

alternatives international

Journal

INSIDE:

Lessons from Nepal

Canada's Tibetans

Interview with Imam Omar Koné
on the Bouchard-Taylor Commission

Back to Reality on Tibet

Myths and Realities:
How Israel Expelled the Palestinians

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Editorial

Another World is Possible

Welcome to the inaugural edition of Alternatives International Journal. Alternatives International is a network of alter-globalist social and political movements, founded in 2004 by 9 organizations from Brazil, Canada, France, India, Israel, Morocco, Niger, Palestine and South Africa. The journal is made possible through the participation of a volunteer editorial board, with written submissions from academics, activist, and journalists who believe that there is a need for a progressive, independent forum to inform, inspire and mobilize people to transform our communities and our world. Through the dissemination of critical and balanced information, and through dialogue and collaboration, we believe that we can contribute to social, political and economic change.

Our journal will carry articles, interviews, topical commentary and book reviews. Our mission is an ambitious one. We aspire to:

- Be a platform for critical debate and independent analysis;
- Raise awareness of social, political, economic and environmental issues;
- Create spaces for people who are not generally represented, or who are underrepresented, in traditional print venues to speak, or, rather, write for themselves;
- Build solidarity between various progressive local, national and international social movements;
- Contribute to the creation of a new political paradigm that challenges Left versus Right discourse, that sees the futility of thinking one dimensionally.

We stand for peace, social, economic and political justice, equality and human rights, and resolutely against sexism, racism, and militarism. Within these broad principles freedom of expression shall be the guiding policy. We invite everyone who shares this vision to join us in our mission.

To thank everyone who has contributed to the realization of this issue I'll borrow from Bertolt Brecht's "Questions from A Worker Who Reads,"

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
In the books you will find the name of kings.
Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
And Babylon, many times demolished.
Who raised it up so many times?

Bonne lecture,
Ceyda Turan

Opinions

Lessons from Nepal

Pierre Beaudet

Nepal is a country that no one ever hears about, except if someone climbs Mount Everest. It is a country that seems to have been forgotten by time. It is a country that does not seem to interest anyone, since it has neither oil nor gas. However a political earthquake, with repercussions extending far beyond its borders, is making its way to the surface.

In Nepal, as in neighbouring northern India, poverty and exclusion have dominated for centuries. The ruling classes act like the feudal lords of a bygone era, practically determining their fellow citizens' right to live or die. On top of class and ethnic domination a caste system is superimposed thereby perpetuating these conditions from one generation to the next. In Nepal's countryside, the majority of the population is comprised of low caste peasants as well as the *dalits*, whom are without a caste and are considered by the small monarchical elite to be less-than-human.

In the past few years, however, these non-humans have decided to exist. They revolted. They organized themselves. They gained influence. As time passed by, they put in place various tools. They played the political game. They were driven back. They built a small "Red Army," which though weak militarily, became formidable on the social and political fronts. And all of a sudden, the poor became aware of the fact that they were the majority! And then came the elections of a few weeks ago, when all of this came to a head. The experts, the consultants, the ambassadors, the mass media journalists, the United States, India, and, of course, the political elite of the country itself had never thought that this incredible scenario could arise: Maoists find themselves far in front of all the other political parties at the ballot box and so, in theory, are on the eve of forming a new government.

How can all this be explained? Of course, and by definition, it is a revolt of the dominated classes. But more often than not, theirs is a struggle that remains just that. The ruling classes, using force and manipulation, continue to dominate. Sometimes- rarely- there is an exception. As has been demonstrated in Nepal, just as it has in other parts of the world such as Bolivia, one needs to weave ties that bind- uniting disparate forces with a platform that is at once ambitious and realisable. In this case, for example, the Maoists were smart enough to gather the majority around an inclusive, republican project that takes into account the peasants, the *dalits*, the middle class, the various national minorities, in short, a bit of everyone. The revolution they speak of promises schools and clinics to people who have never had them. It promises to bring order to a country devastated by

the delirium of arbitrary rule. It promises to rid Nepal of the contempt and the institutional violence that is at the heart of the current system.

What is another lesson learned from Nepal? That the ruling classes, when they read the handwriting on the wall, do not hesitate to mince words and order massacres. The King and his men have killed readily without provoking the slightest consternation from the international community. Those who know they are well connected are constantly overriding law and democracy. It is merely a matter of being deemed a good guy, which grants a government veritable impunity internationally where matters of domestic violence are concerned. What happens, then, when the dominated practise self-defence? In conventional circles, they are automatically condemned; they become "terrorists" for having dared to respond in kind to the violence of the dominant classes. The Nepalese Maoists, like so many liberation movements around the world, are condemned for having resisted. Most of the time, this vilification works and the violence doled out by the dominant classes, which is invariably of a more sophisticated and potent variety, carries the day. Of course, there are exceptions. Sometimes the revolt of the subjugated classes holds good.

Even without completely defeating their adversaries, they can manage to destabilize them sufficiently to, say, force a compromise. Before condemning violence, remember the importance of context. Recall how Nelson Mandela and the ANC finally vanquished apartheid; it included a handful of guerrillas to help put the regime's back against the wall. It is neither a recipe nor an ideal solution but, every now and then, the dominated classes have to resist. Frankly, I think that was the case in Nepal because without their small Red Army the once-dominated classes would still be less-than-human.

