Palestine and (Human) Nature

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1.

*Feb 14th 2016*

I’m in an aeroplane, about as far from ‘nature’ as it’s possible for an ordinary person to get: 30,000 feet above the earth, breathing recycled air in a giant plastic and metal sheath. I’m not even flying to Palestine, but Lebanon – but where are Palestine’s borders? In addressing the decades-long struggle to resolve that violently contested question, I can only start from who and where I am. That first question is hard for anyone to answer, but it’s fair to say I’m a middle-age, middle-class, white British-Canadian of no fixed religion, still winging it through life, aware of her privilege and trying to put it in the service of humanity; paying her carbon credits and packing two passports to visit neighbouring countries on a permanent war footing. I’m on this plane because I’m *en route* to experience Palestine in the many dimensions of its threatened but undeniable existence – as land and occupied territory; place and memory; catastrophe and vision.

First I’m flying as a Canadian to Beirut with the UK charity Interpal, a member of its Bear Witness women’s convoy to the Palestinian and Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon. Then I’ll stopover in Cyprus, revert to my British passport, and journey via Tel Aviv to the West Bank, where I’ll visit the Palestine Museum of Natural History in Bethlehem, and volunteer at Marda Permaculture Farm near Ramallah. Over the fortnight I’ll be seeking to better understand how people in exile and under occupation experience and protect their natural environment – the more-than-human world of plants, birds, animals and the landscape itself. It feels an urgent question. During the six years I’ve supported the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against the state of Israel, I’ve observed – like anyone with a functioning sense of reality – each year get hotter and hotter, and global weather patterns more and more disturbed; and seen scientists confirm that human activity is causing, not only global warming, but the planet’s sixth mass extinction, an event that threatens to wipe out half of all land and marine species by 2100. This won’t be like going to the zoo and finding half the cages empty: such a devastating blow to biodiversity could shatter the food chain and destroy modern agriculture. In the meantime, climate change and environmental degradation are already causing widespread human suffering, largely to brown-skinned people: in 1991 in Washington DC, the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit formalised the principles of environmental justice, a concept which recognises ‘the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color’ and seeks, not to redistribute those hazards more evenly (so that poor whites suffer too), but to abolish them. There could be no clearer example of such environmental injustice than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which a nationalist settler movement led by wealthy Europeans and bankrolled by America has dispossessed the indigenous Arab population and laid waste to their remaining natural resources. The environmental impact of settlements includes the depletion of groundwater supplies; air, land and water contamination by raw sewage and factory outlets; and the deliberate destruction of olive trees: throughout the West Bank Israel burns and bulldozes the *zaytoon*, that ancient, silvery symbol of *sumud*, the philosophy of steadfastness that sustains Palestinians in place of hope. In Gaza, under siege, the situation does look hopeless. Israel Defence Forces (IDF) bombardments have left the strip suffering from infertile soil, loss of biodiversity, an increase in nuisance animals and plants, air polluted by toxic demolition waste, and a barely drinkable water supply that is now damaging unborn children. Yet against this apocalypse, Palestinian ecologists, almost unnoticed, are leading their own environmental revolution. I want to meet and write about these people because, working as they do under military occupation and an apartheid regime, they surely have much to teach the world about resilience, resistance and regeneration.

Maybe, though, I am well-intentioned but naïve. In a geopolitical economy geared to profit from colonial oppression and environmental destruction, is the dream of an egalitarian green future for Israel-Palestine simply that: a dream? Given the rate of settlement expansion, perhaps it is now too late for peace in the region; and beyond that, perhaps, as green guru James Lovelock claims, it also is too late to entertain romantic notions of ‘saving the planet’. Maybe we’re all up to our nostrils in a planetary oil spill, and there is no longer a safe shore to swim to. Personally, I consider myself an idealist, but I still like to base my arguments and actions on scientific evidence. And on the question of how long we have to halt global warming, there is no consensus. Against Lovelock’s pessimism, climatologist Jean Jouzel, a leading member of the International Panel on Climate Change, insists that by abandoning fossil fuels and achieving carbon neutrality by the end of the century, we can still keep from exceeding a 2°C rise in global temperatures. Dismantling the international oil industry may seem as impossible as dissolving Zionism, but cynicism is a self-defeating prophecy, and one we cannot afford to fall prey to. While there’s still hope for humanity to halt, slow or reverse climate change, we must keep up the pressure on governments and corporations, at least for other species’ sake. But also for our own.

We are an adaptable and populous species: global warming will not wipe us out in one thunderous crash. It will, as it is already doing, cause massive social upheaval. The current refugee crisis was arguably triggered by conflict over oil, and droughts, flooding and coastal erosion will inevitably add to the current epidemic of displacement. But here is where an idealist sees opportunity: while images of Europe’s borders slamming shut against floods of desperate people fleeing genocidal warfare can look like the ultimate failure of compassion, they might equally represent the red dawn of humanity’s long day of reckoning. For with this migration of vulnerable populations, sustained by family bonds, faiths and cultures, comes a colossal opportunity for the rich West to morally evolve – and the world to politically devolve into an equitable internationalism. Angela Merkel’s generosity in opening Germany’s borders to one million refugees demonstrated that Europe need not be ruled by fear. Individually and politically, this crisis asks us to conquer our habit of dehumanising the other, and instead treat all people as members of same human family. From that immersive vantage point, we may even radically relax our relationship with borders. Arguing this now, as Europe begins illegally deporting refugees back to Turkey, and Britain contemplates Brexit, may seem utterly deluded. But the nation state is a recent phenomenon, and there is no reason to believe that over time – and under pressure – it cannot mutate into other, more organic arrangements. The chaos of war has already aided this process: in Syria the revolution has by necessity produced over four hundred, hugely under-reported neighbourhood councils. And under the Turkish thumb, the Kurds have developed a vision of democratic confederalism, based on the anarchist model of bioregionalism.

