is divided half between Syria and Lebanon. I have Lebanese family members just because when the borders were drawn, we were on both sides.

not about religion. Jerusalem isn't about the 2 mosques there. But anyway, when Arab nationalists come and see there's this Israel, they don't see it as a Jewish presence. It's definitely an imposed Zionist body there; a colonial body that's being nurtured by the West and U.S., to be superior to the rest and play a different role whether it's military or imposing certain trends in the area towards militarization. Even now, the West is imposing non-democratic measures in all these Arab countries – in the pretext that we are in a state of war.

R: Right.

M: My grandfather and mother and father grew in a democratic society and civil society that now we don't have because of all these American backed regimes that are now actually fighting Israel, and imposing military kind of rule on all these countries. So the whole question that gets imposed in the Middle East is around the presence of Israel as a negative presence, or a hostile presence. Because who started what war or this isn't the issue. It's like: why would there be war between two nations? It's because one nation

issue. Because the Hatztdrut is welcomed everywhere they go in the world as a leftist labour group. Whereas, what they do is actually a kind of apartheid.

R: Can you talk a bit about how that apartheid affects the unions there? They don't recognize Palestinian workers?

M: No, because even Palestinian workers there are mainly daily workers or wage workers and so that's like a legal way out for the unions. The Palestinians are mainly peasants, construction workers, they work in factories. But they're always

That's why Israel has kept the West Bank for so long. It's because it's the main source of cheap labour.

considered as daily wage workers and nothing applies to them when it comes to union privileges. Their status isn't Israeli so they can't join Israeli unions. But still, there are hundreds of thousands working in Israel.

R: Hmm.

M: For the past 10 years, Israel has been trying to depend on foreign labour. Now mainly Romanian, Chinese and Korean Labourers are being brought to Israel to replace the Palestinian workers. And, I don't know if these workers get any benefits under international law.

R: The migrant workers?

M: Yah.

R: I'm certain they don't.

HISTORY OF COLONIALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

R: As I said before, I think the conservative, pro-Zionist global impression is that Israel was given to the Jews after the Holocaust, because of what Ashkenazi (Eastern European Jews) suffered.

And basically because of the guilt of surviving European warmongers, they gave this land to the Jews. And it's perceived that it was a: empty and b: entitled to us due to some kind of religious history there.

M: Yup. What happened is France and Britain conquered the Arab world

from the Ottoman Empire. And what happened actually initially was that the British convinced the Sharif of Mecca who was an outstanding Arab figure, to revolt against the Turks in the first world war. They promised him an Arabic Kingdom, but never intended to give it to him. So, his son who was Prince Faisal established an Arabic army and many of the Arabic officers in the Turkish forces joined the revolutionary army to liberate Turkey and get the dream of the

Arabic kingdom; a united Arabic kingdom. And actually, my grandfather was one of those officers who then joined the Arabic army. And this army actually succeeded in liberating the Middle East then from the Turks. So, they were at the front of the British troops who were attacking the Turks then.

R: Was it a pan-ethnic army from many Arab nations?

M: Ah...the nations that we know now, didn't exist then. There were different states, like counties within the Turkish empire that didn't draw lines along ethnicity. The current states we see actually, aren't comprised of different ethnic groups.

There was another secret deal then signed by the British and the French -signed by Seiks from the British side, and Piqot the foreign minister of France then- to divide the area later into British and French mandates and form new countries. And, this document fell into the hands of the Communists in 1917 and Lenin then, after the revolution found this document in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and sent it to the Sharif of Mecca and told him that the British are deceiving you. So, of course the Sharif didn't believe the infidels then –who were the

...basically because of the guilt of surviving European warmongers, they gave this land to the Jews. And it's perceived that it was a: empty and b: entitled to us due to some kind of religious history there.

non-believers, the Communists- and he showed the document to Lawrence of Arabia. And, Lawrence actually even didn't know about the document and when he went to the British, they told him: yes, this is true but you shouldn't be telling the Arabs. And, that was the kind of game that was going. At the same time, there was the Balfour declaration to the Zionist movement from the British because actually, Balfour was a personal friend of Herzl (Founder of Zionism). So, this kind of friendship gave a boost to the Zionist movement.



