

Peter Larson's book list of suggested reading on Israel/Palestine



The walls of the Educational Book Shop in Jerusalem are lined with hundreds of books on Israel/Palestine, far more than anyone could realistically read. The quality and usefulness of these works varies widely.

To help you navigate this abundance, I've selected a few books and films that I found to be factual and well written.

While I don't agree with every viewpoint expressed, each offers something interesting and represents a range of perspectives and backgrounds from a variety of authors, men and women, Jews, Palestinian and other.

Peter Larson,
Chair, Ottawa Forum on Israel/Palestine

TWO BOOKS – TWO FILMS

If you sympathise with the plight of Palestinians in Gaza, but wonder if this conflict could have been resolved peacefully, I suggest ***'The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine'*** by Ilan Pappé, a non Zionist Israeli. He describes in detail the original Zionist plan to depopulate Palestine militarily of its indigenous inhabitants to create a new, Jewish, state.

If you want to understand better why Israeli Zionists think the way do, then try ***My Promised Land,*** by Ari Shavit, a prominent Israeli Zionist. Reading his book helped me understand the perspective of an intelligent Zionist even if I didn't agree with him.

As for films, the 1964 film ***"Exodus"*** is the iconic film presenting the story of refugee Jews finally coming to the promised land.

A totally different perspective is given by the Aljazeera series called ***Al Naqba*** which presents the same series of events from a Palestinian perspective. Unlike Exodus, the Aljazeera series is a documentary where Exodus is made for Hollywood.

Happy reading

Books

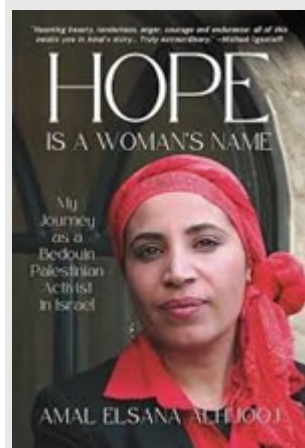
In order of newest publication



Being Jewish after the destruction of Gaza

– Peter Beinart (2025)

In the author's view, Jewish communal life is dominated by perennial perception of persecution and victimhood. After Gaza, where Jewish texts, history, and language have been deployed to justify mass slaughter and starvation, Beinart argues, Jews must tell a new story. After this war, whose horror will echo for generations, they must do nothing less than offer a new answer to the question: What does it mean to be a Jew? Beinart imagines an alternate narrative in which Israeli Jews have the right to equality, not supremacy, and in which Jewish and Palestinian safety are not mutually exclusive but intertwined.



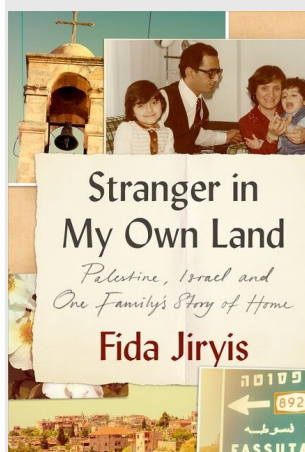
Hope is a woman's name: my journey as a Bedouin women's activist in Israel

– Amal Elsanaa Alhjoo'jej (2024)

This is the first person autobiography by Amal Elsana, the fifth daughter in a patriarchal society, and also an indigenous Bedouin, in a Jewish state. She came into this world fighting for her right to exist.

A shepherd at the age of five, she led her flock across the green mountains of Laqiya, her village in the Negev in southern Israel, and later ran literacy classes for the women in her tribe in her early teens, the beginning of a lifelong career organizing people to promote policy change for Israel's Bedouin, a minority within the Palestinian minority.

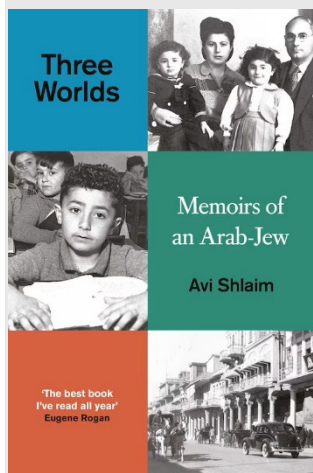
A remarkable book and a remarkable story told by a remarkable woman.



A Stranger in My Own Land

– Fida Jiryis (2024)

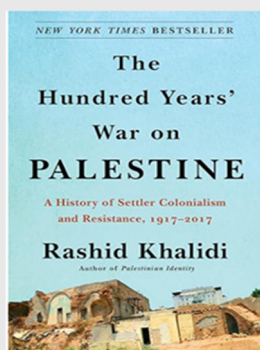
Palestinian author Jiryis became a refugee when her father had to flee his village in northern Palestine, as he was hunted by Israeli police. At age twenty-two, she returned to her village, only to find that her "Palestine" had been transformed into "Israel" and that her experience as a Palestinian would now be one of living as "a stranger in her own land". In this book she reflects on important questions as: Where is "home" for those Palestinian refugees displaced by the Nakba? What tensions and challenges do Palestinians refugees experience when returning to a land which is now under firm Israeli military and political control?