For now, though, violent conflict still defines our realpolitik. What is needed (and utterly lacking in most political leaders’ approach to the challenges we face) is unity: a powerful but humble sense we are all one, interdependent, and dependent on all of creation. In Southern Africa this philosophy is known by the Nguni Bantu word *Ubuntu*: "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity". For atheists, this translates as solidarity, and history demonstrates its potency: Marxism, the civil rights movements, feminism and disability activism have all proven that collective protest can force societies to become more inclusive. But the concept also has a spiritual dimension. A belief in universal sharing flies in the face of the materialist conception of human nature as fundamentally driven by the biological imperative to reproduce our ‘selfish genes’, and re-ennobles the concept of altruism, which evolutionary psychologists interpret as self-sacrifice to benefit younger generations. People inspired by universal consciousness act on behalf of others they are only in the most general of senses ‘related’ to. And while I’m no expert on world religions, research for my science fiction has convinced me that the philosophy of *Ubuntu* beats at the heart of the three Abrahamic faiths. Though Christ is usually credited with advising ‘do unto others as one would have them do unto you’, it was the first century BCE Jewish sage Hillel who claimed: ‘what is hateful to you, do not do unto your neighbour: that is the whole of the Torah’. You might call that a philosophy of enlightened self-interest, but its light is cast by a profound understanding that we all are equal in worth. Later, Islam, of course, brought its own signal message of unity. The doctrine of *Tawhid* is usually interpreted as a rebuke to the Trinity or earlier polytheisms, but also, for the growing eco-jihad movement, ‘gives expression to the fact that everything in the world is part of creation and is related to everything else, which makes the entire world significant, valuable, and worthy of protection.’And just as *Khilafa* and *Amana* emphasize humanity’s stewardship of and responsibility for the Earth, so too does contemporary Judeo-Christian environmentalist thought. If the natural world is the ground of all sharing, then nothing embodies *Ubuntu* more than the co-operation of interfaith and non-religious groups in support of environmental justice. And nowhere do such activists work with greater tenacity and vision than in Palestine. From the people seeding a green future in the open air prisons of refugee camps and walled in towns, cities and hills, I know I will learn far more than facts.

Now it’s Valentine's Night and I'm in a boutique Beirut hotel, touched to find a plate of heart-shaped chocolates on my pillow, but still digesting my first ever evening in Lebanon. Our convoy arrived to a burst of fireworks honouring the late prime minister of Lebanon, Rafic Hariri, assassinated eleven years ago today in a mass murder widely considered the work of Bashar al-Assad. Over dinner our guides from the Interpal Field Office explained the current crisis in the country. Hezbollah has been boycotting presidential elections since 2014, and the vacuum in government has resulted in civic chaos: after no garbage pick-up for months, Beirut’s rivers of refuse are now causing outbreaks of disease. When a country can’t protect the health of its land and citizens, you have to fear for refugees within its borders, and sure enough, the news here is bleak too.

Lebanon hosts half a million Palestinians, and the Syrian influx of nearly a million people means that refugees now comprise a quarter of the country’s population. Compared to the derisory British offer to take 20,000 Syrians over five years, Lebanon thus sounds incredibly generous; in reality, though, its hospitality is far less impressive. Unlike Jordan (and previously Syria), Lebanon forbids Palestinians from working in most professional jobs, and from owning property or businesses. Dependent on aid and meagre wages scratched from day labouring and cottage industries, generations of people have been condemned to poverty, and their situation is getting worse. UNRWA, the UN body set up in 1948 to administer to the Palestinian refugees, now also supporting approximately 44,000 Syrian Palestinians, has recently announced cuts to its medical services. Hundreds of jobs have been lost in the camps and at least four people have died on hospital doorsteps, after being turned away without treatment. One man, our translator said, set himself on fire in protest. He survived, and his medical bills are now being met one hundred percent. That’s a good news story here. I’m glad my trip has started with the gift of a few extra hearts, as mine is already working overtime.

*Feb 15th*

Barelias and al-Farah are two of the over eighty Syrian refugee camps in Bekaa Valley, a fertile plain between Mount Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon mountains – across which lies the carnage of Syria. Looking at those low grey peaks from the tour bus today, and knowing that Hezbollah fighters cross them to support a regime many Lebanese blame for their prime minister’s murder, it struck me that Lebanon is fortunate to have thus far avoided another re-eruption of its own internal conflicts. Those wrinkled flanks seemed like sleeping bull elephants, only one prod away from rampaging.

But for now they are bulwarks against insanity, if not much else. The Syrians in the valley live in containers and tents, and barren socio-economic conditions, lucky to pick up seasonal or day labouring work. Barelias and al-Farah, two of the better-organised camps, sharing a school and a medical clinic, offer only scant shelter against the elements. People here might have smartphones and televisions, electricity, food and water, but little else except each other, their small dwellings meagrely furnished with gas-burning stoves, shelving units and stacks of foam mats that double as sofas and beds. It was an unexpectedly hot winter’s day, and the containers we visited were surprisingly cool inside. But later on my laptop I saw footage of the tents flooding in a storm, the bed mats afloat in muddy water: here, amidst breath-taking scenery, nature is still a force that can undo you.

There was harsh irony too, in the camps’ locations, surrounded by arable pastures, but pitched on stony ground, with not a leaf or blade of grass in sight. In Barelias I asked our Lebanese translator if there was any possibility for people to grow plants here. ‘No, there is nothing for that,’ she replied shortly, as if the question was frankly idiotic. Of course, water must be expensive, and I didn’t press the point. Later though, I spied a row of healthy shrubs in plastic containers behind two men playing chess. Not wanting to interrupt the game, I hovered, taking photos. The tableau, framed by the tent’s cleverly modified arched frontage, could have been transplanted from a Damascus café, and sparked the old argument about painting murals on the Apartheid Wall: is it wrong to try and beautify monstrosities? But while permanent structures in supposedly temporary camps are an ominous development, here in this necessary if inadequate refuge, I was heartened to see people wresting creative control over their monotonous, sterile environment.

Otherwise, people sat on plastic stools outside their dwellings, peeling potatoes, hanging out washing, and watching the children play. Everywhere, the gleeful children racing about, clamouring at the school gates, injected the listless streets with a noisy sense of purpose. The adults occasionally burst out with crueller truths. ‘We’re dying here’ one woman told us, while Fatima, a seventy-eight year old doubly-displaced Palestinian from Tabariyya via Yarmouk, recently bereaved of her husband, complained bitterly that there was nothing to do and no-one to visit with in the camp. And of course, many people are traumatised. Five women spoke of barrel bombings, sniper fields, shrapnel wounds, sons taken into Assad’s jails never to return. But despite all they’d been through, none wanted to join the exodus to our hostile political climate. We met Da’ad, who had lost a child and a brother to tank fire, and whose husband was killed in their home by soldiers, high on a gunfight, who barged in and accused him of setting off the device that had just destroyed part of the house. Da’ad told us that even though there is no war in the camp, she would rather be in Syria, because ‘at least in your homeland you can smell the place where your son died’.

