

The Intifada: an answer must be found.

"When Israeli soldiers and Palestinian rioters are swinging clubs and throwing stones, TV news gets a lot of what it likes best... great moments. They shock viewers and they compel attention."
—Mortimer Zuckerman



by Dina Lebo

According to Mortimer Zuckerman, editor of *U.S. News and World Report*, "Newsmen are expected to do their part to entice more readers, viewers and listeners. This often entails appealing to the base emotions of one's audience. Scenes of brutality, violence and bloodshed, mayhem and action enthuse audiences. This, coupled with television's format of 60 to 90 second clips which are repeated often enough, ensure that these brutal and violent images remain long after the story is forgotten." When it comes to television, he said, "the medium is truly the message."

A study conducted by the Institute for Media and Public Affairs revealed that during the first four months of the Intifada [the Palestinian uprising in the Occupied Territories], the ABC, NBC and CBS networks reported 375 stories totalling almost 600 minutes on the evening news shows. "When the action is the essence of the story, as it is in something like a football game or an earthquake," says Zuckerman, "the moments can add up to a truth. But in the case of the coverage of the West Bank and Gaza Riots, the moments have added up to a lie."

On February 5, the lie was exposed when York's department of political science and the graduate students' association of sociology and political science hosted a panel discussion entitled "The Intifada as a Way of Life." Speakers Avi Ehrlich, a Jewish sociology professor at the University of Tel Aviv and Nahla Abdo-Zubi, a Palestinian-Israeli

and professor at the Ontario Institute for Studies and Education (OISE) gave the audience of approximately 100 students and faculty a very different perspective on the events unfolding in the Middle East; a perspective not written in the newspapers nor found in the media coverage but is perhaps more representative of the actual reality for both Palestinians and Jews under the Intifada.

According to Abdo-Zubi, in 1948 when the state of Israel was created, there were 750,000 Palestinians living within the borders of what was until then their homeland. During the next 18 years, their agricultural society was smashed and what remained after British colonialism was turned into a dependant community without any national identity, culture or traditional educational system.

Said Abdo-Zubi, "We have been resisting since that time but not as a continuous movement. Our predicament is not unlike that of the North American Indian and must be considered in that light." Since the Six-Day War in 1967, the Palestinian people have faced increased economic stagnation, land confiscation and political rights violations — all of which, according to Abdo-Zubi, has come from living under military rule.

This had led to a large Palestinian migration, particularly among skilled men which has, in turn, led to a sharp decline in marriage and the birth rate. This, she explained, has considerably reduced the population and brought further underdevelopment. These events have economically turned the West Bank into a major dependant consumer market of Israel's and a major source of cheap labour. All of this has happened, she said, while the political occupation has resulted in the imprisonment and expulsion of thousands of men and women.

"The Intifada is the inevitable outcome of living under this kind of rule for the last 21 years," she emphasized. "Since 1988, the resistance has become structured by the creation of Popular Committees to become a continuous movement with the goals of resisting military occupation and building a Palestinian society from within."

The word Intifada has two meanings in Arabic which reflects its dual purpose. "First of all it means 'shake-up,' a role which has fallen on the men to do. Secondly it means 'inner cleaning' a role which the women are undertaking," she explained. "People say that the Intifada is unorganized but this is not true. We are more organized than we ever were. Men, women, young and old are all taking part in the building of a nation. We all work with one heart and one hand."

Abdo-Zubi told the audience that popular committees have been established in all cities, towns, villages and refugee camps and that these committees regulate all social and economic activities in the sectors of agriculture, industry, education, health and voluntary work. The spread of information through the dissemination of bulletins is unprecedented in the history of revolutions.

"These bulletins tell us what is to be done in the upcoming weeks and gives us information on what's going on in other Palestinian towns, villages and camps," she said. "What we have created is a Palestinian national communications network for the first time. The Intifada has given Palestinians a new sense of national and social identity."

Abdo-Zubi explained that new economic conditions are also emerging in Palestinian society with the creation of small co-operatives designed to fight consumerism and dependance on Israeli products; "It is necessary to promote economic self-sufficiency in order to prepare for the new Palestinian state. The co-operatives have been so effective that the imports of rugs, clothing and make-up have already been reduced by 70 per cent and we are looking for decreases in other sectors in the future." Abdo-Zubi belongs to the Palestinian Federation Womens Action Committee which was established in 1978. This organization groups women from all social classes and has 100,000 registered members who participate in 150 different chapters throughout the occupied territories. The women are all unified by one programme with a social and federal perspective; from their executive offices in East Jerusalem they co-ordinate the work of the executive committees in the sectors of health, education and literacy, production and foreign relations.