The Arabic kingdom was shortly lived, Prince Faisal declared it and declared a parliament that was even represented by Palestinians, Lebanese; or whatever we know of these countries. But, then the French went and invaded Syria and deported him and the British compensated him the kingdom of Iraq. But then they took what is called Palestine, which is actually an old Roman name. The names of Palestine, Syria, Lebanon have never existed in the Arabic lingo. These are names created by the British to create new countries.

And, the first actually Palestinian national conference was surprised by bringing up the name Palestine because they said: it seems there's something cooking around that. But now of course, we have adopted the name 'Palestinian.'

We are called Palestinians, we are Palestinians. But, the area there was just an Arabic area.

R: Can you talk a bit about the relationship between the 2 communities in the early days?

M: Actually, a milestone of Jewish/ Arab relationships is 1492 in Spain. Now Arabs, or let's say Muslims have always considered the Jews as people of The Book, along with the

Christians. And, Jews were in good number in Al Medinas. Initially, they welcomed the prophet and later they have continued living and actually were able to go back to all the Arabic cities with the Islamic conquest of the whole of the Middle East and Africa, where they were kicked out before by the Romans or the Byzantine Empire. So, many Arab Jewish communities, or Sephardic communities have been continuously been living there for hundreds of years, or more than thousands of years. And, this is

very apparent from the placement of Jewish quarters in every Arab city. Let's say in Damascus where I lived, the Jewish quarter -and I actually want to talk briefly here- when I say Jewish quarter it's not a ghetto...

R: Right. It's a neighbourhood.

M: Arabic architecture has always been into dividing -not only people of different religions into different quarters, but people of different tasks. You would find tailors in only one area....

R: Woodworkers...

M: Woodworkers in certain areas, so it's not divided by religion. It's also divided along professional lines. And it's still apparent in Damascus. So when I say a Jewish quarter, that's not a ghetto. So, all these quarters -I know personally, Damascus- is right in the middle of the old town. It's just next to Nazir du Maia which was initially a church before it was a Roman temple. That's the heart of the city. So, that tells you how long these communities have been there, continuously living there. Now with Palestine, what so many people fail to also point out is Jewish presence in Palestine at least has remained continuous in 2 major cities. That's Hebron and Safat. Safat used to have the biggest Arab Jewish community as well. So, the main milestone that happened is actually 1492. Actually what happened was ethnic cleansing in Spain.

R: Yeah.

state was kind of accepting that we just drop all our sufferings back and believe in our rights that still exist. But we're just talking about 50 years. That's not much.

R: Mmm hmm.

M: So in general, even though we're just like a grassroots group we've never taken a political stand that we don't do this or we're for 1 state or 2 states or there is even now a proposition for 3 states solution.

R: Right.

M: But you will find, that the logic that all right of return groups emphasize is that the best thing to have is a modern state where all live together. And, what's really important is to go over -not necessarily now- other solutions that are I think feasible, but they're not being discussed at all. There are complete solutions that are not being discussed at all. There are more than 4 proposed solutions for the issue of refugees, even solving the whole issue. I think now, why we've seen more people who used to support Israel calling for the end of the Occupation is because yes, now they have seen that occupation has a very ugly face. But, also they have a fear that this is actually going to bring the destruction of Israel.

R: Yes.

M: Like, there was fear that Sharon is actually bringing the destruction of Israel. Now we'd say: how does such a powerful army and nuclear state gets destructed? Well,

we've seen the most powerful nations being...

R: ...demolished

M: ...demolished from within. Because of ethical problems like the Assurian empire. There are historians who go into the questions of how big empires crumble in just no time.

R: Right.

M: So, it's not about might. And that's where our belief comes in and where our perseverance comes in. It's because it has been established on wrong concepts. And what we really believe is so many people didn't even have the choice, but they were shipped into Israel. So not everyone is Zionist, even though many of them have been raised along Zionist terms.

R: Right.