*Feb 16th*

Lebanon’s two most northerly Palestinian camps, al Beddawi and Nahr el Bared, are large, long-established but in many ways precarious shanty-towns. Forced to grow vertically to accommodate new generations, the buildings are haphazard and unsafe, while during Lebanon’s twenty-five year long civil war, refugee camps were often the most vulnerable places to be. Now, riddled with illegal Syrian militants, they are still afflicted with violence. In 2007, in an effort to rout what I was told was a Syrian branch of Al-Qaida, the Lebanese army shelled Nahr el Bared, forcing the evacuation of its 45,000 inhabitants to al Beddawi. Nine years later, al Beddawi’s resources are seriously strained and Nahr el Bared is only half-reconstructed and repopulated.

Morale though, was high. In home visits we met families who had accepted their existential limbo with what seemed miraculous grace. And at the Nahr el Barad Women's Programme Association, the calm, glowing centre director Manal Hamied Abdel Aal, embodied the camp’s reputation for enterprise. Before the shelling, Nahr el Barad ran a thriving market and Manal’s capable leadership has revived this spirit of entrepreneurship: her WPA runs occupational training courses in sewing, sells its traditional cooking in Beirut, and has a women-only gym. Here, seeing steps lined with potted plants, I asked Manal if she had any plans to encourage home food production. Warmly clasping my hand, she said yes, she had a roof-top garden herself, and had tried to get funding for a pilot project, but the NGO involved had pulled out. Hearing this, I offered to put her in touch with the Palestine Museum of Natural History in Bethlehem. Her dream was a seed that deserved water.

Indeed, growing plants in a refugee camp didn’t seem quite such a frivolous Western notion here. Later we visited the Green Land Project, a large walled vegetable garden decorated by murals of women in traditional dress. Soaking up the verdant peace of this place, I thought again how vital it was that the Palestinians, deprived for decades of their land, should not suffer also the loss of the ability to work the soil. But for me, the most moving moment in the camp came on the tour bus. Passing a razed stretch of rubble and sand, we came to a small mound of jumbled tombstones and shrubs: the camp’s oldest cemetery, the green graves of Nahr el Barad’s grandmothers and grandfathers, who had died without ever seeing their beloved homeland again, and are now buried in a bombsite.

*Feb 17th*

Today, at the Women’s Programme Association in El Buss camp in Tyr, we heard distressing stories about the increase in child marriage since the Syrian influx. Impoverished Syrian parents offer their fourteen year-old daughters as second wives to Palestinian men, many of whom snap up these bargains then return the pregnant girls to their families a year later. Though these marriages are illegal, social workers are reluctant to involve the Lebanese police because jailing the parents will only make matters worse. While understanding the predicament, we nevertheless pressed for answers. Centre director Hanan Jadaa responded with the story of a Syrian girl who ran to the WPA to avoid being married off to a fifty year-old man. In this case she was sent to the police, who kept her safe for a week while camp residents put pressure on her family, their landlord threatening to evict them if the marriage went ahead. The parents relented, the daughter returned home, received occupational training and is now working as a hairdresser. This success story reminded me of the cliché that war brings out ‘the best and the worst in humanity’. Like most clichés it’s largely true; what is vital is to identify and develop whatever that ‘best’ behaviour is: here, an inspiring example of a refugee camp’s leadership in the field of restorative community justice.

Hanan’s response also encouraged me to ask again my now familiar Englishwoman’s question about gardening. She replied that even when the WPA had tried to get permission to create children’s playgrounds in the crowded camp, the neighbourhood councils had been unable to agree on a proposal. Here, El Buss’s participatory democracy demonstrated just how far removed camp conditions are from Western conceptions of ‘normal’ life. Later a question about sporting opportunities for disabled children dried on my lips as I realised that here, football fields and swimming pools were facilities just seen on a screen. But the case of the Syrian girl had not been unique. Again and again in this materially impoverished place, we encountered world-class social care: a tiny baby getting expert physiotherapy for a frozen shoulder; bright, happy students with hearing impairments being taught by a deaf former student of the school, which is also proud of a graduate currently working in an advertising agency, earning four times more than the average Palestinian wage.

I’m also becoming increasingly impressed by Interpal, which clearly supports the strong ethos of self-organisation at work in the camps. A Muslim charity, it has built trust through a sense of shared faith – shared also with me, who prayed in a mosque today, for the first time invited by women I know – but also by honouring principles of popular sovereignty, employing Palestinians and Syrians as medical and social workers. The latter are exclusively young women: a man could not speak alone to a Muslim woman, and Muslim men in the camps tend to believe that family difficulties are a wife’s responsibility, even (or perhaps especially) if these involve the husband’s emotional problems. But while more needs to be done to involve men, it’s clear that the profession’s language of care, inclusion and child protection makes a vital contribution to a culture of respect and opportunity for women in the camps, empowering them to work toward a future return to Palestine or Syria. Altogether, today nurtured hope.

*Feb 18th*

Near Saida, south of Beirut, stands the largest Palestinian camp in Lebanon, its one hundred thousand inhabitants pulsing against the walls of a volatile, over-crowded, concrete maze. Between buildings collapsing in storms, and the illegal Syrian Islamists who frequently clash with its internal Fatah security force, Ein el Hilweh is a dangerous place and we were assigned an armed guard: three strapping khaki-clad youths and their grizzled commander, charged with keeping us safe. Kidnappings of foreigners by Palestinian militants are virtually unknown but, aware of the 2011 capture and killing of Italian activist Vittorio Arrigoni in Gaza – a murder condemned by all major Palestinian factions – I was glad of protection from any publicity-seeking Salafis. Our guards escorted us first to a medical clinic that has to apply for permits to leave the camp to refill its oxygen canisters, then to private homes, where we heard stories of complete despair. A young man with a damaged leg, earning five dollars a day, can’t afford surgery. A mother of five, abandoned by her husband and suffering from depression, lives in a dank room with a tiny high window, breastfeeding by candle light in the middle of the day. Her eldest son, a twelve year-old, runs wild in the camp and sleeps in the graveyard. Nearby, lives a family of school drop-outs, where a sixteen year-old girl is not permitted to study hairdressing because her parents fear she won’t be safe walking to the centre, and her older brother – who could escort her, but won’t – doesn’t think his sister should learn a trade.