Now that the Maoists are on the verge of political power, it remains to be seen how they will manage it. They must, and this will not be easy, face a certain number of old demons, which include a tendency toward authoritarianism and know-it-all-ism, read militarism. According to the human rights organizations that have monitored the civil war that has raged there for more than a decade, the army committed a majority of the atrocities, but the Maoists were not angels either. With a little bit of power in their hands, they could be tempted to – and we have seen this in the past- take it all. At any rate, this is not what their leader, Prachanda, which is a *nom de guerre* meaning "the fierce one" seemed to have in mind. On the contrary, he repeated his willingness to put in place a government of national unity, stretching out his hand to the other parties that his Maoists soundly defeated at the ballot box. Thus, let us say that, for the moment, the Nepalese have decided to give him the

benefit of the doubt.

On the other side, we can expect some turbulence; the dominant classes will provide no shortage of it as they cling on to their privileges. Worse still, with the assistance of the United States and India, they could foment disorder and support groups which refuse to compromise. Not unlike Bolivia, where the reforms promoted by the government of Évo Morales, despite being elected on these reform platforms by a healthy majority of Bolivians, are being harried by the *latifundists* and the oil interests, who are threatening to break away with the richest areas of the country. It will take a miracle for the Nepalese to eke their way out of a situation where 80% of their people live in crushing poverty and want changes NOW. We wish them good luck! In all likelihood, those movements that have made great strides in alter-globalization, notably in Latin America, will be eager to learn of the shifting of the plates in the shadows of the Himalayas.

The author is a member of Alternatives and Professor of Sociology at the University of Ottawa.

Canada's Tibetans

Martin Lukacs

In this small, impoverished northern village, people eke out a miserable existence. One of the world's most powerful countries occupies their land, plunders their resources, interferes with their governance, and seems intent on assimilating them into wider society. With its Olympic Games at hand, the country would rather the international community dwell on its national achievements than cast scrutiny on these abuses. The country? Canada, of course.

No doubt Canadians would be shocked by the comparison to China: a liberal democracy, Canada doesn't militarily occupy native people's land and hasn't imprisoned or executed thousands of native prisoners.

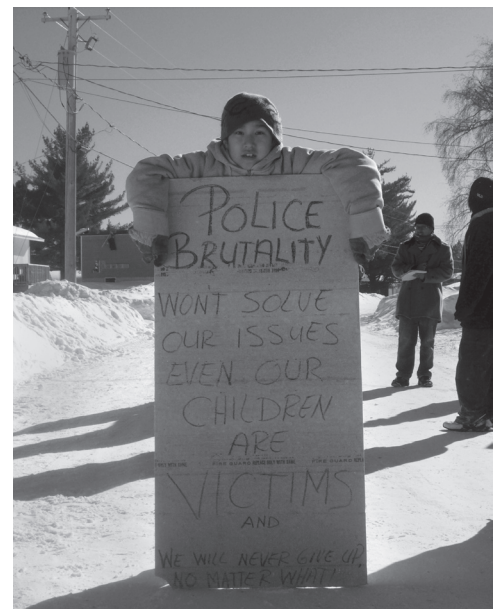
So when Assembly of First Nations Chief Phil Fontaine suggested the comparison was "compelling," and Canada's own 2010 Olympics might warrant protest, editorials stormily reproached Fontaine. According to the *Ottawa Citizen*, he was being "irresponsible."

But Barriere Lake, an Algonquin First Nation 350 km north of Ottawa, might have thought otherwise. From their viewpoint within Quebec's boreal forest, China and Canada's long-term objectives appear strikingly similar: to absorb a culturally "backward" people, and gain exclusive control of their lands and resources.

Neither government has thought twice about dispossessing or displacing them to secure their first priority: unimpeded resource-extraction and industrial development. Human rights seem negligible when the spoils – oil, natural gas, and mineral deposits in Tibet, and a lucrative forestry industry and hydroelectric power on Algonquin land – are so precious.

Nor has the Canadian government shied away from cracking down on protests. As Chinese police tear-gassed and arrested dozens of Tibetan demonstrators on March 10, the Canadian government was ousting Barriere Lake's leadership, a thorn in its side for years. When community members blockaded the return of an unpopular faction recognized by the government as the new leadership, a provincial riot squad pepper-sprayed and arrested ten.

Conspicuously silent about Barriere Lake, Canadian media instead sounded off about Chinese inequities. "China had hoped to long ago seal off Tibet from the world, to make of an ancient land a tomb in which Tibetan religion, language and culture would die," thundered the



A child condemning police brutality

National Post on March 22. "Yet there is life within that tomb." Swap the countries, and would the storyline have still roused the *Post's* indignation?

Yet for centuries the Algonquin were officially non-existent, after Euro-Americans deemed North America a *terra nullius*: a land without people. Their lands were blithely seized and their sacred sites flooded. Their subsistence economies were destroyed as they were squeezed

into puny reserves. Their children were stolen and reared in residential schools, in the hope that such brutalization would “civilize” them. Little wonder that Barriere Lake has succumbed to social ills common on many reservations – rampant unemployment, physical and sexual abuse, and alcoholism. But it's still a greater wonder that they've tenaciously maintained their language, culture, and customary governance- that “there is life within that tomb.”