M: If you see the conscientious objectors, or know the reservists who are signing the Refusal to Sign. For example, I met reservists and asked them: if you think it's unethical to serve in West Bank, do you think it's ethical to serve in

Golan Heights? I haven't seen reservists saying: I won't serve in Golan Heights.

R: Right.

M: Or, even before in Lebanon. I haven't seen reservists saying: I don't want to serve in Lebanon.

R: Yup.

M: So, what makes West Bank different than Sinai or Golan Heights? Their main concentration is on the West Bank whereas what about the Golan Heights? You have 1/2 million refugees...Syrian refugees who have been kicked out of Golan Heights. People think the issue of Lebanon is finished. It is, but still, Lebanon is carrying more than 1/2 million Palestinian refugees. And this is still laying heavily on the Lebanese

internal politics.

R: Right.

M: So if Israel pulls back, that still doesn't mean that the conflict with Lebanon has ended..

R: Right.

M: So, these are the questions that

I would say that

...when Arab nationalists come and see there's this Israel, they don't see it as a Jewish presence. It's definitely an imposed Zionist body there; a colonial body that's being nurtured by the West and U.S., to be superior to the rest and play a different role whether it's military or imposing certain trends in the area towards militarization.

Zionists have to answer. Or people who still believe that a solution can be met where Israel should still exist with the kind of identity as a Zionist



differences are many. The similarities are also many, but it's important to talk about both.
M: Yah.

DIVISIONS ON THE LEFT ABOUT ISRAEL/PALESTINE

R: Let's talk about the current state of the left. We talked a bit about where it's lacking in terms of communities being involved. How do you see us working together? How do you see us bridging differences?

M: Well, I don't see major differences. What I have mainly felt here is that whoever is concerned about this issue is either the Arabs or Muslim groups, or Jewish groups. Most of the activists I've seen are actually Jewish, and some of them are Israelis. Now, I've seen some short term objectives that both agree to do. But, long term there are differences that need to be addressed.

I see many of the activists here still believe that Zionism is a good idea, and that there should be a Jewish state. For us, still it doesn't make sense. This is also a debate in the Arabic community. You'd find people who would only accept a

Palestinian state now. Where, for example someone like me- I don't accept a Palestinian state beside an Israeli state, or a Jewish state. Because, for me that's just emphasizing what was wrong. It's not about not bridging differences or not coming up with a feasible solution. Because I think there are many feasible solutions for both to live. But, not with a colonial or Zionist concept where both live in a modern state. Where both are residents of the same country abiding by the same laws and having the same rights.
R: Do you feel as an activist, you can work with people who are against the Occupation but support the concept of the state of Israel? Or do you feel like the diasporic kind of activism we have to do right now -being in Canada isn't possible alongside Zionists?

I don't accept a Palestinian state beside an Israeli state, or a Jewish state. Because, for me that's just emphasizing what was wrong.

M: Well, it's not pragmatic but initially as the Palestine Right to Return

Coalition, we wouldn't have worked at all with people who still believed in...or at least didn't acknowledge the right of return of refugees. Because for us, it's a basic elemental suffering of every Palestinian - losing their own house or village. And, accepting a Palestinian state along an Israeli

the population, which is a challenge.

R: Right. That also fits in reference to what you were saying earlier. In terms of the colonial conception of the 'Arab World'; that there's this group, and we're going to divide them into smaller groups and designate Roman names to them - that it's totally arbitrary to begin with. And that this incredibly long history gets obliterated when we use that term indigenous because we conceive of it in this Canadian context. Which in itself is highly problematic, because there's hundreds of different tribes and nations that constitute what we call Native Canadian. Some of whom never had any contact with Europeans before colonialism. So, to relate them as one group, is problematic in its own sense.

M: Yah.
R: And, there was no one living here except the indigenous people. That was it. So, the

M: And in every...let's say in Damascus...I'm from an area that's

manufacturers of Syrian artiana and goldworks. I remember that

I see the Arab/Jewish relationships in Arab countries as a model rather than something negative.

when I was in Damascus I used to tune to radio Israel to the Iraqi Jewish programs called: Al Mu-hajirin or: the emigrants. In a way, in every city you'll find an area called Al Mu-hajirin and it goes back to 1492. These are the people who came actually from Spain. So, whether it's in Damascus or Palestine or Egypt or Morocco or Iraq, the biggest waves of immigration from Spain happened then. And these were combined Arab and Jewish immigrations also. So, you have 2 kinds of Jewish communities in the Arab world: original, who have been continuously living there; and the Spanish or the Moorish. They are Sephardic as well but can call them Arab or Moorish.

