

Dr. Henk Overberg

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Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs

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Introduction

Consider the following report, which **The Age**, one of the two morning newspapers published in Melbourne, Australia, offered its readers on the morning of 2 January 1986:

Recent events... provide a consistent, if blurred picture of Palestinian-inspired may-hem to the PLO's disadvantage. The amorphous and ill-disciplined Palestinian movement rarely fails to oblige its enemies. The hijacking of the Italian cruise liner was merely one of several recent spectacular examples of uncontrolled terror that rebounded to the PLO's discredit.

PLO officials, Western analysts, specialist observers of the PLO, and Arab diplomats interviewed recently in various Middle East capitals, contributed to a view of the Palestinian movement as weaker, more fractured, less relevant and more adrift than it has been for many years.

If Mr. Arafat was to slip from the scene, it would open the way for a reconciliation between warring PLO factions. Influence in the new PLO would probably lie with a younger group of militants, ideologically to the left of the PLO chairman and his associates. (**Age**, 2 January 1986 - **Tony Walker: PLO in crisis**).

Now compare this with the following report, featured in the **Age** on 31 October 1991:

'When one calls upon Hanan Ashrawi at her modest home in the West Bank town of Ramallah, the first impression is rather like stepping from a world of barbed wire and guns - the Israeli occupation forces maintain a headquarters across the road - into the chambers of a young university teacher ... "My first love is English literature", she says, escorting visitors into a sitting room lined with worthy volumes. "There is a certain purity about the language. Clarity"... Her wit, poise and fluency has made her the natural choice for prime-time interviews on television and radio... American officials say Dr Ashrawi's forthright, practical approach was influential in winning the Secretary of State's confidence. "It gave Baker the feeling that they were serious here, that there was a point in going on with the effort", said one US diplomat who sat in on the talks'. (**Age**, 31 October 1991 - **Michael Sheridan: Ashrawi seeks the language of peace**).

Both times, it is clear, the **Age** wants to tell its Australian readership something about the issue of modern Palestine. But in each case its message is very different. Tony Walker, writing in the wake of the Achille Lauro hijacking and the seizure of the Egypt Air Boeing airplane late in 1985, offers what I would call the standard traditional Western view of the PLO. It is a terrorist organization, with a special talent for the

theatrical coup ('spectacular examples of uncontrolled terror'), creating vast disorientation among civilised society ('Palestinian-inspired may-hem'). It is an unbridled, uncontrolled, 'ill-disciplined' rabble, hardly to be graced with the title organisation. Its members are a set of alienated individuals ('adrift'), who deservedly lead a shadowy existence outside the concert of nations. There is no point in dealing with this PLO in conventional ways; it would be best if it were to disappear altogether. The first instalment of this vanishing act may well be the 'slipping away' of Mr Arafat, soon to be expected. Here is Palestine - 1986 version.

With the second article, Michael Sheridan takes us into a different world. The 'crisis' in the heading of 1986 has become the 'language of peace'. Here she is, this 'modest' 'young' university professor, helping us escape from the Israeli world of 'barbed wire and guns' into her 'chambers', where, surrounded by 'worthy volumes', she invites us into a world of 'purity' and 'clarity' with a 'wit, poise and fluency' so exceptional that they have even cast a spell over the US Secretary of State, inspiring him to devote himself unreservedly to the most intractable political problem in the world. Here is Palestine 1991.

This change of definition of the issue of modern Palestine in the Australian press is the subject of my paper. My primary concern is not the issue itself so much as its public definition in Australia. As in any society, there are a number of public definers in Australia, which construct the knowledge we have about Palestine: the government, the churches, the electronic media, academe, the press, the local Jewish community, Australia's Arabs. These definers interact and compete in the public domain, and a multi-layered picture emerges as their messages about Palestine reach their Australian audience. In this paper I shall make a start with painting this complex picture by tracing the relevant definitions which one of these public definers, the mainstream Australian press, has offered during the last seven years. As a social institution, the press stands in a complex relationship to its readers: it informs, educates entertains, persuades them, but it also depends on them. So my analysis also hints at what one can and cannot print in Australian society, and a brief examination of our social context is necessary to understand Australian press definitions of Palestine. Finally, acknowledging a unique Australian context represents a way of calling into question the widely encountered Arab belief that the West is a monolith, all powerful, hostile, unchanging and unwilling to learn.

It simply won't do to characterise Australia as a 'Western' nation, an adjunct to the United States and Europe. It has its unique geography and history, which have contributed to its own characteristic view of contemporary political reality. What follows is a brief attempt to characterise this uniqueness, which forms the context of the press views which will then be analysed.

The Australian context

A few years ago the Melbourne historian Geoffrey Blainey encapsulated an important feature of Australia's position in the world in the title of his book **The Tyranny of Distance**. Australia is far from **everywhere**. By sheer geographical chance it has no land borders, no neighbours, no large linguistic groups close to it. No other nation makes claim on it; no national group in Australia claims it has been dispossessed by a wicked foreigner (the Koories may be the exception). This perception of self has both positive and negative aspects. Speaking negatively, there is a universal feeling that we are isolated from what happens in the world; a suspicion that we might be irrelevant to the mainstream of international events; that our voice is not perhaps of the utmost importance. This sense of isolation is expressed in our perennial question: whom **do** we relate to? Britain, the mother country, far away, has abandoned us for Europe. America is powerful, protective, glittering, but it is also ignorant of our world and ruthless. Our nearest neighbour is Asia: overpopulated, culturally alien, more than just a bit frightening. It is a measure of the hold of the Middle East on Australian (and world) public opinion that, in spite of these national preoccupations, it is the most densely reported region in our media. Speaking positively, our isolation allows us the luxury of an attitude of puzzled bemusement about the squabbles, hatreds and oppressions of this world, which seem very far away and insignificant under the stark light of the lonely southern sun. No lobbies will tell us what to think about the Middle East situation!