Yet for all their misdeeds past and present, China and Canada never tire of reminding Tibetans or native people just how much government revenue they receive. It's as if someone occupied your house, sold off your furniture and belongings, and proclaimed their generosity after throwing you a meagre allowance.

The frenzied pre-Olympics expansion in Vancouver is itself a microcosm of continuing injustices. Many of the mountains being carved up for ski hills and resorts, and crisscrossed by new highways, are on traditional territories used by BC First Nations – territories that have never been ceded by treaties and the titles to which were affirmed in the Supreme Court's seminal Delgamuukw decision in 1997.

Canada deals with this awkward fact through the Comprehensive Claims Policy, which is fair-minded only in name. Even before discussing natives' grievances, the government forces them to surrender collective rights to their territories. Destructive resource extraction continues unabated while negotiations drag on for decades. Native communities end up with small parcels of money and land whose underlying title remains with the Crown, a practice the UN's Human Rights Committee has repeatedly condemned for “extinguishing” indigenous rights.

Barriere Lake has joined many BC indigenous nations in rejecting Comprehensive Claims, proposing alternative frameworks for redress. In 1991, they signed a co-management agreement with Ottawa and Quebec to gain joint management of their territories and a share in resource revenue, while reconciling their land use with the logging industry's interests. Despite this accommodation, neither Ottawa nor Quebec wanted to relinquish exclusive control of the land. They have undermined the agreement at every turn – the latest effort being last month's regime change.

As denunciations of China reach an ear-splitting din, Canadians concerned for human rights might note a final, crucial difference between the governments. Even the perfect storm of international protest has not made an authoritarian regime budge. But a democracy guarding a sensitive reputation might be more easily swayed. When the spotlight shifts from Beijing 2008 to Vancouver 2010, let the demonstrations begin.

Martin Lukacs is a writer and activist in Montreal, and a former editor of the **McGill Daily**.

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National

Reasonable accommodation interview: Imam Omar Koné on the Bouchard-Taylor Commission

Imam Omar Koné is a Muslim congregation leader at the Masjid al-Iman in Montreal, and serves as a regional director of the worldwide Haqqani Foundation, which follows the Naqshbandi Sufi order. After graduating in microelectronics, he received his MBA with a specialization in technology, and has worked as an engineer for ten years. Originally from Mali, he has been very active in inter-faith dialogue throughout Montreal and regionally for a number of years. Imam Koné's involvement with the issue of reasonable accommodation in Quebec began with his participation in panels organized by the School Board as a specialist on reasonable accommodation in religious matters. He later participated as a community leader in the Bouchard-Taylor hearings.

Alternatives International: Let's start with the basic terminology of the debate. How appropriate do you find the words "reasonable" or "accommodation"?

Omar Koné: It is a fair term to describe that reality. When you have to get out of the common way of doing things it is called an "accommodation." If we want to analyze if it infringes on equality, then the term appears to carry a certain bias because it already sets the way the majority is doing things as the model. I prefer the word "reasonable" more because all of our actions have to be balanced, fair, and not excessive. It shouldn't cause an inconvenience to one side or another. For example, if a prison guard wants to ask for a 2 hour break to say his prayers, that might not be *reasonably* possible, but he may *reasonably* take a 15 minute break, during which somebody could replace him.

AI: What were some of the questions that public sector professionals asked you with regard to the Muslim community during your participation in reasonable accommodation panels organized by the School Board?

OK: An issue that always came up was segregation between sexes. For example, teachers faced problems in parent-teacher meetings- having to address the father

and not the mother. A lot of male health care professionals had to face the fact that they couldn't approach certain women if they were wearing a *hijab*. They were generally confused about accommodations that had to be made for religious practices. They didn't understand what the religious obligations were – at what age did they start, or why some people did them, while others didn't.

AI: Were these the same issues raised during the Bouchard-Taylor Commission?

OK: While previously the question was how to give accommodations to integrate immigrants, during the Bouchard-Taylor Commission it shifted to the necessity of accommodation. Accommodation was seen as something potentially threatening to the identity of society, so the very concept was opened up for debate.

AI: Do you feel that the focus of the debate should have instead challenged the implicit hierarchy of "us" versus "them", and the necessity of accommodation arising from that distinction?

OK: I don't know if our society is ready for it. That's because Quebec has a history defined by threats to its own identity and a perpetual struggle with the huge majority, so I don't think they would have been ready to take that step further.

AI: During that debate, what were the issues raised specifically with regard to the Muslim community?

OK: An issue that was brought up was why we have to accommodate people on the basis of religion. The view that accommodation based on religion has no rational basis is very common. The value system of Muslims dictates aspects of their way of life, and people were asking why they would have to accommodate for food, and place and time of prayer. Why would they allow people to opt-out of gym classes because they were fasting, or because they could not dress a certain way?

AI: In a diverse community like the Muslim community with its different practices, what is considered part of



Imam Omar Koné at the Sufi Centre on Fairmount

the religion and what is not? Who decides that?

OK: There is no central council of jurisprudence in Islam. There is also no standard school of thought or a standard level of practice. There is a broad range of practice that come out of one religion, based on which we are all asking for reasonable accommodation. It is not an easily solvable problem, because even with a council of jurisprudence – as we see in some countries where their judgement is taken as ruling – a person can say that they don't accept that council, and we would still have to accommodate that person. People don't often understand that the principle of reasonable accommodation is applicable at the individual level, not at the group level.