These activities are undertaken to raise their

political and social consciousness and to mobilize and organize Palestinian women in both urban and rural areas. "If it weren't for the Intifada," she said, "Palestinian women who are part of a very patriarchal male and sexist culture would not be taking part in shaping a nation and a whole new way of life."

She cautioned that the work of establishing a new role for women in an Arab society is a separate issue and will continue long after the creation of a Palestinian state. For the time being, she said, this is not the major question and the women who are the major players in the inner-cleaning are taking the responsibility of ensuring community survival, identity and resistance while the Palestinian society is under military occupation.

"Women have taken charge of education," said Abdo-Zubi. "Because, for the last two years, except for brief periods, all the civil institutions [were] closed. We have been teaching in basements, kitchens and in the fields."

In December, 1989, a milestone was reached when Palestinian women organized a peace march around Jerusalem involving 35,000 men, women and children (Arab and Israeli) carrying peace ribbons and surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem; "It was the best organized event that we have ever had and this year's peace march will be even larger."

Avi Ehrlich spoke as an Israeli Jew about what the mounting Palestinian national consciousness is doing to Israelis.

"There are a lot of different opinions," he said, "but they are becoming more and more popularized. Those who want peace want it more and those who want to fight want it more as well. More people want a strong central state but I believe that an Israel which is not democratic and based on strong democratic values is not worth having. What is going on in the West Bank is not democratic by any means."

He recounted stories about life at the University of Tel Aviv where professors, employees and security guards collected money for Achmed, a Palestinian janitor whose son had been hit by a rubber bullet and had lost an eye. He spoke about



donations from the medical faculty who decided to take charge of fitting the child with a false eye and he also talked about the collection of money for Israeli students who refused to do their military service in the West Bank and Gaza strip and who were thrown into prison and court-martialed as a result.

Some Israelis have even taken to wearing Jewish armbands in support of the Palestinians who must wear foreign worker armbands in some parts of Israel. According to Ehrlich, "There has never been as much talk between Palestinians and Jews as there has been in the last two years. We have contact with people in the West Bank; we meet with them and we even agree on possible solutions."

"Thousands of people want to meet and talk to the PLO and defy the stupid law," he said, "but we are not the people in power and the people in power who can make the decisions, don't want to talk to the PLO."

During the question period the proceedings got hot, as students asked Abdo-Zubi why the struggle is so violent and not peaceful.

"It is a peaceful struggle in many ways," she said. "It also has its violent moments. You have to understand that we can get military weapons if we want to. We can escalate the confrontations if we want to. It's not that we can't find or buy arms or that no country will supply us with them. It's simply because we want our independence. We don't want to kill Israeli soldiers, we want them to go home. We want them to know that there is no place for them in the occupied territories. We want them to go home so that we can build our own society on our own land with no political or economic impositions from Israel."

She continued to say that the Intifada is a calculated and effective mechanism which is generating a mutual solidarity for those who support Palestinian independence while, at the same time, generating psychological frustration for those who are against it or who must work against it.

"Israeli soldiers use rubber bullets and clubs. They don't want to kill either. They are not trained for this kind of policing, harassing and clubbing. They want to go home as well. Recently a suicide hot-line was created for Israeli soldiers because suicides are happening in increasing numbers. There are casualties on both sides."

The bulletins the PLO is issuing came into question when one student demanded to know why the Palestinians are killing each other. In a December statement from Amnesty International, it was reported that, since 1967, more than 120 Palestinians have been killed by other Palestinians, some after having been interrogated and tortured. The killings have been carried out mostly by special squads of Palestinians intending to punish others who are considered to be collaborating with Israeli authorities. Abdo-Zubi's response was that "collaborators can not survive in a society that has become so conscious of its own nation-

