

FFIPP DELEGATION REPORT

JUNE 14, 2003

Professor Ilan Pappé

We began our day on June 14, 2003 at Kibbutz Gan Shmuel, birthplace of Arnon Hadar and current place of residence of Hanna Knaz, our two leaders in Israel/Palestine. Professor Ilan Pappé, an Israeli revisionist historian who teaches at Haifa University, joined us that morning and discussed the origins of Zionism and the Palestinian perspective of the Zionist movement. He also focused on the history and myths surrounding Zionism and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 (Al-Naqba). One of the points that he emphasized was that one cannot understand the conflict today by seeking its origins from the 1967 War, as many do. Rather, 1948 was a more formative year in terms of the conflict, and it is there that one can find the roots of the failure of the Oslo Accords.

The Zionists viewed themselves as a group that only sought a safe haven from persecution for the Jewish people. To be safe, they believed that they needed to be in a demographic majority in their new state. From the Palestinian perspective, 1948 was an intentional ethnic cleansing operation undertaken for the purpose of creating a Jewish majority state. As Dr. Pappé stated, while ethnic cleansing is not as horrific as genocide and therefore, the two sides can reconcile with one another more easily, Israelis and Palestinians today cannot close the chapter of conflict until Israel acknowledges its responsibility for its actions against the native Palestinian population in 1948.

An active discussion ensued between members of the FFIPP delegation and Dr. Pappé. Points that were raised included the alternatives to a two state solution, such as a bi-national state or a unitary state.

Tighrid Younis

Later that afternoon, we met with Ms. Tighrid Younis, an Arab-Israeli woman who is currently pursuing her PhD. in sociology at Tel Aviv University. She began by apologizing for her poor English (which was actually quite good, and certainly better than our Arabic). She explained that Israeli Arabs have less opportunities than their Israeli Jewish counterparts to develop their English skills in the Israeli public school system. In the segregated Israeli public schools, Arab students received less resources. In addition, there is scant treatment of Arabic or Palestinian literature and history in the Israeli public school system.

She also spoke at length about the situation of Israeli-Arab women. Specifically, she described the strengthening of patriarchy under oppressive practices of the Israeli government. As a result, Palestinian men suffer exclusion from Israeli society, and to compensate, become more dominating in their family settings at the expense of Palestinian women. In some ways, Palestinian women are marginalized, but they also play essential roles in Palestinian society. They carry the responsibility of perpetuating their culture and traditions, but today they are also agents of social change. In order to create positive social change within their communities in Israel, some work within the Israeli state system. However, by doing so, they must acknowledge the existence of Israel as a Jewish state, and themselves as a perpetually disadvantaged native minority.

Kibbutz Metzger/Meisser Village

After much talking and thinking about how reconciliation can take place, it was very moving to visit Kibbutz Metzger and the neighboring Arab village of Meisser and to observe their positive

interactions with each other. We met at the home of Ghassem, a resident of Meisser who works in the nursing home of Kibbutz Gan Shmuel. His family welcomed us with great hospitality, passing around Arabic coffee, juice and sweets throughout our visit. We were joined by a group of residents from Kibbutz Metzger.

Even though the kibbutz was established on land that had belonged to Arabs, there were never any hostilities between the residents of Kibbutz Metzger and the two surrounding Arab villages of Meisser and Kefin. The kibbutz residents described their efforts to work cooperatively with the Arab villagers and respect their communities. They insisted that whatever services were provided for the kibbutz by the Israeli government also be provided equally for Meisser.

Ghassem told us that the residents of Meisser and the residents of Kibbutz Metzger know each other by name, enjoy each other's celebrations, share in each other's sorrows and offer each other assistance. During the 1967 War, when the men of Metzger were called to the army, the residents of Meisser filled in for them to help farm Metzger's fields and harvest their crops.

Kibbutz Metzger intervened on behalf of the Arab village of Kefin when the Israeli government proposed the building of a fence between Israel and the West Bank, which would cut off the residents of Kefin from much of their agricultural land. In addition, the proposed location of the fence was not along the Green Line, and would result in the confiscation of land from Kefin. Kibbutz Metzger offered to give an equal amount of land as Kefin for the building of the fence, and demonstrated with residents of Kefin against the Israeli government's proposed actions, which was a historic first.

On November 3, 2002, while in the midst of negotiations, a Palestinian from Tulkarem entered Kibbutz Metzger and murdered 5 residents, including a mother and two of her children. Kibbutznik Dov speculated that the reason for the attack was to disrupt the dialogue between Metzger and Kefin, and to dispute the legitimacy of the 1967 border. Others in the group expressed the belief that the attack was mistakenly directed against Metzger, a kibbutz that is well-liked by its Arab neighbors. Following the attack, the residents of Meisser joined the residents of Metzger during their mourning period. (The residents of Kefin were unable to come to Metzger because they could not legally cross from their land in the West Bank to Metzger in Israel.) The attack did not disrupt the peaceful personal relations between Metzger, Meisser and Kefin. Ultimately, however, it resulted in the building of the fence between the West Bank and Israel on Kefin's land, as originally proposed by the Israeli government.

One of group members asked whether other Israelis have tried to follow Metzger's example in establishing positive relations with its Arab neighbors. Kibbutznik Doron answered on the contrary, they criticized Metzger for its attitudes. Fellow kibbutznik Ayelet said that some Israelis even told us that we deserved the attack.

Doron led our group through Kibbutz Metzger to the fence. We saw where the olive groves of Kefin had been bulldozed to make way for the fence and the road alongside of it. Much of the remaining olive groves of Kefin are now situated on the opposite side of the fence from the village itself. Instead of trees, they see a security fence, topped with barbed wire and equipped with electronic sensors. The new fence winds its way through the serene hills of north-central Israel/Palestine, slicing and scarring the lands and taking over land on the east side of the Green Line for Israel. It was inspiring to speak with the kibbutzniks, the villagers and their families, but it was devastating to see the forced separation that has been erected by the Israeli government.

Janet Kestenberg Amighi and Michelle Dworkin