AI: Were the issues that dominated the debate represented the main demands of the Muslim minority or are they fringe issues, in comparison with other barriers that prevent their integration?

OK: Muslims are asking for accommodations that would allow them to be able to live their daily lives in harmony with their faith system. These accommodations that people are asking for on a day-to-day basis are not a barrier to their integration. But integration starts, first of all, by allowing immigrants to participate fully in society by letting them work. But most people cannot work for reasons independent of their religion and their accommodation demands, because they have a different mentality about how to build up a career and promote themselves, but also because of the lack of recognition of foreign educational and work experience, or diplomas. The debate on the reasonable accommodation did not look at these barriers.

AI: Do you think the issue of institutional barriers is an important part of integration and accommodation?

OK: It is a huge part of integration but it doesn't have too much to do with accommodation. A reasonable accommodation is something you give to someone because of for example a disability, their faith, or sexual orientation. The structural barriers to integration do not fall under accommodation. They have to do with the opening up and the breaking down of, for example, different interest groups, like *Collège des médecins* and *collège des ingénieurs*. Such institutions keep new comers out of the system with so-called quality criteria, when people who come here are often very highly qualified.

AI: Do you think these barriers should have been part of the debate?

OK: The integration of foreigners should absolutely be part of the public debate. But, I want to underline that the public debate and the work of the commission are two different things. The commission had a mandate to look at reasonable accommodation. But since the hearings were open public consultations, it became a debate on the integration of immigrants. Unfortunately, instead of being a constructive debate about the place of immigrants and their problems, it became a debate about the problem with immigrants and the spaces they were perceived to be overtaking.

AI: The commission has on occasion been criticized for creating a forum that legitimized the expression of xenophobia and racism. What are your views on this?

OK: The hearings did open the door for a lot of xenophobic expressions. But most of the time, more good things were said than bad. The media did not cover it. Unfortunately, bad news sells better. They also acted very poorly in representing immigrants' demands. Whenever they called a Muslim woman for an interview, they refused women who did not have their hair covered to go on TV, enforcing stereotypes. The media also played a role in letting people express their anger at immigrants on TV, radio, and newspapers. People would hear about one, or two, or three crazy accommodations that were all over the media, and get the impression that the entire face of Quebec was changing. They did not filter the information well and lost perspective about many things: that among the thousands of demands for reasonable accommodation, religious ones made up one or two percent; out of which a low 30 percent were coming from Muslims; and the majority of accommodations were asked by native *Québécois*.

AI: Do you think the commission will generate positive outcomes for immigrants?

OK: It is hard to say, but the commission, by meeting Muslim communities, discovered many things that most people are not aware of which will come out with the report. For example, when the commission came to Montreal, one of Mr. Taylor's remarks was how they were astonished by the quality, eloquence, and education level of the people that were representing the Muslim communities and how they all brought up the same issues like the lack of recognition of foreign diplomas.

The interview was conducted by Waleed Ziad and Ceyda Turan for Alternatives International. Ziad is an economic consultant in Montreal and Turan is the editor of Alternatives International Journal.

International

Back to Reality on Tibet

Andrew Martin Fischer

When wide-scale protests broke out in Tibet in March 2008, the world suddenly paid attention to this little understood region of Inner Asia the size of Western Europe. This attention has since been diverted by pro-Tibet demonstrations and Chinese counter-demonstrations, both focused on the Olympics. In the resulting clamour, fable is increasingly reigning over fact. In particular, the assertion that 'Tibet was, is and always will be part of China' reflects very little historical understanding. While Chinese sensitivities about a western media bias are understandable, we must, in turn, beware of a Chinese media bias. We must seek the real Tibet amidst the rampant stereotypes.

There is not much contention over basic facts among serious scholars of Tibet. It was only in the mid-20th century that the Chinese state first became directly involved in the social and economic management of Tibetan areas. The Tibet Autonomous Region, which accounts for just under half of the total Tibetan areas in China, has effectively been an occupied territory since the 1950 invasion by the Peoples' Liberation Army, in the sense that it has been ruled directly by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through force rather than consent, and from Beijing rather than from Lhasa. This situation had never come to pass throughout all of the previous ebbs and flows of various empires emanating from China. Similarly, many of the grievances that underlie the current protests in Tibet, from economic marginalisation to political subordination and social humiliation, are typical to other situations of occupation around the world.

China has undoubtedly been the usher of economic and human development in Tibet, such as rapid growth since the mid-1990s, improved infrastructure, falling mortality, and rising living standards, life expectancy and education. But pointing to these as justifications for occupation recalls earlier European apologists for colonialism, such as the British socialist Bill Warren. He argued that western capitalist penetration into Africa, Asia and Latin America was definitely progressive given that it destroyed pre-capitalist cultures and modes of production and implanted cultural and economic elements of modern civilisation.

The counterargument is that similar modern achievements could have been made under entirely different political frameworks. For instance, the Bhutanese have achieved very similar levels of human development as in Tibet, except with internal political independence. Of course, Bhutan is heavily subsidised by India, just as Tibet is subsidised by China. There is no doubt that these remote peripheries of modern capitalism are doomed to

be deficit regions, perpetually dependent on subsidies from an overlord, if only because they are agrarian economies facing constantly declining terms of trade.