Linked to the issue of distance is the self-perception of Australia as 'the empty continent'. In 1988 the first white man found an mere 300,000 natives inhabiting a land nearly as big as Europe, and even by 1945 the population had barely reached 7 million. The war had taught us a lesson, though: that with so few people, you could barely run a continent or defend it - we had only just managed to escape the Japanese invasion ('the yellow peril'). We had to do something about it; so the country initiated a policy of vigorous immigration, which has hardly abated since, and which has helped push the population up to 17 million at the present time. We encouraged the most heterogeneous mixture of groups - national, ethnic, racial, religious - to enter the country and make their home with us. Today, a quarter of our population is overseas born.

This vast and sustained experience of immigration into Australia since 1945 has given rise to an array of public arguments and positions about how these diverse groups should be incorporated into our institutional framework. Such ideologies of settlement, as we know them, say a great deal about institutional arrangements, matters of citizenship, economic participation and intergroup relations. This is not the place to discuss these ideologies, but it is important to say that they have been concerned with inclusion, social harmony and cohesion, and that models of ethnic exclusiveness have generally been given short shrift. Attempts to import old inter-ethnic conflicts into Australia from abroad have generally been resisted; and claims throughout the world that states need to be based on a single ethnicity meet with general scepticism.

Both Jews and Arabs are well represented in this multi-ethnic Australian society. There were Jews on the First Fleet, which brought the first white population to Australia in 1788. The Nazi era brought a vast influx of Jews to Australia: first pre-war refugees from Germany, and then post-war survivors from Nazi persecution. Since the establishment of the state of Israel they have had to face the issue of where their civic loyalty lies. The loosening of Soviet restrictions has resulted in a recent steady stream of Jews to Australia.

At present there are about 70,000 Jewish residents in Australia, virtually all Ashkenazim, most of whom live in Melbourne. They present themselves as a separate community, with significant institutional in the form of schools, hospitals, synagogues, media outlets and shops. Their integration into mainstream society is complete: the commander of the Australian forces in World War I as well as two Governors General were Jews. They are institutionally and economically influential, but, because of a combination of their residence pattern and the structure of Australia's electoral system they cannot determine the identity of important public figures. They are prominent in world Zionist affairs (Isi Leibler, an Australian, is Chairman of the World Zionist Movement, and Martin Indyk was a prominent Australian Zionist before his appointment as special advisor on the Middle East to President Clinton).

There are 120,000 Arabs in Australia, two thirds of whom live in Sydney, the rest in Melbourne. They are by and large a refugee community, having mostly come after 1970 due to the troubles in the Arab world. There are Lebanese, Palestinians, Egyptian Copts, Sudanese Christians. They are mainly a poor community of unskilled factory workers, with an unemployment rate three times the national average. Apart from the network of mosques and the occasional Arab shop and restaurant, institutional development is minimal. In view of their recent arrival, very few Arabs are to be found in key positions of the mainstream institutions. Mainstream Australian perceptions of Arab residents have changed: originally Turks and Arabs were thought to be the same (the 1976 census lumps them together as one group); then, as the troubles in Lebanon took hold we heard of our 'Lebanese' community speaking a language called 'Lebanese'. We subsequently discovered that they were actually Arabs. And lately it has become common and acceptable to identify 'Palestinians' in our community in a non-pejorative way.

The Australian mainstream press

The *Australian* published in Canberra, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Melbourne Age* are the three quality newspapers with a national circulation in Australia. Of the three the *Age*, with a circulation of about 200,000 is probably most widely recognised as the civilised voice of the nation, both within Australia and abroad. Apart from one report from the *Australian* and another from the *Melbourne Sun*, my analysis will be based on a selection of reports which appeared in the *Age* from 2 January 1986

until 22 January 1992.

Something should be said about the Australian journalist Tony Walker, who contributed the bulk of the articles on the Middle East to the *Age* during these years. Walker was the *Age* correspondent to the Middle East from 1984 until 1992, a relatively long stint for a foreign correspondent in one particular posting. A graduate in from the Australian National University in Canberra, he got his first overseas posting as the *Age*'s foreign correspondence to China in 1979. In 1984 he was transferred from China to the Middle East, and he experienced all developments in the region from the aftermath of Sabra and Shatila until the Rabin election of 1992. He was transferred back to the *Age* bureau in Peking in the middle of last year. In addition to his journalism, Walker wrote a biography of Arafat in joint authorship with Andrew Gowers in 1990 (*Behind the myth. Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Revolution*, London, W H Lane). A number of Walker's articles were syndicated to other papers, and he appeared regularly on Australian radio and the BBC as a commentator on Middle East affairs.

The *Age* report are discussed under five headings: the presentation of violence, the institutionalisation of the intifada, Israel's 'right' as a mainstream rather than a marginal societal phenomenon, the contrast between Israeli intransigence and Arab moderation, and the Israeli attempt to control media access to events in the territories.

Violence

The reporting of violence associated with the intifada got off to a flying start with Rabin's announcement of the 'wooden club' policy to be used against the Palestinian population. The early shock at the brutality of the order remained with the press throughout the intifada, and was a factor in the press' shift of the traditional locus of Middle East violence from the PLO to official Israel. As early as 30 January 1988, the *Age* noted that Rabin had announced a policy of "might, force and beatings" to suppress Arab demonstrations in the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war... It is now clear that the "wooden club" policy has been indiscriminately applied in such a way that scores of Palestinians, some with broken limbs, have been committed to hospital after being beaten up by Israeli soldiers.

Linguistically, this association of official Israel with the issue of violence ('wooden club') as against the relatively neutral 'demonstrations' of the Palestinians in territories that were in any case 'occupied by Israel' marks a beginning in a shift of the ascription of violence that was to continue henceforth. Other articles followed in the same vein. *Beatings traumatise teenagers* were read on 11 February 1988; followed by *Israeli officers ordered to watch beatings film* on 1 March. By 9 March, the *Age* had discovered Felicia Langer (*The limits of force*), who was described as having to field daily telephone death threats from Kach loonies, and who characterised the "killings" as "routine". "You have a pattern of killings, and people are not taking notice any more".