Interpal can’t necessarily help these people, as the sums needed and the sociopsychological challenges are so great, and sitting on these sofas with my notepad and pen I felt increasingly helpless, as if I were playing a part in an absurd charade. Decompressing later in a play park, the first we had seen in the camps, I had to sternly remind myself that all these people were receiving professional attention, and my role was simply to bear witness – as much as I could bear. There was no grass in the park, and its cages of lethargic monkeys disturbed us all, but wandering in the sunshine between a carousel and colourful murals I began to regain my equilibrium. Then, in a meeting with young Palestinian human rights workers and a journalist, my spirits lifted. Articulate, confident, connected with the diaspora, West Bank and Gaza, these young women are fully committed to the struggle of being Palestinian. They told us of recent political initiatives to end the restrictions on employment and give the Palestinians Lebanese citizenship. Though the Syrian catastrophe has interrupted these campaigns, and caused so many other difficulties, all three were deeply involved in helping Syrians. Their jobs are tough, but when the stress mounts, the journalist takes out her skipping rope.

Buoyed up myself, I confess I flirted with one of our guards as we re-boarded the bus. Tall and bashful, he had a fluttery way with his eyelashes that provoked me to say goodbye with a playful ‘Shukran, habibi!’ Naturally, in one of the most densely populated places on the planet, I was overheard. ‘Habibi?’ one of his brothers-in-arms echoed incredulously as my new sweetheart smiled coyly into his beard. ‘Why him habibi, no me?!’

All right, I flirted with two of the guards . . . ‘Stay human’, Vittorio Arrigoni urged in his signature to all of his messages.

*Feb 19th*

Our last day in Lebanon took us to UNRWA, where the communications officer insisted that the recent cuts to the health care budget were not in fact cuts, but a reallocation of funds. Knowing of daily protests, deaths, the man who had immolated himself in despair, and hospitals holding children hostage until parents could beg or borrow the money to pay their bills, we were shocked by this disavowal of responsibility. Next the Chief of Education, a soft-spoken Palestinian, himself from a camp, spoke of the importance of encouraging creativity, and empowering women as students and mothers. I warmed to him, but found myself getting confused. When the rest of the staff rushed off to attend an emergency meeting, I wondered aloud why the word ‘donors’ kept being repeated, as though the UN were a kind of glorified charity, and asked the two Palestinians remaining how, in their view, UNRWA could best advocate for the most fundamental of the refugees’ rights – the right to return to their homes. The Chief of Education’s diplomatic response was that UNRWA schools teach the right of return as part of a human rights based education. Although I had seen the positive effects of such a curriculum in the camps’ social centres, it was not a highly satisfactory answer. In the hallway afterwards, I spoke to him privately, and he clarified that UNRWA does not receive core funding, but is dependent on voluntary contributions from individual governments, the most generous of which is America. Suddenly, I got it. The country that bankrolls Israel also exerts the most influence over UN support to the Palestinian refugees. A shift in the balance of sponsorship might push the agency into active advocacy – while Saudi Arabia and Kuwait rank high, looking right now at the 2015 list of donors, the contribution from the League of Arab States is pitiful, and Qatar, which independently funds reconstruction projects in Gaza, fails to put money where it would have significant political clout. Currently, I am afraid I agree with those who argue that UNRWA is part of the Palestinians’ problem. Under its guardianship a ‘temporary problem’ has become permanent crisis management.

Finally, we ended our tour of Lebanon in the camp that, more than any other, is synonymous with the brutal persecution of the Palestinians: Shatila, in the neighbourhood of Sabra. Here, between September 16th and 18th 1982, a right-wing Christian Lebanese militia, assisted by the IDF – who sent up flares to turn the night skies as bright as a football stadium – raped, tortured and butchered as many as 3500 people. The Phalangists left the camp and surrounding streets strewn with grossly mutilated bodies – and survivors waiting indefinitely for justice. The UN officially blamed Israel, the occupying force in the country at the time, for the massacre, while even an internal Israeli investigation held Defence Minister Ariel Sharon personally responsible for not doing enough to prevent the killings. But no prosecution for war crimes resulted. Sharon was simply forced to resign.

Now Shatila’s mosque has become a martyrs’ cemetery, and the declassified camp camp also houses Lebanese people and Syrian refugees. Its reputation as a lawless jungle means taxi drivers often refuse to drive to it, while most Beirutians are so scared of the place they don’t even know where it is. But for us it was the simplest of the camps to enter: no longer constrained by a Lebanese army checkpoint, people walk freely in and out. Due at the airport, and lacking time to pay our respects at the graveyard, we visited Basmeh & Zeitooneh Relief and Development Agency, an ambitious start-up NGO supporting Syrian refugees. In a few rooms at the top of a narrow building, we found a school, theatre, art therapy room, library, and media and communications training room, and met a class of young students studying Peace Education. Syrian children have been so traumatised by their experiences that teachers now build psychosocial support into the curriculum, including training in non-violent communication and conflict resolution. It’s yet another way in which catastrophe has made moral leaders of the dispossessed.

From the rooftop patio we looked out over the hectic streets to a massive cliff of buildings, its rough-hewn, shambolic composition of balconies, cables, drab curtains, black plastic water barrels, satellite dishes and cindercrete extensions somehow serene in the sun. Yet again, I could see no trees, but Basmed & Zeitooneh had found a way to bring nature into the austere chaos of the camp, hiring local craftsmen to etch brutalist reliefs of tree trunks and traditional doors into the stairwell walls. I snapped away, but found the final, iconic image of my visit while leaving Shatila, looking up from the road at a giant rust-red key mounted to a water tower. It was, of course, the key to resolving the misery and violence of these camps, easing the pressure on Syrian refugee services in Lebanon, and replanting half a million parched souls in their native soil – the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homeland.

2.

*Feb20th*

I switched passports in Cyprus, and – after the ludicrous but unsettling experience of being interrogated by Israeli security about my copy of Khalil Gibran’s *The Prophet* – have made it in to Tel Aviv. It's sad and sobering to be arriving just after another three people, two Palestinian youths and one Israeli settler, have been killed in the wave of violence that has consumed the region since October. To the on-going series of stabbings and car-rammings committed mainly by young Palestinians on settlers, soldiers, and police officers, 28 of whom have been killed, Israel has responded with force: reflecting the endemic disproportionality of the conflict, over 180 Palestinians, including 49 children, have been killed during this period, many in incidents that Israeli human rights organisation B’Tselem terms ‘public, summary street executions, without law or trial’. Some have dubbed this period the ‘knife intifada’, but the Palestinian attacks are random, committed by unrelated individuals; not an organised protest, but expressions of hopeless fury at the ever-mounting injustice of the occupation. The tragic deaths on both sides, as well as the hundreds of injuries incurred, should be a powerful motivation to find, at last, a political solution to the conflict. Instead, Netanyahu ramps up the ‘terrorist’ rhetoric and implicitly endorses a shoot-to-kill policy; Palestinian anger grows; and more despairing adolescents are drawn toward the shallow promise of martyrdom. Ultimately, the cycle of violence works in Israel's favour, distracting world attention from its seizure of what is left of Palestinian land.