The Indian arrangement with Bhutan – Indian subsidies in exchange for Indian control over Bhutan's external relations and border security, while preserving Bhutan's independence over its own internal affairs – is essentially what the Dalai Lama has been asking for Tibet since the early 1980s. This is similar to the arrangement agreed between representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Communists in 1951, and to the arrangement between Lhasa and the Manchu Empire in the late 18th century, after which Tibet was closed to the West for most of the 19th century.

Yet despite these precedents, a comparable ar-



View of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, from the new supermarkets

angement now seems far too much for the CCP to concede, given that it has already been intricately involved in micro-managing almost all aspects of Tibetan society and economy since the Dalai Lama escaped in 1959, and even before in the Tibetan areas outside the control of Lhasa. Subsequently, Tibetan rural society was completely re-engineered twice in thirty years, first through collectivisation in the 1950s and 1960s, and then through decollectivisation in the 1980s. Decollectivisation was undoubtedly welcome across Tibet given that collectivisation was intensely unpopular. Indeed, it was collectivisation, and not Chinese rule per se, that incited the large scale armed uprising in eastern Tibet in the mid 1950s.

In the process, China claims to have wiped out theocracy, feudalism and slavery in Tibet. However, there never was systemised slavery in the traditional Tibetan society that was obliterated by these seismic historical events. It is also wrong to characterise old Tibet as feudal. It was certainly not theocratic, given that Buddhists



Tibetan women working on a Chinese construction site in Qinghai

do not believe in God. There was a system of labour and land management in Central Tibet that was roughly comparable to manorial serfdom, insofar as peasants were hereditarily tied to land held by nobles and monasteries and to whom they owed various services. However, the eastern Tibetan rangelands were largely ruled through tribal systems.

Rather, the modern CCP terminology of feudalism, theocracy and slavery bears little relation to Tibet. Instead, it draws from Marxist theories of ethnicity that were elaborated by Stalin in the 1930s and then later adapted to China by the CCP. Accordingly, ethnic and religious identities were considered to be manifestations of lower stages of historical material development that will presumably recede under material and scientific progress. It was argued that this is best achieved in the Tibetan areas by opening them up to the more advanced regions of China and allowing for the dissemination of rationality and technology. Much to the frustration of many Tibetan and Chinese scholars in China, public presentations on Tibet from within China still remain heavily constrained by this official ideology.

Indeed, minority nationalities have been a constant thorn in the backside for modern Chinese nationalism even prior to the Communists. The demise of the Manchu Empire in the early 20th century left the emerging Nationalist movement in China with a paradox; they rejected the legitimacy of imperial rule, although they simultaneously argued for maintaining the borders of the Manchu Empire and its satellites despite the fact that these borders could not be legitimated along nationalist lines, given that early Chinese nationalism was undeniably Han and had little resonance among Tibetans and Uighurs.

In order to resolve this paradox, Han nationalists re-conceptualised these imperial satellites as parts of an in-

vented national tradition (à la Eric Hobsbawm). Adapting earlier imperial ideologies, China was described as a nation of five nationalities; the Han, Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan and Uighur. The latter four were probably chosen over others, such as the larger Hui Muslim, Miao or Zhuang minorities, because they were key to staking out the non-Han satellite regions of the Manchu Empire, and thus to creating an ideology that legitimated their inclusion into the emerging Chinese Republic. This was later elaborated by the Communists in the 1950s into the current 56 ethnic nationalities, in an exercise of 'scientific' categorisation that resembled the early uses of anthropology by European colonists, except with the additional overtone of Marxism.

This paradox of modern Chinese nationalism is perhaps one of the reasons why the recognition of Tibet and Xinjiang as parts of China since a distant historical past is so sensitive in China.

Ideological problems aside, once the Communists won the civil war in China in 1949, Tibet and Xinjiang were quickly subjugated. Tibet then entered the havoc of radicalising Maoism in China. The eastern Tibetan areas were particularly hard hit by counter-insurgency in the mid-1950s and the famine of the Great Leap Forward from 1959-61. Following these debacles, the government turned to policies of heavily subsidising the Tibetan areas in the 1960s and 1970s, reversed this policy in the 1980s, and then returned again to intensive



Tibetan women working on a small dam project in Qinghai

subsidisation in the mid-1990s.

The current challenges in Tibet are found in this history of political subjugation combined with the heightened degree of economic and social polarization generated by the latest phase of intense subsidisation since the mid-1990s. This has resulted in strong ethnically-exclusionary dynamics within development, which I have analysed in detail in other articles. Suffice it to say here that

local initiatives and locally generated investment and accumulation play a very minute role in the overall processes of economic change in the Tibetan areas. In the tense political environment, they may have even been discouraged. In the Tibet Autonomous Region in particular, where subsidisation has reached its zenith with the recent construction of the railway to Lhasa, the lo-



Foreign Affairs building in Lhasa

cal Tibetan population has been rendered more or less irrelevant as agents causing growth. Meaningful decentralization has simply not taken place in Tibet the way it has in most other areas of China during the reform period.