She clearly attributed the violence to official Israel: "The Palestinians have simply no protection". Once Rabin had offered his policy of might, force and beatings to the world, the *Age* simply would not let go off the issue, and in fact followed the court cases of Yehuda Meir and Ofer Reshef into late 1990, nearly three years after the order. **Rabin gave order to bash Palestinians, says officer**, an article ran on 23 June 1990, in which we learned of Meir giving evidence in a military court that Rabin instructed him and senior officer to "Start beating [Palestinians], start breaking their bones. If they start hurting, maybe then they will understand... You do the work, I'll deal with the press and the law".

Six months later the same theme was still alive. **Light sentences to soldiers who beat an Arab to death**, reported Lachlan Shaw on 2 November 1990:

The case [of Captain Ofer Reshef] has been followed with interest in Israel as it centres on the controversial "bone-breaking" orders issued by the then Defence Minister, Mr Yitzhak Rabin, early in the Palestinian uprising.

The *Age* was not content to merely rely on individual journalists and individual cases in its reporting on Israeli violence; it soon brought reputable outside institutions into the fray to confirm its reports. Both the 1990 and 1991 annual reports of Amnesty International received coverage (4 January 1990 **Israeli condones Palestinian executions, says Amnesty**, and 31 July 1991 **Amnesty says Israel "routinely" tortures Palestinians**). The second *Age* report was particularly interesting, not only in that it reported a response of the Israeli Justice Ministry at the end ("This report is biased ...[it] casts doubts on the motivations of this organization'), but also in that it went to one of the root causes of the violence. In an obvious reference to the report of the Landau Commission it cited Amnesty: "What is extremely disturbing is that there are actually secret official guidelines allowing 'moderate physical pressure' during interrogation".

The apex of all the reporting of violence during the intifada was reached in the treatment of the incident at the Harem al-Sharif in October 1990. No fewer than 8 articles appear in *The Age* within the space of three days. Although a lone voice was raised in defence of original official Israeli interpretations of the killings (**Mayor says Palestinians provoked the clash**, 10 October 1990), the main tendency of the reports was unmistakable. 'Police opened fire, killing at least 21 Arabs and wounding 140. Eleven Jews were also hurt', we read, in a 'day of fury, mayhem and horror' (10 October 1990). The Israelis might will 'accuse the world of hypocrisy' and 'reject the linkage to Gulf crisis' (11 October 1990), nevertheless 'the Australian Government issued a statement deploring the deaths and accusing Israeli authorities of "a disproportionate response" (11 October 1990). The 'outrage' had 'deflected' the 'world spotlight', and it was hard to disagree with French President, Mr Mitterand overnight when he said that the violence "can only confirm my view... that negotiations must replace violence". And Mr Mitterand also said pointedly that while it would be a mistake to link the Gulf crisis with Israeli policies towards the Palestinians "one cannot try to defend human rights here and

neglect them there. Rights are rights". (Age, 10 October 1990 - **Tony Walker: Outrage deflects world spotlight**).

As if to underscore where responsibility for the massacre lay, the Age noted that since the attack 'Palestinian moderates are under threat' (11 October 1990), and as an expression of the attitude of official Israeli the paper was able to report a month later that the officer in charge of the Jerusalem police district, who was criticized by a government commission investigating the killings at the al-Aksa Mosque a month ago, would be promoted, Israeli police said last night. The announcement indicated that the police do not intend to discipline anyone for the shootings on 8 October that left at least 17 Palestinians dead. (Age, 14 November 1990 - **Jerusalem officer promoted**).

In March 1988 it had still been possible for the president of the Executive Council of Australia Jewry to defend Israeli violence :

Please bear in mind that condemning Israeli for trying to quell Arab violence which kills and maims no less than bullets, without demanding an end to the riots and a movement towards negotiations, simply encourages more Arab extremism. (Age, 10 March 1988 - **Isi Leibler: Israelis are ready to talk peace**).

During the Harem al-Sharif killings, however, he was conspicuously absent from the press, and by September 1991, when he wrote to condemn PLO 'atrocities' and 'crimes' (20 September 1991), Australian public opinion was sufficiently confident to engender the following response:

It is standard procedure for Isi Leibler (20/9) to defend Israel. One can expect no less of a committed Zionist of his international standing. However, the PLO and its representatives are not the only ones who accuse Israel of "atrocities" and "crimes" which are far more than merely "alleged". If Mr Leibler would like a "shred of evidence", I suggest he reads the 1000-page, four volume report recently published by the Swedish Save the Children Fund, which documents Israeli-Jewish brutality including murder and state-sanctioned torture, against Palestinian children. Or is Save the Children just another bunch of anti-Semites? Mr Leibler cannot sustain an argument with the PLO representative simply by accusing him of "outrageous claims", calling him a liar and a "self-appointed propagandist". Whether Mr Leibler likes it or not, Ali Kazak is the state official of a country that is recognised by more members of the United Nations than is Israel. (Age, 25 September 1991 - **Letter by Shelley Woods: Suffering of the Palestinians**).

By this stage the public perception of what was happening in Palestine is clear: Israelis are the perpetrators of interethnic violence on a widespread scale, Palestinians are its victims, public disbelief of official Zionist definitions of the intifada is considerable, the man in the street is no longer diffident to say so, and the paper feels comfortable in publishing such views.

Institutionalised Israeli responses to the Intifada

Violence and human rights violations are by their very nature newsworthy, and favorites with the press - there are opportunities for pictures too. Yet from very early on in the intifada, the *Age* makes an attempt to look at the institutional changes behind the daily events that are occurring in Israeli and the territories. This approach is less immediately event-bound or person-bound, lacks the picturesqueness of shootings and beatings, is difficult to photograph, requires some level of analysis, and looks beyond the event of the day to general trends and tendencies. An early report noted Israel's concern to control the communication channels of Palestinians by cutting of 'phone links to [the] West Bank' (*Age*, 17 March 1988). A month later, on 12 April 1988 an article entitled **Measuring the cost of the uprising** appeared, which neatly juxtaposes daily events and developing trends as follows:

While Palestinians are continuing to die at the rate of about one a day in sporadic outbursts of violence, the focus of the conflict is shifting to an economic version of trench warfare. The Israelis have begun laying down a barrage of economic sanctions to try to break the spirit of the resistance.