R: Right. And there's a language as well. There's an Arab Jewish language. Some people call it Ladino.

M: Ok. I don't know about that. So, that was a period that even continued this common history. Now, the major change or tensions started to happen in the '40s and maybe in the '30s. But even, if you go to specific countries...like in Syria, the Jewish community is still present. The Jewish community is still intact in Damascus. And, they're successful. They are the major dealers and

as so many Syrians do because the Iraqi -even here in Toronto- the Iraqi Jewish community has very strong feelings towards their Arabic music and Arabic culture and so they still maintain this. It's a kind of proof that they didn't leave there willingly. Other than in Egypt, I see the Arab/Jewish relationships in Arab countries as a model rather than something negative.

R: Mmmm
M: But, they should surface more and be given another chance because whatever happened if you take it in terms of history, is a small period actually. What we say is that Israel's problems are a glitch in the long history of the Middle East of these relationships.

THE CREATION OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

R. And how do you perceive the opportunism of Britain within that? You know, in the years leading up to 1948. What's your perception of the creation of the state of Israel, basically?

M: It's colonialism. It's just a kind of stupid colonialism. Where they

think the ability to remove indigenous people and we've seen this behaviour in Australia, we've seen it in Canada, we've seen it everywhere. The complete deportation of people. Even French Canadians, how they were deported. So, it's not surprising at all. But, I think the major problem even now with what we face in the U.S. is a biblical background to the issue where so many fundamental Christians believed in that. And, I think the Protestant British were affected by that kind of religious mentality.
R: So, it's almost a mix of political and religious inclination.

M: Yah. You can definitely see that. Because, even the British who were...all colonialists, European colonialists use the same terms. Canada was once the promised land. The big wide rivers in Canada were compared to the Jordan river. Australia was a desert and it was compared to the promised land. America was the promised land. South Africa was the promised land. So, it's not something new to see that Palestine comes later to become the promised land. Again, the concept of the 'Chosen People' is a colonial concept. The supremacy of a certain race over the others where you can uproot them easily.

LOOKING AT TERMINOLOGY: THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

R: Well, it's interesting because as Jews tend to do, there's a zillion interpretations of that term. And that's been used in a Jew hating way, and it's also been used by Jews themselves in their Zionist zeal. But the term the Chosen People, as I learned it religiously, means two things. It means that we choose our spirituality; it's actually speaking to us as Jews to make a choice every day to practice our Jewishness. And it's spoken by us to ourselves as singling us out to have a certain role and responsibility within humanity. Not singling us out to take ownership or to dispossess. But, to act as something specific. I don't know if I can put my finger on it. Maybe it has to do with a kind of morality that Judaism portrayed. Or a kind of -I would hope- tendency towards healing the Earth. You know, 'tikkun olam' as it's called. So, that term is really interesting and I'm glad you brought it up because it does directly apply. It's been so used and abused in colonialist discourse...and on the surface it seems like a colonialist phrase. It took me a long time to figure out if I even wanted to interact with

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that concept, being Jewish. You know? And, as I said it has so much history in terms of Jew hating. Because we're seen as elitist. It is a complex issue and has been used in all kinds of ways. M: Because it's been used in North America by even the first 'pioneers' who were a type of religious people...and even until now, for example when we hear in the newspapers that Israel has the right to defend itself. You would get the impression that it's Israel under attack, even though it is the 4th most powerful army in the world. A nuclear state. But, the concept of it being under attack is deep rooted in the colonial culture. Like the pioneers who came here, were the Chosen People again, and they were on the defensive. It's them who were besieged by the Natives. Not that they were actually, the Natives were besieged. And, this kind of culture is in movies today, and in the old Western movies. And even now, if you see these movies about terrorism. You are on the

...they think the ability to remove indigenous people and we've seen this behaviour in Australia, we've seen it in Canada, we've seen it everywhere. The complete deportation of people. Even French Canadians, how they were deported. So, it's not surprising at all.

defensive. America, the biggest country is on the defensive.
R: Right, yah.