Lack of agency within development exacerbates a feeling of alienation despite all of the monumental change and pockets of affluence. The policies that guide development in the Tibet have been essentially promulgated from Beijing as top-down dictates, following the trends of national development policy. Policies are then, effectively or ineffectively, implemented by local authorities, themselves appointed by Beijing, with the assistance of a corps of professionals and cadres from around the country on terms of duty that usually last two to three years. Elite Tibetans often make up a large share of local-level government officials, although rarely at the most senior positions or with any substantive power. Due to the fiscal monopoly of Beijing and the political and security paranoia that grips the Tibetan areas, these local Tibetan officials mostly toe the line set out from above. And even these privileged Tibetans must face regular humiliation, in the form of an ever-more-confident sense of Han chauvinism, from their Chinese superiors.

In this light, it is true that the CCP has spent much money in Tibet, but not necessarily on Tibetans. Most of the subsidies have been spent through Chinese state-

owned corporations or via the administrative apparatus of the state itself. This might add up to good national industrial strategy, in much the same way that tied international aid from the US or the EU supports many US and EU commercial interests, but it is often of questionable use to the needs of the local population and reinforces an extreme form of dependency. Some argue that the show should go on because trickle down is nonetheless improving the livelihoods of many rural households. However, we must ask whether a better alternative is possible.

Along these lines, many Tibetan officials and scholars who I interviewed in China argued in private that whatever China spends in Tibet goes back to itself. Once this boomerang aid is deducted from the subsidy equation, the small amount that actually reaches Tibetans, in the form of salaries, poverty assistance, agricultural development, limited healthcare, education, and so forth, could quite possibly be funded through local resources, particularly if mining activities were taxed and spent by local governments. They argued that similar if not better human development outcomes could be achieved in this manner, all things considered.

While it is true that Tibet embarked on modern development following Chinese occupation in 1950, it would not have necessarily remained static in the absence of Chinese rule. More likely, it would have embarked on its own process of modernization as with all the countries of Asia, the path of which can only be speculated. One thing is certain; the Tibetan economy of the late 1940s and its elites would have served as a starting point for an autonomous economic transition, possibly aided by China or other countries in exchange for relinquishing some sovereignty. In this light, the question that is probably on the minds of most of the Tibetans who were recently demonstrating in Tibet was; development yes, but at what cost?

*The author is a fellow at the **London School of Economics**, and former Montrealer and graduate from **McGill University**, is the author of "State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges of Recent Economic Growth" (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press, 2005). He is also a contributor to "Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China's One-Hundred Questions" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).*

International

Myths and Realities: 1947- 1949

How Israel expelled the Palestinians

Dominique Vidal

On May 14, Israelis will celebrate the 60th birthday of their state. For Palestinians, it will be 60 years since the *Nakba*, the catastrophe. During the past twenty years, a group of Israeli critical historians has searched through the material that was declassified 30 years after the war of 1948, in an attempt to revise the traditional account of the birth of their country... With courage, these researchers wanted to restore the truth - their truth - about the events of 60 years ago. Here is an outline of their work. On November 29, 1947, the



Naji Al-Ali's portrayal of the uprooting of Palestinians

General Assembly of the United Nations decided to divide Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State, and a special international zone for Jerusalem and the holy sites. The Arab world refused and, on May 15, 1948, intervened against the Jewish State that was proclaimed the day before.

One year later, the war ended with a greatly altered partition: Israel's win increased its territory by a third through the annexing of part of the stillborn Palestinian State, whose remaining lands passed into the hands of Jordan and Egypt. Moreover, several hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli occupied territories fled their homes.

On this last point, there have been two opposing views of history:

-- For Arab historians, it was an act of expulsion. The majority of the 700,000 to 900,000 refugees were forced to leave as part of the framework of a military-political plan that included numerous massacres.

-- According to traditional Israeli historiography, the refugees - there was a maximum of 500,000- left voluntarily, responding to the calls of Arab leaders. Also, the regrettable and rare massacres were carried out by a scant number of unauthorized and extremist troops.

The "New Historians"

From the 1950s onwards, some influential Israelis began contesting the traditional narrative. As of the 1980s, Simha Flapan, Tom Segev, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé and Benny Morris joined them in their criticism; the latter, with his *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, blew the lid off of the scandal.

Of these historians, only Ilan Pappé defines himself as an anti-Zionist. The others declare themselves to be Zionists. In fact, Morris, has gone as far as to say, in an outrageous interview with the daily *Haaretz*, on January 8, 2004: "There are circumstances in history which justify ethnic cleaning".

To synthesize two decades of historical research in this space would be impossible. Let us just say that the "new historians" shake three myths of traditional Israeli historiography to their core.

The first is the mortal threat posed to Israel at the time. Contrary to the image of a frail Jewish State confronted by the juggernaut armies of a powerful Arab world, these researchers agree that Israeli armed forces possessed superiority in manpower, weaponry, training, coordination and motivation - except, perhaps, for the period between May 15 and June 11 of 1948.

Add to this advantage the political support of the United States, the diplomatic and military support of the USSR, as well as a tacit agreement reached between Golda Meir and King Abdallah of Transjordan on November 17, 1947, just twelve days before the partition plan. Avi Shlaim, in his *Collusion across the Jordan*, maintains that the Arab Legion- the only Arab army worth its salt at the time- was committed to not crossing into the territories allocated to the Jewish State in exchange for the possibility of annexing parts of those intended for the Arab State. In the end, that is exactly what happened.