Israel's economic measures for the territories were not aimed at improving the economy of the region, which might have been though a legitimate objective for economic measures, but at eliminating political activity among the Palestinians. These measures expressed a desire to dominate and 'break the spirit of the resistance', and this became the theme of the reports on the Beit Sahur tax revolt in late 1989:

Because of its closeness to Jerusalem, [Beit Sahur] has attracted the attention of the resident diplomatic corps, some of whom, including the British consul, were refused entry to Beit Sahur a few weeks ago, which sparked something of an international row.

The Pope, after receiving a plea for assistance from the mayor of Beit Sahur, said last week that he wished to make his "own legitimate request for the Palestinian people to live in peace in their own country". The Latin, Greek Orthodox and Armenian patriarchs protested against being turned back by soldiers on Friday. "What's going on in Beit Sahur is unjust - it is not acceptable to any churchman or any spiritual man who has a human conscience", Michael Sabbah, the Latin Patriarch, told Israeli radio.

Israel is waging a relentless economic war against the 1.7 million residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to try to crush the 23-month long Palestinian uprising. Taxation is one of its principle weapons, so it wants to stop Beit Sahur's tax protest quickly to keep it from spreading. (*Age*, 30 October 1989 - **Tony Walker: Israelis plunder town that refuses to pay taxes**).

The perception was clearly that we are not witnessing a civil response to civil disobedience, but a situation where the Israeli authorities try to exact compliance in a civil dispute through use of the apparatus of war, combined with officially sanctioned plunder, and without the conventional moderating judicial checks and balances. Two days later, after the operation was called off, the *Age's* rhetoric was even more explicit.

Israel has called off its siege of the little Christian town of Beit Sahur following an international outcry over methods used to break a six-week tax revolt by its residents... The authorities had used draconian measures in their attempt to force Beit Sahur's residents to pay their taxes, including arrests and confiscations of personal property. The little town of Beit Sahur adjoins Bethlehem, Christ's birthplace, about 15 kilometres from Jerusalem. Its residents have long had a reputation for industriousness and civic pride. (*Age*, 1 November 1989 - **Tony Walker: Israel lifts siege on tax revolt town after outcry**).

This report combines the language of war ('siege') in inappropriate circumstances, the asymmetry between the villagers' civil disobedience and the Israeli military countermeasures ('draconian') with the perception that these villagers are downtrodden, gentle, industrious folk, against whom those measures were particularly unfair ('the little Christian town... adjoining Bethlehem... [with] a reputation for industriousness and civic pride'). The emotional impact of the picture of the Beit Sahur villagers as fellow Christians (rather than as rock-throwing PLO-inspired terrorists), of the town's link with Christianity and Christ's birthplace, with childhood ('little'), innocence and defenselessness, is bound to stir some of the earliest and deepest feelings and associations in a readership of the Christian tradition for which the *Age* is largely writing.

Beit Sahur represented punitive institutional occupation in its economic form. The full impact of the Israeli occupation across the full spectrum of institutional life in the territories had already been suggested to the Australian reader early in the intifada in the following terms:

In the area in which its legal system applies, Israel is an exemplary democracy. But in Gaza the right to vote, to be elected, to express grievance and protest, to have recourse to serious legal process, to be protected from punishment without trial or proof of guilt, to hold a passport, to revere a flag, to enjoy social benefits, to have a decent, non-menial economic future, above all to walk the streets with dignity, are beyond the reach of the 650.000 Palestine Arabs. (*Age*, 11 February 1988 - **Abbas Eban: Israelis realise that time is on the side of the Arabs** (reprinted from *Observer/World Press Networks*).

This paragraph suggests the whole gamut of institutional discrimination suffered by Palestinians under occupation: political, judicial, social, economic, national, the denial of **habeas corpus**. Particularly fascinating is the author's view of the occupation as a

sufficient condition of the intifada, not the intifada as a justification for occupation. And rather than condemning the intifada as immoderate and violent, he characterises it as an unusually moderate response given the context of Israeli occupation:

The recent explosion itself needs no sophisticated explanation in terms of Islamic fundamentalism. Gaza is not an area of deep theological speculation. If the 650,000 inhabitants were American Baptists, Swedish Lutherans, or, for that matter, Jewish Zionists, and were in the same status and condition as the 650,000 Gazans, they would be reacting with similar or greater virulence. Extremism in Gaza is a reason for ending the occupation, not an excuse for perpetuating it (op. cit.).

The article was written by Abba Eban, and that brings me to an interesting feature of reports published in Australia. As the intifada took hold, the press increasingly coopted liberal Israelis are coopted to present alternative views about the Palestinian situation as a means of invalidating the well-known Israeli-Zionist tactic of ascribing antisemitism to its critics. This procedure helped change the readers' traditionally benign views on Israel without being burdened by this impact of the Zionist defence, but paradoxically it also had the added benefit of introducing the Australian reader a more moderate Israel: besides Shamir, Rabin and Sharon, we meet Abba Eban, Felicia Langer, Daphna Golan (Btselem), Amiran Goldblum (Peace Now), Yehoshafat Harkabi, Dedi Zucker and Israel Shahak.

Polarisation of the Israeli polity

Even so, the way the *Age* talks about right wing circles in Israeli political life is to imply with increasing insistence that it is this right wing that expresses most adequately the Israeli political mainstream, to which progressive elements become increasingly marginal phenomena. That began quite early on in the intifada. **Israel's voice in the wilderness predicts truly**, headed an article by Tony Walker about Meron Benvenisti on 22 January 1988, and we only had to wait another week before we read the following about another eminent Israeli political figure:

Israel's burly former Defence Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon, does not spend a lot of time in his new apartment in the Arab quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. He did not buy into the Old City because he needed somewhere to sleep - he owns a modern apartment in the new Jewish sector and a sheep farm in the Negev desert. He is there to show Jews and Arabs alike where Ariel Sharon stands on what to do about the Palestinians... There are extremists in every society, of course, but the antics of Mr Sharon and his friends are an indication of the strength of sympathy for right-wing positions in Israel'. (*Age*, 1 February 1988 - **Lachlan Shaw: Israeli hardliners discover the status quo is history**).