The volatile situation is not, though, a reason not to visit: Israel shouldn't be allowed to completely cut Palestinians off from the rest of the world. I'm here to see friends, some of whom are unable to travel to see me, simply because they are Palestinian. Coming here is a humbling privilege I am all too conscious of after visiting the refugees in Lebanon. I also feel tense and paranoid. Here in a hotel with paper-thin walls, I’m too nervous to watch videos sent by a new Facebook friend, Ahmad in Gaza. What if someone hears the Arabic, and reports me?

*Feb 21st*

In Bethlehem, my birthday (officially tomorrow), has started with a flourish of Arab hospitality. Having insisted over email that I phone him should I encounter any problem at all in Palestine, Mazin Qumsiyeh of the Palestine Museum of Natural History came with his wife Jessie and their American volunteer Deb to my Franciscan guest house, and treated me to dinner in the colourful foyer restaurant. It was almost far too kind. Mazin, a Christian Arab from Bethlehem, is a world-renowned scientist and indefatigable human rights activist whose work promotes a refreshing, pluralist approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict, most fully explored in his book *Sharing the Land of Canaan*. Jessie, a former accountant whom he met in America, is the co-founder of the museum and its parent organisation The Palestine Institute of Biodiversity Research. Deb’s a permaculturist, artist and political activist. Scanning the menu, discussing the fact that all its dishes are made with Israeli produce, and looking around at well-heeled Italian and Japanese tourists, I had the sinking feeling that I was dragging the leadership of the Palestinian Green revolution into horrendous complicity with Zionist industrial agriculture and international apathy to the occupation. Mazin though, sensed my discomfort and waved it aside, commenting, ‘We are a captive market – so order what you like.’ [*Author’s note: this quote is corrected from the print version.*]

I did, and soon we were talking permaculture, GM crops, Lebanon, mutual friends – Jewish ex-Israelis who’d insisted I meet Mazin – and finally Arabic. From Anthony Shadid’s *House of Stone*, the late journalist’s account of rebuilding his ancestral home in Lebanon, I had learned that *beit* – as in Beit Lehem and its neighbourhoods Beit Jala and Beit Sahour – means ‘house’, and by extension ‘family’ and ‘village’. The word also refers to a line of poetry in the Arabic and Urdu form the *ghazal* and, I reflected, like the Italian *stanza*, which means ‘room’, gives a reassuring sense of a poem as a dwelling place. Mazin reached for a paper table mat and drew the letter *bā*, with its curved wall and single dot: “The centuries have turned it upside down, but it looks like a house, see?”

It did. And I felt as though I was being made welcome inside it.

*Feb 22nd*

Funded by Mazin and Jessie’s initial sizable investment, The Palestine Museum of Natural History Museum rents land and buildings from Bethlehem University, where Mazin is a professor. The main sandstone building contains an office/library, a conference/research room, and a hall that will eventually host the Museum’s full collections. Here, Environmental Biology MA student Elias Handal proudly showed me trays of butterflies, dragonflies, grasshoppers, and his personal speciality – raptor pellets, from which he has recently reconstructed the hedgehogs eaten by a pair of Eagle Owls nesting near Wadi Mahour, Beit Jala. Keen to deploy my limited Arabic, I asked about the *hudhud*, or hoopoe, a quaint, colourful bird prominent in the Islamic and Judeo-Christian myths I’d researched for my last novel. Elias was more taken with the iridescent Palestine sunbird, the country’s national symbol. Then, next to a large map of the ethnically cleansed villages of 1948, he pulled out a drawer in which, limp as if sleeping, lay a giant kingfisher, a porcupine, a fruit bat Elias had personally killed and skinned, and a barn owl corpse he – no doubt noting my growing look of alarm – assured me had been found on the road. Moving on to the reptile, amphibian and biogenetics section he casually pointed out a jam jar containing a human foetus: there is more than a whiff of the Victorian cabinet of curiosities about the Museum. You won’t smell formaldehyde though in its preserved frog jars – a heavily proscribed substance due to its potentially explosive qualities, formaldehyde is rarely approved for import into the West Bank and what Israel does allow through is saved for human tissue samples: the Museum uses alcohol for its specimens. As Elias agreed, you ask a simple question in Palestine and the answer is likely as not to expose the impact of the occupation.

A showroom too for the Palestine Institute of Biodiversity Research, the collections hall also houses a research display, including Mazin’s landmark work *Mammals of the Holy Land*, and papers on geotoxicity and declining biodiversity. The research dimensions of the Institute are manifold: visiting scholars learn how the occupation not only damages the land, but curtails Palestinian scholarship. In this context Mazin, also the author of *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*, talks to guests about the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement. It was immediately clear that the nascent Museum is no pet project or dusty archive; rather the living embryo of a highly effective international environmental justice organisation.

The Museum grounds, then, are its green, revitalised womb. Owned by the church, the land was preserved from development by being used as the university’s dump site. The adjacent fields are still home to farmers and wild dogs, but a school, shops and houses now overlook the plots, while across the valley, a stark reminder of what the Museum is up against, a white stone settlement marches down the crest of the next hill. Israel, Mazin informed me, has annexed 87% of the land around Bethlehem. This, of course, makes taking full ecological responsibility for the land that is left to the Palestinians nearly impossible, but even more important. Mazin and Jessie’s first priority was water management; having constructed a rain water collecting pool, they then built greenhouses and removed asbestos from the roof of a shed intended for a bird rehabilitation and aquaponics centre, where fish will produce nitrogen for fertiliser. They also planted chickpeas and plum trees, installed a clay oven, and established a compost heap and a vermiculture farm: an old enamel bathtub filled with compost-creating worms. Jessie also showed me the *Hugelkultur* bed – a German innovation in which buried wood enriches the soil – and spoke of plans to encourage long-stay volunteers by opening a cafeteria, covering the old cistern with a grape trellis and converting three containers into bedrooms: Deb has been painting images of lynx and kingfishers on the doors. The site also hosts wildflowers, bee hives, fruit and nut trees, two species of endangered orchid and the now rare Star of Bethlehem, nearly driven to extinction in the area by the local practise of pressing the blossom in glass to sell to tourists. The Museum’s olive trees, ignored for decades, are now increasing their yield annually. It’s a peaceful oasis – except for the conflict. Tear gas regularly rolls down the hill, and while studies have yet to be done on the environmental effects of the chemical, one bee hive swarmed after a dose of it and, down in the town, a Christmas tree hung with gas canisters as a piece of public art died within a week. Mazin winced as he told me this story: he had tried to insist that the artist wash the canisters thoroughly, but somehow the message did not get through.