The second myth confronted involved Israel's desire for peace immediately following the war. The Lausanne conference has been studied by Avi Shlaim and Ilan Pappé; the archives indicate that Israel came to Lausanne in order to obtain its admission into the United Nations. Since Lausanne, however, Israel seems to have forgotten about its signature on May 12, 1949 of protocols ratifying two U.N. resolutions regarding the partition plan and the right to return of Palestinian refugees. Walter Eytan, the co-Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would write a month later, "My main purpose was to begin to undermine the protocol of 12 May, which we had signed only under duress of our struggle for admission to the U.N." quoted in Ilan Pappé's *The Making of the Arab-Israel Conflict, 1947-1951*.

The myth most seriously shaken, however, concerns the exodus of the Palestinians. According to Benny Morris, "there is no proof that the Arab States and the High Arab Committee wished for a mass exodus, or that they produced a general directive or calls inviting Palestinians to flee their homes" As for the famous exhortations of Arab radios, recorded at the time by the BBC, they were mere inventions.

In the weeks following the partition plan, 70,000 to 80,000 Palestinians left voluntarily; mostly the rich land-owners and the members of the urban bourgeoisie. And afterward? The first assessment drawn-up by the Israel Information Services, on June 30, 1948, estimates that 391,000 Palestinians had already left the territories that were in the hands of Israel. This leads to a figure of 73% of departures being directly attributed to the Israelis.

Following the resumption of fighting in July 1948, the willingness to expel was no longer a doubt. A case in point is the operation of Lydda and Ramleh. "Expel them," David Ben-Gurion said to Igal Allon and Itzhak Rabin. They would evacuate some 70,000 Palestinian civilians. Similar scenarios took place until the spring, in both the North (Galilee), and in the South (the coastal plains and the Negev).

The summer of 1948 saw a spread of the policy of destruction or restructuring of Arab villages; the Law on "abandoned properties," which allows the seizure of all the properties of "absent" people, "legalizes" the confiscation of land.

Was it planned or not?

Among the New Historians, the focus of the debate for the last ten years has concentrated on the nature of the exodus: was it planned or not? In his first book, Benny Morris concluded: "war, not Jewish or Arab design, gave birth to the Palestinian refugee problem." Thus reinforcing the idea of "transfer," in the words of David Ben-Gurion, and demonstrating the latter's role in its implementation in 1948. Morris brushes aside the possibility of a total expulsion plan and vindicates the Prime Minister and Defense minister of the young State of Israel. He nevertheless concludes: "Ben-Gurion clearly wanted as few Arabs as possible to remain in the Jewish State. He hoped to see them leave, but no

expulsion plan was ever stated, and Ben Gurion always abstained from giving clear or written expulsion orders; he preferred that his Generals "understand" what he wished of them. He intended to avoid being lowered in the eyes of history to the rank of "the great evictor."

Fourteen years later, Morris would contradict his previous thesis during his aforementioned interview with *Haaretz*. He affirmed that, "a Jewish state would not have come into being without the uprooting of 700,000 Palestinians. Therefore, it was necessary to uproot them. There was no choice but to expel that population." Surely, this is tantamount to recognizing that Israel did indeed transfer the Palestinians.

In fact, this is exactly what Ilan Pappé puts across in his new book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, where the expulsion of Palestinians is argued to be the outcome of a deliberate plan. His thesis is supported by the archives of Jewish defense groups such as Hagana and Palmah, the Israeli Defense Forces, as well as the diaries of David Ben-Gurion and other leaders, while also drawing on the testimonies of Palestinians.

The book opens in the headquarters of Hagana; on March 10, 1948, writes Pappé, eleven men "put the final touches on a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. That same evening, military orders were dispatched to the units on the ground to prepare for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians from vast areas of the country. The orders came with a detailed description of the methods to be employed." Six months later, the historian continues, "[and] more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and 11 cities were emptied of their inhabitants." Hence Pappé's objective for the work, "defending the 'ethnic cleansing' paradigm and inserting it for that of 'war'".

It should be noted, however, that the term "ethnic cleansing" is problematic, in that it is anachronistic; it is rooted in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Its connotation evokes mass slaughters, and while the war of 1947-1949 was certainly the stage of numerous massacres, it was never as deadly as the Yugoslav wars where a 140,000 people died; the war of 1947-1949 directly cost the lives of 6,000 Israelis and 15,000 Arabs.

One of the most disturbing facts that Pappé reveals is the files compiled of every Arab village in Palestine, complete with aerial reconnaissance, even



Al-Ali's commentary on the Palestinian refugee problem



Al-Ali's depiction of despairing Palestinians

before the Second World War. They included topographic, economic, sociological and demographic data, but also, the historian specifies, "an index of hostility [with regards to the Zionist project], based on the level of the village's participation in the revolt of 1936."

From 1943 onward, the files were systematized with the assistance of Palestinian informants, "the final update was finished in 1947 and included lists of 'wanted' persons in each village. In 1948, Jewish troops used these lists for search-and-arrest operations they conducted after occupying a locality. The men were all put in a line and those who appeared on the lists were identified, often by the same informant who had provided the original information... their head covered with a bag featuring two eyeholes, in order not be recognized. The men selected were often killed at once."