Characteristically, Sharon was introduced not as a marginal figure, but as a representative of mainstream Israeli political life. Other examples followed. On 1 March 1988 the *Age* reported that "transfer" is no longer a dirty word'. Early in 1990 the shift in ownership of the *Jerusalem Post* was noted: "'Post" turmoil signals shift to right' (*Age*, 4 January 1990). The *Australian* devoted a large section of its weekend magazine on one occasion to the doings of Rabbi Moshe Levinger and his friends at Gush Emunim. 'He has been dubbed Israel's foremost fascist', wrote the paper, before going into details about the Abdul Rahman Samua case. The rabbi was described as a true disciple of Zvi Kook, whose central position in Israeli polity as the former chief rabbi of the IDF was discussed, and who was described as one of Israel's most charismatic rabbis. Kook, who believed that Zionism is part of God's plan, taught that the Jewish return to Israel and the flowering of the land heralds the beginning of the messianic age... The most important commandment, said Kook, was settling the land, which should be defended at any cost... [During the six-day war at the Walk Kook said]: "We announce to all Israel, and to all the world, that by a divine command we have returned to our home, to our holy city... From this day forth, we shall never budge from here". What began in messianic fervour ended in organised terrorism'. (*Australian Magazine*, 22 September 1991 - **Robert Friedman: 'The Messiah complex'**).

Later Levinger and his friends were implicated in the plan - which he and a few of his rabbi friends 'blessed' - to blow up the Dome of the Rock. The lenient court sentences they later attracted for this project were duly noted: 'In July 1985, a three-judge court in Jerusalem convicted 18 members of the underground, handing out prison terms ranging from four months to life. Today, after years of intense lobbying, the entire underground, including Levinger's son-in-law and two others serving life sentences, has been released from jail'. Levinger's killing of an Arab in 1990, bargained down in court to negligent homicide attracting a sentence of 'just ten weeks' was also described. During the trial he declared that though he had not killed anyone, 'he wished that he'd had "the honour of killing an Arab"'. The article ended with Levinger's definition of Zionism, given without further comment:

"Zionism is a movement that does not think in rational terms - in terms of practical politics, international relations, world opinion, demography, social dynamics - but in terms of divine commandments. What matters only is God's promise to Abraham as recorded in the Book of Genesis".

Only six weeks after the appearance of the Levinger article, Meir Kahane was murdered. 'He publicly called Arabs "dogs"'. And in case readers got the idea that the rabbi stood at the margins of Israeli society, the *Age* added.

Mr Alouph Harevan, associate director of the Van Leer Foundation, a private Israeli research foundation trying to promote tolerance, said in 1985: "Before his election [to the Knesset] a year ago, Kahane was just an illness; now he is an epidemic" (*Age*, 7 November 1990 - **John Kifner: A "messiah" from Brooklyn**).

The Melbourne **Sun**, a tabloid not normally given to serious reporting of news coming from overseas, saw fit to run the following Reuter report on events at Kahane's funeral"

[In Jerusalem] the alert went out as followers of Mr Kahane vowed to avenge Monday's killing in "a river of Arab blood"... In New York, rage over the killing boiled over at a memorial service in a Brooklyn synagogue on Tuesday, with thousands of the Jewish militant's supporters baying for vengeance. Mourners jammed the street, shouting "never again", and "Arabs out of Israel". They waved signs bearing large red Hebrew letters that spelt out the word "nakama" - revenge... Another Kach member, Mr Yoel Ben David, openly vowed retribution: "I promise you there will be a river of Arab blood". (Sun, 8 November 1990 - **Reuter: Revenge fears on rabbi death**).

Eventually the inevitable, not-to-be-spoken comparison between present-day Israeli society and a fascist society of days gone-by had to come. This is how it entered the Australian press:

In a further sign of the times notices have begun appearing in Jerusalem shop windows saying "Arabs not employed here"... Dedi Zucher of the Citizens Rights Movement has sent a telegram to Israel's Attorney - General, asking for the signs to be removed. "Even with a magnifying glass", he said, "you cannot tell the difference between these signs and similar signs in Germany in the 1930's, which were aimed against Jews and paved the way for more serious crimes". (Age, 21 November 1990 - **Tony Walker: Israel's cycle of despair**).

I draw attention to the fact that when the odious comparison was finally publicly expressed, the Age prudently coopted Dedi Zucker to do the dirty work for it. When the news came through of the UN decision to rescind the Zionism is racism resolution, the only invited comment was from the PLO representative in Australia (Age, 23 December 1991 - **Ali Kazak: Racism is not so easily rescinded as a UN vote**). No voice from the Zionist circles in Melbourne was heard in the paper; and in view of Jewish leaders' long-standing eagerness to contribute to the editorial pages of the paper, it was almost as if the Age did not see its reaction as very relevant.

Israeli intransigence versus Arab moderation

As the intifada progressed, the theme emerged that it is Israeli intransigence rather than any Palestinian actions or attitudes which is at the root cause of the difficult situation in Palestine. **Israeli's immovable rock**, was the headline of an article on Shamir: "He never believes an Arab, any Arab, rarely believes a non-Jew and basically thinks no news is good news... Earlier this year... he referred to Palestinian protesters as "locusts" to be crushed, revealing a certain contempt' (Age, 5 November 1988). A moderate Israeli explained: 'Any opinion different from ours is termed lack of

understanding. Perhaps it is we and our leaders who don't understand. The claim that any criticism gives comfort to the enemy is no less demagogic' (**Age**, 10 March 1988 - **Yehoshafat Harkabi: Jerusalem must accept that the PLO speaks for Palestinians**). The settlements issue was viewed both as the symbol and reality of this intransigence. We again listen to Shamir:

Mr Shamir yesterday promised cheering Jewish settlers that Israel would "tell the Gentiles of the world" that nothing can stop its home building in the territories it has occupied since the 1967 Middle East war. "We see the construction in all of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, he said, using biblical terms for the West Bank, "and this construction will continue, and no force in the world will stop this construction... We say to ourselves, and to the Gentiles of the world and to the next generations, here will be our homeland, here will be our home, forever and ever... We will build and I hope very much we will get the guarantees, too... I hope that I will not have to sacrifice anything. All our national duties are sacred at the same time and I don't think we have to sacrifice any of our principles". (**Age**, 22 January 1992 - **Tony Walker: Shamir's pledge pleases settlers**).