It is early days though, for the Institute’s environmental activism. Financially, things should improve: the honey, fruit, vegetables and herbs produced on the site can be sold, while the Museum is now applying for grants to support its educational programme. I was only too pleased to spend my birthday helping Jessie and Deb draft a proposal for a project that would teach children from local Middle Schools, including two in the Bethlehem refugee camps, about recycling and composting. After collecting plastic water bottles to use as planters, the students will build ‘green walls’ in which to grow food. It’s hard to imagine a better symbolic riposte to the Apartheid Wall, that illegal brutality that makes a mockery of the ‘green line’ of Palestine’s 1967 borders. In the meantime, the Museum has taken possession of the dead Christmas tree tear gas canisters: washed, filled with soil and mounted on an olive tree, they are now sprouting za’atar and geraniums.

*Feb 26th*

After a warm farewell to the Museum, and an evening in Ramallah, I arrived at Marda permaculture farm, where my feverish diary keeping has given way to a run of early nights. Owned by Murad Alkufash, the farm is a smallholding in the village of Marda, which sits downhill from the sprawl of Ariel, the fourth largest settlement in the West Bank. Notorious for founding a university on stolen land, Ariel, built on arable hilltops once used for winter crops, is surrounded by a barbed wire fence that has also separated farmers from long swathes of their olive groves and cut villagers off from the nearest town – what was once a five minute drive to the hospital now takes forty minutes. Crowning its abuse of the village, Ariel periodically flushes its raw sewage out down the hills, torrents of faeces diluted with rainwater that erode the soil, pollute the streams and pool in the streets. Seeing photos of Murad’s house befouled by this disgusting assault, I could only think that, while the Palestinians may have lost their land, the Israeli settlers are losing their souls. Things have otherwise been quiet with Ariel, Murad says, but in Palestine violence is never very far away. I got a lift here from a friend of his, who pointed out the spot at a checkpoint where a young Palestinian woman was shot and killed during the on-going cycle of attacks.

Against this tense background, the farm flourishes, just as it was carefully designed to do. Permaculture, an ethical system of sustainable and ‘permanent agriculture’, was developed in Australia in the early nineteen seventies by David Holmgrund and maverick biologist Bill Mollison who, with the publication of *Permaculture: A Designers Manual* became the guru of a movement that aims for nothing less than to dismantle industrialised agriculture, and replace it with a global society characterised by self-reliance at the personal, local and regional levels. In a sense, though, the utopian aura of the term ‘permaculture’ is misleading: as Mollinson points out, permanence and sustainability are not synonymous. Feudal permanence, in which peasants work the land, provides stability until the inevitable revolts provoke state-engineered famines. Baronial permanence, in which large fields are devoted to single crop cultivation to profit their owners, can be sustained in low-tech societies, but once mechanised monoagriculture quickly depletes the soil resulting in desertification. Permaculture, in contrast, was devised as a system of ‘communal permanence’ that could deliver both food security and social justice thanks to its study of the inherent patterns of nature and adherence to the central concept of beneficial design. Thus, planted strategically, trees provide windbreak for more fragile plants; star-shaped beds increase the length of edge; circular beds embrace the plant, ensuring no wastage of water. Space is maximised by vertical gardening and companion planting: Murad sows his herbs and cabbages in ‘tyre tiers’, using old tyres he gets for free from local mechanics; and lets beans, for example, grow up the stalks of corn. As well as cultivating long greenhouse beds, he plants outside in a mosaic of mainly circular plots arranged between beehives, citrus fruit and olive trees, a worm farm and a chicken and pigeon coop. But while in many ways the farm deploys traditional and low-impact knowledge and practices, permaculture also embraces modern technology: from the beginning Mollinson was enthusiastic about the use of computers to model designs. And as a revolutionary, future-oriented method of planning sustainable human settlements, the practice naturally supports urban life.

In Bethlehem, permaculture had yet to gain traction at the Museum. While the Institute officially promotes the philosophy, and does not till its soil, it has not yet committed to a full permaculture design plan, partly because not all the local Palestinians involved in the project are interested in this approach. Some may feel that permaculture, developed in Australia, is a ‘Western import’, but although not yet widespread, permaculture has a long history in Palestine. Murad attended his first course in 1991 when some Australians established a training centre in Marda, an organisation that lasted until the IDF shut it down in 2001, declaring the area a military zone. The land was never returned and the main building is now a restaurant for settlers and soldiers. Murad, who could easily been driven mad by this, used his Chilean passport, a legacy of his father’s time in exile, to go to America to gain further qualifications, returning to Marda in 2006 to get married, cultivate his land, and resume teaching. His experience is of strong local interest: the farm’s next course, running in April, has so far attracted nine students, none of them international.

For Murad, this is only logical. Permaculture, for him, harmonises with the Muslim faith, and forms the basis of his political position as a Palestinian. Permaculture’s devotion to patterns is shared by Islamic architecture, of course, but Murad also believes that ‘Islam tells a man to support his own family’. This is not a patriarchal rejection of women’s economic empowerment: his wife is currently returning to work part-time in Ramallah. Rather it is a philosophy of radical self-reliance. Murad not only provides food for the table and an income from his produce sales and courses, but a political education for his three young daughters and son. For no one living in the shadow of neighbours who literally shit all over you can be anything but politicised. And as Murad says to volunteers, and in his presentations at international peace and democracy conferences: in Palestine, permaculture is a form of resistance.