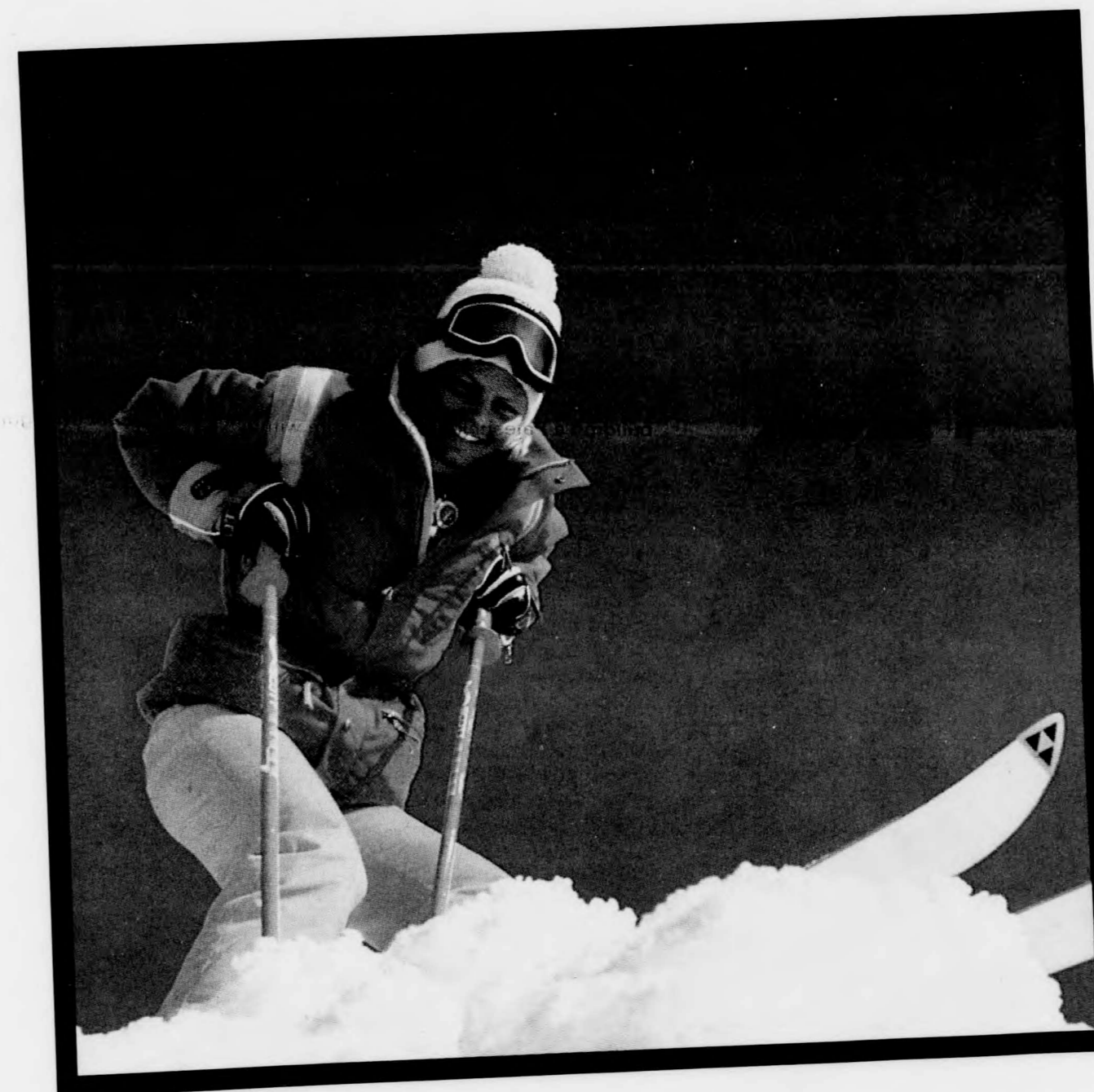
ality and its own cultural identity. When a call was made in the bulletins for Palestinian police on the Israeli payroll to resign, most of them did resign. When a call came for the mayors to resign, it was accepted by most. There are always people who don't follow orders. They are warned over and over, they are threatened and then . . ."

Ehrlich added, "Israelis have always used Palestinians as spies and informers to get vital information. This is how things function under a military occupation. The only change is that now Palestinians are organizing and no longer want the Israelis to have control and power because of the information they receive. These deaths represent an internal justice that is being met. Nice?" Ehrlich questioned, "no it is not nice and in a democratic society it is not done. But you have to understand that there is no democracy in the West Bank at this time."

When asked about a lasting peace, the two panelists responded that they believe that it will come about through a two state solution; that there will



be a state of Israel and an independent Palestine. "In time, the two sides will sit down and negotiate," said Ehrlich. "Whether they do it now or later, whether they do it by their own choice or whether others will push them into it; whether they do it when they are exhausted and demoralized or whether they do it when they can still talk to each other, we don't know. All we know is that every day events are bringing us closer to it. It will happen."



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