It is a revealing passage, featuring the familiar mix of the precedence of Zionist claims over international law, the buttressing up of claims with biblical references, the mixture of the sacred and the political, and the stance of opposition between Israel and the wicked world. But implicit in its presentation is also a condemnation of what is presented, in line with other reports in the paper on settlements (**Age**, 28 August 1991 - **Tony Walker: Report condemns settlements - a discussion of an al-Haq report**).

This Israeli attitude is contrasted progressively with a perception of moderation and reasonableness on the part of the Arabs. Even before the intifada, the **Age** had discovered an Anglican bishop who 'stands for the moderate voice of Palestine' (2 January 1986). When King Hussein renounced Jordan's role in Palestine, we heard that 'Jordan gives up West Bank role' (**Age**, 2 August 1988) - we have just seen how Shamir never gives up anything - and 'Hussein cuts losses to preserve Arab unity' (**Age**, 6 August 1988). The leadup to Arafat's Geneva Declaration in December 1988 publicly recognising Israel, with the work done by the Swedish authorities in the US and Menachem Rosensaft of the American labour Zionist Alliance, was reported approvingly, and contrasted with the 'ruthless' tactics of the American Jewish community. Menachem Rosensaft, of the American arm of the Labor Zionist Alliance, talked about his communications with Arafat, preparatory to Arafat's pronouncement recognising Israel:

"I find it strange for anyone to suggest that the PLO finally accepting Israel is a block to peace when that's what we've been asking for since the 1970's".

The logic of this aid is that the American Jewish community is the most powerful single-issue lobby in the US-the best financed, the most articulate and best organized, and ruthless in using its financial clout to destroy those who define America's interests in the

region as different from Israel's... The fate of Israel's 3.5 million Jews is heavily influenced by America's 5.5 million Jews. One way or another, that may their best hope for peace'. (Age, 20 December 1988 - **Time Colebatch: American Jewry's point of no return**).

The Australian foreign minister welcomed Arafat's announcement as a "giant step", 'but said he was concerned by Israel's negative posture' (Age, 16 December 1988 - **Persistent diplomats win breakthrough**). We heard that "'Honest broker" Egypt [is] back in [the] Arab fold (Age, 19 May 1989). And the Pope chipped in with the observation that 'the Palestinian issue is the main obstacle to diplomatic ties between the Vatican and Israel' (Age, 6 March 1991 - **Philip Pullella: Pope calls for a Palestinian homeland**). Even Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein, though complicating Australian perceptions, brought the publication of an important article by Edward Said (Age, 13 January 1991 - **The gulf between worlds**), which compared the US' 'underlying fantasy' to be able to create a new Middle East order military, with the 'Israeli paradigm for dealing with the Arabs: bomb them, humiliate them, lie about them'.

Restricted media access

The Israeli concern to restrict access by foreigners to the territories, especially the media, was noted in the Age with some regularity as evidence that the Israelis might have something to hide in their dealings with the intifada. **Israel tightens media rein** headed a report on 21 March 1988, the salient points of the situation being expressed as follows:

Israel appears to be trying to further restrict access by foreign reporters to the West Bank and Gaza Strip where more than three months of rioting have left 100 Palestinians dead... It seems a more restrictive policy is being applied to minimise adverse publicity arising from the way Israel is putting down the Palestinian revolt.

Three weeks later the Age noted how the Palestinians were becoming aware of the foreign media, and incorporated foreign media presence as a factor in their decision of where and when to demonstrate, to the chagrin of the occupiers (14 April 1988 - **Demonstrators move into the camera line**). When the Israelis clamped restrictions on foreign TV cameramen, it noted with approval that Foreign TV networks are sidestepping the Israeli Government's ban on news coverage of the Palestinian uprising on the West Bank. They are training local Arabs and giving them cameras to film the troubles. (Age, 15 June 1989 - **Marjorie Olster: Videomovies defy Israelis**).

Not only the media, but also the foreign diplomatic corps were denied entry when the Israelis decide there were reasons to hide something:

[Beit Sahur] has attractied the attention of the diplomatic corps, some of whom, including the British consul, were refused entry to Beit Sahr a few weeks ago, which sparked something of an international row. (Age, 30 October 1989 - **Tony Walker: Israelis plunder town that refuses to pay taxes**).