This synthesis of Israel's New History explains why Yehouda Lancry, former Israeli ambassador to Paris and to the United Nations, wrote, "the 'New Historians,' despite the radicalism of Ilan Pappé, are as much luminaries of this obscure part of the Israeli collective conscience, as they are the forerunners of a firmer adhesion to mutual recognition and peace with the Palestinians. Their work, far from representing a source of annoyance for Israel, is an honour for their country and, what's more, it is a duty, a moral obligation, an extraordinary assumption of responsibility for a liberating endeavour that registers, in the lives of Israelis, the crack lines and the healthy breaks that are necessary for the insertion of the discourse of the Other."

*The author is a journalist for **Le Monde Diplomatique** and a historian. He is the author of "Comment Israël expulsa les Palestiniens (1947-1949)".*

60 Years of Palestinian Suffering & Homelessness

1948 - 2008

In May of 1948 the state of Israel was declared on the ruins of a nation, the Palestinian nation.

Today, 60 years later, the rights of the Palestinians (the world's largest refugee population) are not forgotten.

Their right to their land, properties and country will always be a just demand no matter how many years go by.

Coalition for Justice and Peace in
Palestine March

Saturday May 10, 2008

1:00 PM

Dorchester Square (Peel & René
Levesque)

Artists against Apartheid III

bridges from South Africa to Palestine...

A cultural event organized by Tadamon! Montreal and the Kalmunity Vibe Collective, the third in a series under the banner Artists Against Apartheid, uniting Montreal artists in support of the growing international movement to boycott Israeli apartheid.

Artists Against Apartheid III: Bridges from South Africa to Palestine takes place within a context of commemorative events to mark the 60th year of the Palestinian Nakba.

Thursday, May 8, 8:30pm
Doors: 8-15\$
La Sala Rossa, 4848 St. Laurent
Montreal, Quebec

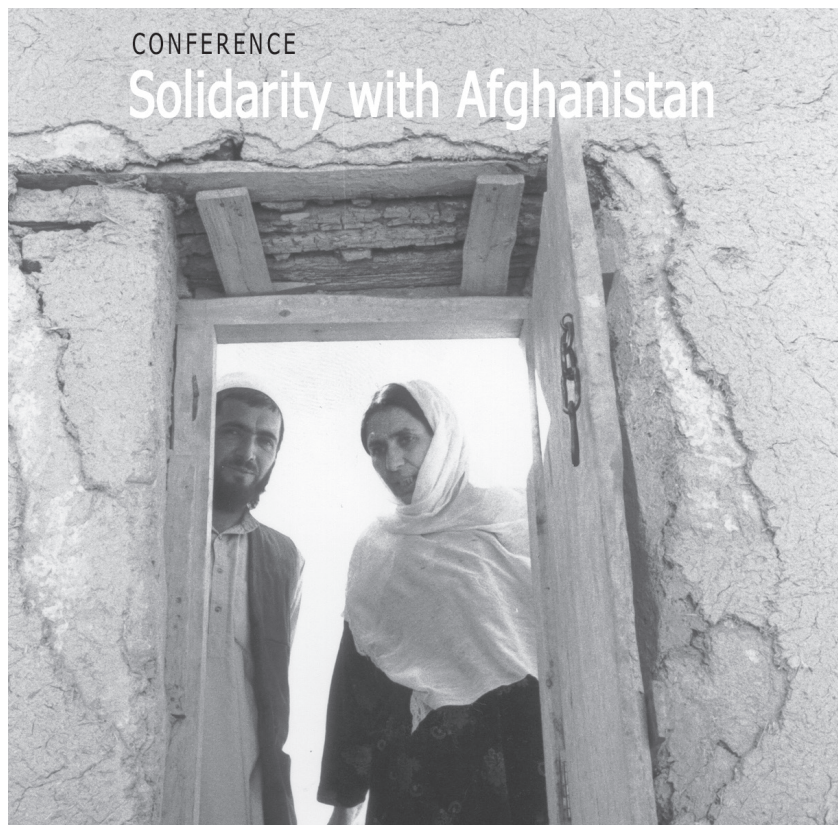


PROTEST MILITARY RECRUITMENT !

Thursday, May 8, 5:30pm to 7pm

In front of the recruitment center, 1420 Ste-Catherine W.
(at the corner of Ste-Catherine and Bishop, Guy-Concordia metro)

Let's protest against military propaganda,
the war in Afghanistan and police repression against
anti-war protesters !



CONFERENCE

Solidarity with Afghanistan

June 3, 2008 7 pm

What are the developmental challenges Afghanistan is facing?

How to build a state for human rights in a country torn by 30 years of war?

What role should Canada and the international community play in Afghanistan?

With Sima Samar
Chairperson of the Afghanistan
Independent Human Rights Commission

Claude-Jutra Auditorium
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CONFERENCE

« How do we address the Democratization and Human Rights challenges in the Middle East today? »

With

M. Bahey Eldin Hassan

Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Member of the Board of the EuroMed Human Rights Foundation (EMHRF) and Lecturer and Author of several articles and papers on Human Rights and Democratic Transformation in the Arab Region.

Thursday, May 8, 2008, 7 pm

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