To start with, all kinds of farming are under grave threat in Palestine. Whenever, uprooted or destabilised, Palestinians leave their land, Israel claims it for settlements or national parks. Israel has also destroyed the millennia old practice of seed-sharing, its companies encouraging Palestinians to use patented seeds and bioengineered fertilisers. Currently, in a development even Orwell couldn’t have made up, the Zionist assault on Palestinian farming allegedly extends to pig warfare. Growing up, Murad never saw a wild boar, which formerly existed only in the north of Palestine. Now there are thousands of them, a genuine plague of huge ferocious beasts that hold night orgies in farmers’ fields and groves, devouring crops and trampling the fragile roots of the olive trees. Murad himself lost a thousand lettuces and cauliflowers, and nearly his life after he charged at a sounder of boars that had broken into his farm. Fortunately the boar leader was a wily one, and did not attack, just snorted at Murad long enough to allow his pig family to escape. It was a good story, but the problem is huge, and deeply political. Villagers report seeing IDF helicopters landing to release pairs of the animals, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has accused settlers of ‘training dogs to attack us and sending wild boars to spread corruption on the face of the earth.’ B’Tselem more cautiously conjectures that the rise of the boars is a result of decreasing biodiversity, a decline attributed to . . . you guessed it, the settlers’ shit. But whatever caused the problem, Israel has blockaded a solution. Palestinians are not allowed guns to cull the beasts, and cannot poison them because strychnine is now banned from import. Tranquilizer guns were prohibited at the same time, when Israel passed a law forbidding the hunting of these dangerous predators – straight-facedly citing a threat to biodiversity.

Murad reinforced the fence around his farm with recycled tyres, so far a boar-proof barrier. He is not, though, just interested in protecting his own business. Against the Zionist stranglehold on his people’s aspirations, he has a vision of national food sovereignty and economic independence. Palestinian land – what is left of it – he told me, is mostly countryside, and even in cities and towns there are large gardens and fields in which fruit, vegetables and grains could be grown. I nodded, thinking of the wild, enchanting olive groves I’d stumbled on in East Jerusalem and Ramallah, and the scores of open hilltops I’d passed through on my way from Bethlehem – and of the refugees who could live on them instead of yet more illegal settlers. In the meantime, for urban and rural Palestinians, the ability to grow food without expensive chemicals or patented seeds would save money, while even rooftop and balcony gardens would help relieve hunger, particularly important for the people in Gaza, suffering economic siege and Israel’s grotesque policy of ‘putting the Palestinians on a diet’.

Food sovereignty would also support the boycott of Israel, a campaign Murad actively endorses, checking labels in his local shop, and working as a translator for researchers into Israel’s illegal activities in the West Bank. Yesterday afternoon I accompanied him and two Methodists investigating the predictably ill-effects of two Israeli factories on nearby Palestinian villages: cancer rates have rocketed, we were told by the Mayor of Deir Balut, possibly because every autumn the factories blow a thick white dust over the olive groves, which cannot be harvested until after heavy rains. The Methodists, currently reviewing their investments, will be making a report to the German parent company, Heidelberg Cement. But if money talks, permaculture also has a growing voice of its own. Murad’s farm attracts not just aid but commercial opportunities: the UK soap company Lush, which buys olive oil from a consortium of the villagers, is interested in funding a permaculture project with him next.

All of this is possible because permaculture is very well-suited to a Middle Eastern climate. Marda farm yields harvest all year round. Right now, the oranges and lemons are ripe on the trees, the radishes big, bright and crisp, and the lettuces as long as my forearm. This time of year the main task is weeding. Leaving, as instructed, the peppery nasturtiums to attract aphids away from Murad’s planned cucumber seedlings, I’ve cleared a raised bed and a path in the greenhouse, and a row of bushy *za'atar* outside in the shade of the olive trees. I like the job, which I also did at length when volunteering years ago on organic farms in Australia, most especially the satisfying feeling when the root clump comes up all in a soft earthy rush. Though how aggravating when, despite being whacked at with both ends of a pick mattock, the taproot refuses to budge, and I have to saw through its fibres and re-bury the tenacious sign of my failure, feeling like an un-re-educatable extra in a Maoist revolution. Nearing fifty now, I sense it’s unlikely I’ll ever be more than an apprentice gardener. Today I even walked down to the farm with my reading glasses stuck up on the top of my head, so it’s a good thing Murad is the very opposite of the Chairman in philosophy and disposition. ‘Take it easy,’ he says. ‘Take a break now’. And then we stop to eat, and laugh with his kids, or go for a walk round the village, stopping every ten minutes for Murad to conduct voluble exchanges of opinion and news with his various relatives. ‘You’re the *malak* of Marda’ I teased him today – remembering another word from *House of Stone*, and thinking also of *King of Kensington*, the classic Canadian TV show about a generous convenience store owner and his multicultural neighbourhood in downtown Toronto. No, Murad demurred, genuinely shocked, the first time in three days I had seen this visionary eco-dynamo lost for words.

*April 15*

Thinking of that moment with Murad as I finish this essay, I realise anew that my involvement in the Palestinian-led resistance to Zionism challenges the very notion of leadership itself. Most activists I know are deeply disillusioned by the official Palestinian leadership: corrupt Fatah polices the West Bank on behalf of Israel, while Hamas is locked into a grim cycle of violence with the IDF it can never militarily win. It is oft complained that the Palestinians lack a Gandhi figure, but when people can be jailed indefinitely without charges, simply for organising a weekly demonstration, how can such a peaceful superhero emerge? The answer, as I have learned from Manal Hamied Abdel Aal, Hanan Jadaa, Mazin and Jessie Qumsiyeh, Murad Alkufash and his family, and the self-ironized ‘leaders’ of the BDS movement I’ve worked with for years, lies in civil society: Palestinian leadership has to be shared.

And is stronger for it. You can jail individuals, but not – despite Israel’s best efforts in Gaza – a whole people, or a vision whose strength is attested by its growing reach. On my trip I also met with Jewish Israeli human rights activists and boycott campaigners, as well as a publishing professional in Tel Aviv who hates the apartheid in her country, intends to send her son to an integrated school, and reluctantly supports BDS. Undeniably, the skies are dark over Israel-Palestine. But powerful rays of light are breaking through: visionary projects like those I visited radiate hope, while every month the boycott movement announces significant victories, most recently the withdrawal of two huge multinational corporations, Veolia and G4S, from the Israeli market. Zionism is not invincible. All empires must fall in the end, and the long-term future of Israel-Palestine may yet lie in a shared state, or even bioregional governance. For now, let Mazin Qumsiyeh, himself a recent visitor to Beirut, explain how appreciating the multifarious blessings of (human) nature can help achieve a just peace in a land which, like all land, is holy:

Lebanon, like Palestine, is such a beautiful rich country but its political leaders do not seem to get their act together. Being divided into sometimes intermixing and sometimes contending communities is not a bad thing if you think in terms of healthy diverse human communities just like a healthy diverse ecosystem (many species competing, conflicting, sometimes cooperating). It is fertile ground for innovation . . . in Palestine, we just need to collect all those good people in networks to better help young talent to grow and promote collaboration and healthy but not destructive competition. Our museum motto is RESPECT (for ourselves, for others, for nature) . . . Come visit us.