M: There's probably 1,2 or 3 guys who are the villains.
R: It's the victimization of the oppressor.
M: And why are you a victim? It's because you're also one of the Chosen People, and the rest aren't. And, you have this role...not role...you are a kind of elite human that has the moral ability to just demolish everyone else.

INDIGENOUSNESS AND PALESTINIAN LIBERATION

R: Let's move on to discussing this concept of indigenusness. You've made lots of comparisons to how colonialism used indigenous people throughout the world. How do you feel about the way indigenusness functions in the Palestinian community?

M: Well, we've always been faced with defending the responsibility that we were there, we were in big numbers. I'm new here in Canada, but what I understand when you say indigenous people is that there are remnants of some kind of previous culture, which I don't think applies as a comparison. I think if we accept that, it's as if we accept that this is going to be the situation. Now in

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Palestine, when the early settlers started to move, -and here I avoided using Zionists because as I read, I come to know that so many people didn't have the choice to go anywhere but there. They didn't have the choice to come to Canada or U.S., all the doors were blocked, or were closed in their faces. So, not everyone who immigrated had this Zionist dream...

R: Right.
M: But in the initial stages even Britain has the responsibility because it had accepted as early as 1936 that there should be huge deportations of Arab populations. And that was Peel's report in 1936. The report said that 92% of the land is still owned by Arabs, and the only way to create a new state is to force out the population. And that was a legal document, an official document adopting such kind of measures. And they started doing that because the main concept of Israel then was coastal...the state that was on the coast...

R: Right...
M: ... so their plan was to clear the coast. And in 1936, so many people don't know that so many villages on the coastal area and even the biggest, there was an Arab industrial city Yaffa or 'Jaffa' which was demolished. It was...
R: Razed.
M: Yes. So, this created a kind of mass movement of Arabs from the coastal areas and later, in 1948

with the massacres, people just escaped in a way, which gave the Israelis a state with an Arab minority. Now later in 1967, what they didn't think would happen is the immediate crumble of the Arab armies and the immediate seizure of big quantities of land with the population still intact and residing in these areas. And, actually many people there didn't even have the chance to pack and leave. And so many people were initially refugees from those areas that decided that they didn't want to move. I remember 1982 in Lebanon, in the invasion. We had the option to leave Beirut when it was heavily bombarded but, my mother said: I've moved so much.

R: She didn't want to do it again.
M: So many became aware that just staying put in the land was the best achievement then. And that's now the issue. I would challenge the Israelis to take over the land and make it proper Israel. Because what would happen? More than 50% of the population would be non-Jewish.
R: Mmm hmm. And that's their fear.
M: That's their fear.
R: They openly admit that.
M: And I would say: let's accept that. If they would...but, would they do that? They wouldn't.
R: That's why they built settlements. That's the whole justification for it. To Judaize that whole region.

M: So anyway, there are 2 phases. One of ethnic cleansing that left the area with a small number of Arab population. Where maybe they can be related to indigenous people in small numbers. There are Arab villages that aren't on Israeli maps because Israel doesn't acknowledge them as human settlements - as enough number of population to be considered a town or a village. And these areas that are considered Arab areas inside Israel have a population of more than 150,000 and still they're not on the maps. And sometimes the army moves and starts bombarding them as a shooting range because they're not on the maps. It's not that they don't know but they come later to the defense of: oh, we didn't know. It wasn't on the map. So what I wanted to answer towards the question of indigenusness is, maybe they wanted to portray the Palestinians as a small number of people as the West and Israelis have accepted the state of indigenous people. They would say it would go along with what's happened to the rest of the world, but now with 3.5 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories it's not that issue. It's a complete nation and population, it's not small numbers of population. Even the small number of Arabs in Israel is now more than a million. So, they constitute more than 25 - 30% of