Conclusion

This paper has been concerned with the definition of the issue of Palestine in the Australian press, and with the changes in this definition about the situation as the intifada developed. I have suggested that these changes have partly been due to the nature and sequence of the events themselves, which the press has simply passively reflected. The nature of the constituency to which the press reports has been a second factor in these changes; it is a constituency which has been socialised in an Australian context, in which the boundaries of acceptance and rejection of information on Palestine may not lie the same as in other countries. But the changes have also been due, I would argue, to a third factor I have not yet mentioned, although the article on Hanan Ashrawi cited in the beginning of this paper alludes to it: that is an increasing awareness by the Palestinian authorities of the issue of audience. For many a year the Palestinian authorities and people have had a message to tell. They have concentrated heavily on the nature of the message, but in the process they have forgotten questions of audience. By default more than by anything else, it has been assumed that the audience is a monolith, who would deal with the message in a unified, predictable, and, in case of the West, uniformly damning way. That is not the situation, and the intifada has helped bring an awareness of the diversity of the audience. That diversity is formidable: messages must be sent to the Palestinians, to the Arab world, to the Israeli government and its constituents, to the United States, to the United Nations as the world community. In so far as each of these audiences is a factor in the Palestinian situation, each audience needs a message tailored to its perceptions and needs. You can't talk to a merchant in Nablus in the same way as you talk to an accountant in Melbourne. Conversely, with such a diverse of audience, Israelis and Palestinians can reasonably expect their messages to be received differently by the members of this audience. Official Israel has long understood this; and it has been careful to package its message to suit its audience, with both message and bearer chosen in such a way as to appeal to its international audience. And that has been to its political advantage. As late as 1990, Maria Holt bemoaned the pro-Israeli bias of the mainstream British press; noting the benefit of the doubt the Israelis got for obstructing the peace talks, the disproportionate space Israeli concerns were given in reports over Palestinian issues, and the salience of the terrorist image which still attached to the PLO in the British press (Holt, 1990:19). If nothing else, a phenomenon like Hanan Ashrawi both presents and represents a new Palestinian image to the outside world, one which Arafat with 'his difficulties not only with the language, but with the whole presentation of self and image' (Said, 1991:18) could never hope to carry. Here is a person, articulate, lucid, tolerant; a woman, for heaven's sake, presenting a whole new Palestinian-Arab world to the outside. And James Baker took notice. The Palestinian definers have become different; the message has become more potent, Palestinian and Israeli messages stand more in symmetry, and the attitudes Maria Holt noted in Britain are simply not possible in Australia. Local conditions contribute to this, but also the realization on the Palestinian side that the message must be tailored to audience.

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Documents

DOCUMENT 1

Recent events... provide a consistent, if blurred picture of Palestinian-inspired may-hem to the PLO's disadvantage. The amorphous and ill-disciplined Palestinian movement rarely fails to oblige its enemies. The hijacking of the Italian cruise liner was merely one of several recent spectacular examples of uncontrolled terror that rebounded to the PLO's discredit.

PLO officials, Western analysts, specialist observers of the PLO, and Arab diplomats interviewed recently in various Middle East capitals, contributed to a view of the Palestinian movement as weaker, more fractured, less relevant and more adrift than it has been for many years.

If Mr Arafat was to slip from the scene, it would open the way for a reconciliation between warring PLO factions. Influence in the new PLO would probably lie with a younger group of militants, ideologically to the left of the PLO chairman and his associates. (Age, 2 January 1986 - **Tony Walker: PLO in crisis**).

DOCUMENT 2

'When one calls upon Hanan Ashrawi at her modest home in the West Bank town of Ramallah, the first impression is rather like stepping from a world of bared wire and guns - the Israeli occupation forces maintain a headquarters across the road - into the chambers of a young university teacher... "My first love is English literature", she says, escorting visitors into a sitting room lined with worthy volumes. "There is a certain purity about the language. Clarity"... Her wit, poise and fluency has made here the natural choice for prime-time interviews on television and radio... American officials say Dr Ashrawi's forthright, practical approach was influential in winning the Secretary of State's confidence. "It gave Baker the feeling that they were serious here, that there was a point in going on with the effort", said one US diplomat who sat in on the talks'. (Age, 31 October 1991 - **Michael Sheridan: Ashrawi seeks the language of peace**).

DOCUMENT 3

"might, force and beatings" to suppress Arab demonstrations in the territories occupied by Israel in the 1967 war... It is now clear that the "wooden club" policy has been indiscriminately applied in such a way that scores of Palestinians, some with broken limbs, have been committed to hospital after being beaten up by Israeli soldiers. (Age, 30 January 1988).

DOCUMENT 4

"Start beating [Palestinians], start breaking their bones. If they start hurting, maybe then they will understand... You do the work, I'll deal with the press and the law". (Age, 23 June 1990).

DOCUMENT 5

The case [of Captain Ofer Reshef] has been followed with interest in Israel as it centres on the controversial "bone-breaking" orders issued by the then Defence Minister, Mr Yitzhak Rabin, early in the Palestinian uprising. (Lachlan Shaw, Age, 2 November 1990, **Light sentences to soldiers who beat an Arab to death**).

DOCUMENT 6

It was hard to disagree with French President, Mr Mitterand overnight when he said that the violence "can only confirm my view... that negotiations must replace violence". And Mr Mitterand also said pointedly that while it would be a mistake to link the Gulf crisis with Israeli policies towards the Palestinians "one cannot try to defend human rights here and neglect them there. Rights are rights". (Age, 10 October 1990 - **Tony Walker: Outrage deflects world spotlight**).

DOCUMENT 7

The officer in charge of the Jerusalem police district, who was criticized by a government commission investigating the killings at the al-Aksa Mosque a month ago, would be promoted, Israeli police said last night. The announcement indicated that the police do not intend to discipline anyone for the shootings on 8 October that left at least 17 Palestinians dead. (Age, 14 November 1990 - **Jerusalem officer promoted**).

DOCUMENT 8

Please bear in mind that condemning Israel for trying to quell Arab violence which kills and maims no less than bullets, without demanding an end to the riots and a movement towards negotiations, simply encourages more Arab extremism. (Age, 10 March 1988 - **Isi Leibler: Israelis are ready to talk peace**).

DOCUMENT 9

It is standard procedure for Isi Leibler (20/9) to defend Israel. One can expect no less of a committed Zionist of his international standing. However, the PLO and its representatives are not the only ones who accuse Israel of "atrocities" and "crimes" which are far more than merely "alleged". If Mr Leibler would like a "shred of evidence", I suggest he reads the 1000-page, four volume report recently published by the Swedish

Save the Children Fund, which documents Israel-Jewish brutality including murder and state-sanctioned torture, against Palestinian children. Or is Save the Children just another bunch of anti-Semites? Mr Leibler cannot sustain an argument with the PLO representative simply by accusing him of "outrageous claims", calling him a liar and a "self-appointed propagandist". Whether Mr Leibler likes it or not, Ali Kazak is the state official of a country that is recognised by more members of the United Nations than is Israel. (Age, 25 September 1991 - Letter by Shelley Woods: **Suffering of the Palestinians**).

DOCUMENT 10

While Palestinians are continuing to die at the rate of about one a day in sporadic outbursts of violence, the focus of the conflict is shifting to an economic version of trench warfare. The Israelis have begun laying down a barrage of economic sanctions to try to break the spirit of the resistance. (Age, 12 April 1988, **Measuring the cost of the uprising**).