**CITATIONS [House style]**

The Seventeen Principles of Environmental Justice are available at [www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html](http://www.ejnet.org/ej/principles.html). Recent reports on the environmental impact of the Occupation can be accessed at: [www.middleeastmonitor.com/resources/fact-sheets/3541-the-environmental-impact-of-israeli-settlements-on-the-occupied-palestinian-territories](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/resources/fact-sheets/3541-the-environmental-impact-of-israeli-settlements-on-the-occupied-palestinian-territories), [www.ps.boell.org/en/2015/12/03/2014-war-gaza-strip-participatory-environmental-impact-assessment](http://www.ps.boell.org/en/2015/12/03/2014-war-gaza-strip-participatory-environmental-impact-assessment) and [www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/water-crisis-deepens-gaza-strip-151006081548621.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/10/water-crisis-deepens-gaza-strip-151006081548621.html). In his George Orwell Prize winning memoir *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (Profile Books, 2010), Raja Shehadeh gives a personal account of the environmental destruction of the West Bank. James Lovelock and Jean Jouzel’s views on global warming can be read at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/science/science-news/10752606/We-should-give-up-trying-to-save-the-world-from-climate-change-says-James-Lovelock.html and [www.alternet.org/environment/leading-climatologist-says-its-not-too-late-solve-climate-change](http://www.alternet.org/environment/leading-climatologist-says-its-not-too-late-solve-climate-change). In *Burning Country: Syrians in Revolution and War* (Pluto Press, London, 2016) Robin Yassin-Kassab and Leila Al-Shami give a detailed account of the development of Syria’s democratic neighbourhood councils. More information on green movements within Islam, Judaism and Christianity can be found at: [www.en.qantara.de/content/islamic-environmentalism-the-call-to-eco-jihad](http://www.en.qantara.de/content/islamic-environmentalism-the-call-to-eco-jihad), www.biggreenjewish.com/home/about/ and www.operationnoah.org/articles/read-ash-wednesday-declaration/. The International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) campaigns for environmental justice in Israel: [www.ijan.org/category/projects-campaigns/stopthejnf/](http://www.ijan.org/category/projects-campaigns/stopthejnf/).

The short video ‘Bearing Witness - Interpal's Women’s Delegation to Lebanon’ can be viewed at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9\_C7pUym0c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9_C7pUym0c). Fuller responses from my fellow convoy members Victoria Brittain and Yvonne Ridley can be read, respectively, at: [www.middleeasteye.net/columns/ixty-years-shame-palestinian-camps-lebanon-23044460](http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/ixty-years-shame-palestinian-camps-lebanon-23044460) [sic]; and www.middleeastmonitor.com/.../as-in-life-so-too-in-death-there-s-no- peace-for-the-palestinians, www.middleeastmonitor.com/.../23990-are-we-on-the-verge-of-a- palestinian-exodus-to-europe, www.middleeastmonitor.com/.../the-tragedy-of-ahmed-and-palestine-s -feral-children. Insightful information on the rebuilding of Nahr El Bared camp can be found at [www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/monika-halkort/rebuilding-nahr-el-bared](http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/monika-halkort/rebuilding-nahr-el-bared). To learn more about the inspirational life and tragic death of Vittorio Arrigoni (1975-2011), please visit www.[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vittorio\_Arrigoni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vittorio_Arrigoni). ‘Four Hours in Chatila’, Jean Genet’s eyewitness account of the aftermath of the Sabra-Shatila massacre can be read in full at: [www.radioislam.org/solus/JGchatilaEngl.html](http://www.radioislam.org/solus/JGchatilaEngl.html).

B’Tselem’s statement on the extrajudicial killings of Palestinian youth since October is available here: [www.btselem.org/press\_releases/20151115\_letter\_to\_pm\_on\_extrajudicial\_killings](http://www.btselem.org/press_releases/20151115_letter_to_pm_on_extrajudicial_killings).

‘My Eyes Here’, Ahmad Alshyyh’s short documentary on the impact of the IDF bombardments on a young blind mother in Gaza, can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQPuqCEzxXA

The Palestine Museum of Natural History and The Palestine Institute of Biodiversity Research welcome volunteers and visitors; both projects can be explored online at [www.palestinenature.org/](http://www.palestinenature.org/). For a full bibliography of work by Mazin Qumsiyeh and to read his blog, which furnished the final quote of the essay [‘Lebanon Encounter’, 14.01.16], visit him at [www.qumsiyeh.org](http://www.qumsiyeh.org) and www.popular-resistance.blogspot.co.uk. *House of Stone: A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012) by the late Lebanese-American journalist Anthony Shadid, also invokes the pluralist Levant of the past. Marda Permaculture Farm accepts volunteers all year round; to find out more about the farm, visit [www.mardafarm.com](http://www.mardafarm.com). To hear Murad Alkufash speaking about his work, watch ‘Marda Permaculture Farm: Planting Seeds of Hope in the Occupied Territories’ at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H90W\_O6H1s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2H90W_O6H1s). Bill Mollison’s *Permaculture: A Designers’ Manual* (Tagari Publications, 1988) remains the definitive text on the subject. Ben Hattem investigated the wild boar crisis in the West Bank for Vice Magazine: <http://www.vice.com/read/the-wild-boar-and-feces-epidemic-in-palestine>. Background and official updates on the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign can be found at the website of the Palestinian BDS National Committee: <https://bdsmovement.net/>. In his eloquent and comprehensive essay ‘Palestine, Postcolonialism and Pessoptimism: Palestine and Postcolonial Studies’ (*Interventions*, Routledge, 2016) the late Bart Moore-Gilbert draws on a host of Palestinian, Israeli and other thinkers to persuasively critique the moribund two state solution and promote a progressive one state future for the region.