DOCUMENT 11

Because of its closeness to Jerusalem, [Beit Sahur] has attracted the attention of the resident diplomatic corps, some of whom, including the British consul, were refused entry to Beit Sahur a few weeks ago, which sparked something of an international row.

The Pope, after receiving a plea for assistance from the mayor of Beit Sahur, said last week that he wished to make his "own legitimate request for the Palestinian people to live in peace in their own country". The Latin, Greek Orthodox and Armenian patriarchs protested against being turned back by soldiers on Friday. "What's going on in Beit Sahur is unjust - it is not acceptable to any churchman or any spiritual man who has a human conscience", Michael Sabbah, the Latin Patriarch, told Israeli radio.

Israel is waging relentless economic war against the 1.7 million residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip to try to crush the 23-month long Palestinian uprising. Taxation is one of its principal weapons, so it wants to stop Beit Sahur's tax protest quickly to keep it from spreading. (Age, 30 October 1989 - **Tony Walker: Israelis plunder town that refuses to pay taxes**).

DOCUMENT 12

Israel has called off its siege of the little Christian town of Beit Sahur following an international outcry over methods used to break a six-week tax revolt by its residents... The authorities had used draconian measures in their attempt to force Beit Sahur's residents to pay their taxes, including arrests and confiscations of personal property. The little town of Beit Sahur adjoins Bethlehem, Christ's birthplace, about 15 kilometres from Jerusalem. Its civic pride. (Age, 1 November 1989 - **Tony Walker: Israel lifts siege on tax revolt town after outcry**).

DOCUMENT 13

In the area in which its legal system applies, Israel is an exemplary democracy. But in Gaza the right to vote, to be elected, to express grievance and protest, to have recourse to serious legal process, to be protected from punishment without trial or proof of guilt, to hold a passport, to revere a flag, to enjoy social benefits, to have a decent, non-menial economic future, above all to walk the streets with dignity, are beyond the reach of the 650,000 Palestine Arabs. (Age, 11 February 1988 - Abba Eban: Israelis realise that time is on the side of the Arabs).

DOCUMENT 14

The recent explosion itself needs no sophisticated explanation in terms of Islamic fundamentalism. Gaza is not an area of deep theological speculation. If the 650,000 inhabitants were American Baptists, Swedish Lutherans, or, for that matter, Jewish Zionists, and were in the same status and condition as the 650,000 Gazans, they would be reacting with similar or greater virulence. Extremism in Gaza is a reason for ending the occupation, not an excuse for perpetuating it (op.cit.).

DOCUMENT 15

Israel's burly former Defence Minister, Mr Ariel Sharon, does not spend a lot of time in his new apartment in the Arab quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. He did not buy into the Old City because he needed somewhere to sleep - he owns a modern apartment in the new Jewish sector and a sheep farm in the Negev desert. He is there to show Jews and Arabs alike where Ariel Sharon stands on what to do about the Palestinians... There are extremists in every society, of course, but the antics of Mr Sharon and his friends are an indication of the strength of sympathy for right-wing positions in Israel'. (Age, 1 February 1988 - Lachlan Shaw: Israeli hardliners discover the status quo is history).

DOCUMENT 16

One of Israel's most charismatic rabbis. Kook, who believed that Zionism is part of God's plan, taught that the Jewish return to Israel and the flowering of the land heralds the beginning of the messianic age... The most important commandment, said Kook, was settling the land, which should be defended at any cost. [During the six-day war at the Wall Kook said]: "We announce to all Israel, and to all the world, that by a divine command we have returned to our home, to our holy city... From this day forth, we shall never budge from here". What began in messianic fervour ended in organised terrorism'. (Australian Magazine, 22 September 1991 - Robert Friedman: "The Messiah complex").

DOCUMENT 17

"Zionism is a movement that does not think in rational terms - in terms of practical politics, international relations, world opinion, demography, social dynamics - but in terms of divine commandments. What matters only is God's promise to Abraham as recorded in the Book of Genesis".

DOCUMENT 18

Mr Alouph Harevan, associate director of the Van Leer Foundation, a private Israeli research foundation trying to promote tolerance, said in 1985: "Before his election [to the Knesset] a year ago, Kahane was just an illness; now he is an epidemic" (Age, 7 November 1990 - **John Kifner: A "messiah" from Brooklyn.**)

DOCUMENT 19

[In Jerusalem] the alert went out as followers of Mr Kahane vowed to avenge Monday's killing in "a river of Arab blood"... In New York, rage over the killing boiled over at a memorial service in a Brooklyn synagogue on Tuesday, with thousands of the Jewish militant's supporters baying for vengeance. Mourners jammed the street, shouting "never again", and "Arabs out of Israel". They waved signs bearing large red Hebrew letters that spelt out the word "nakama" - revenge... Another Kach member, Mr Yoel Ben David, openly vowed retribution: "I promise you there will be a river of Arab blood". (Sun, 8 November 1990 - **Reuter: Revenge fears on rabbi death.**)

DOCUMENT 20

In a further sign of the times notices have begun appearing in Jerusalem shop windows saying "Arabs not employed here"... Dedi Zucker of the Citizens Rights Movement has sent a telegram to Israel's Attorney-General, asking for the signs to be removed. "Even with a magnifying glass", he said, "you cannot tell the difference between these signs and similar signs in Germany in the 1930's, which were aimed against Jews and paved the way for more serious crimes". (Age, 21 November 1990 - **Tony Walker: Israel's cycle of despair.**)

DOCUMENT 21

Mr Shamir yesterday promised cheering Jewish settlers that Israel would "tell the Gentiles of the world" that nothing can stop its home building in the territories it has occupied since the 1967 Middle East war. "We see the construction in all of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, he said, using biblical terms for the West Bank, "and this construction will continue, and no force in the world will stop this construction... We say to ourselves, and to the Gentiles of the world and to the next generations, here will be our homeland, here will be our home, forever and ever... We will build and I hope very

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