Three Worlds: Memoir of an Arab Jew

– Avi Shlaim (2024)

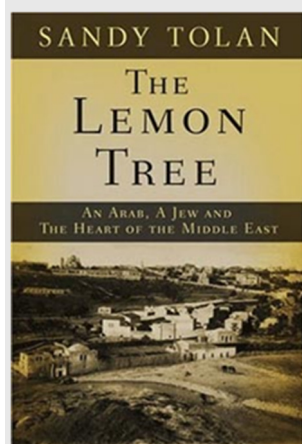
Professor Avi Shlaim was born to a wealthy Jewish family in Baghdad, Iraq. He traces his family's trajectory from Baghdad to Israel to the UK. Shlaim rejects the widespread narrative that the Jews of Iraq had been oppressed forever. His parents had many Muslim friends in Baghdad and no interest in Zionism. But after the creation of the State of Israel and expulsions of Palestinians, anti-Semitism surged in Iraq aided by the Zionist underground which wanted to foster an exodus of Jews from Iraq to Israel. Yet when Iraqi Jews like his family arrived in Israel, they faced an unhappy reality and eventually moved to the UK.



The Hundred years war on Palestine

– Rashid Khalidi (2021)

Rashid Khalidi is a Palestinian American whose father was expelled from Jerusalem and later became a Palestinian diplomat. Khalidi is widely recognized as the premier Palestinian American academic and scholar. This book is part family history and part history of Palestine. He argues that the recent history of Palestine has been characterised by its refusal to accept a hundred years of European settler colonialism.



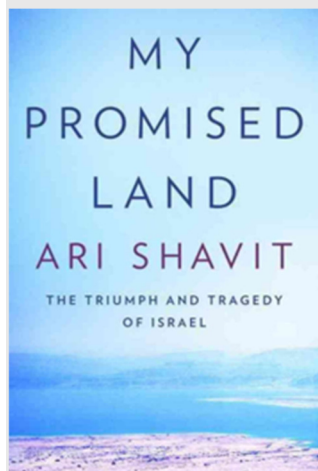
The Lemon Tree- An Arab, a Jew and the Heart of the Middle East

– Sandy Tolan (2020)

Sandy Tolan is an American academic who has devoted a good part of his life trying to make sense of the Israel/Palestine tragedy. The Lemon Tree (not to be confused with the movie of the same name) is the story about two families – one Palestinian and one immigrant Jewish.

The Jewish family has taken over the house in which the Palestinian grew up from which he was expelled during the Nakba in 1948. Nolan tells both their stories – in a way that is compelling and sympathetic. This is a serious book, filled with lots of background historical information.

NOTE: This book is also available in a young readers version.



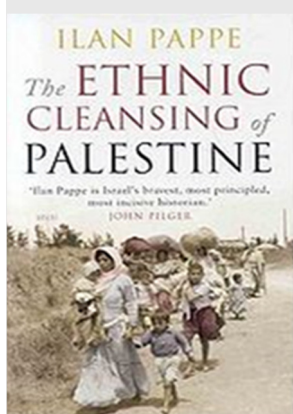
My promised land: The triumph and tragedy of Israel

– Ari Shavit (2015)

A deeply personal narrative history of the State of Israel, by one of the most influential Jewish Israeli journalists. This book is the Zionist story told from the inside beginning with Shavit's great-grandfather, a British Zionist who in 1897 visited the Holy Land and believed it was the way of the future for his people. Shavit himself served in the IDF including in Gaza.

His frank and devastating chapter on the massacre of Palestinians in Lydda in 1948 scandalized the New York Jewish community. Shavit remains a defiant Zionist – we did some dastardly things, he admits, but it was the only way to create a Jewish State.

For anyone who wants to better understand how Zionists justify what they did (and are doing), this well written book provides an insight.

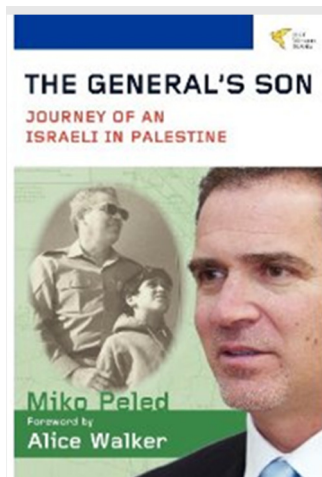


The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

– Ilan Pappé (2007)

Ilan Pappé is an Israeli Jewish scholar. He was one of the first of the so called “new historians” who went into Israeli archives to see what really happened in 1947/48. Using both official Israeli records and oral histories he collected from still living Palestinians, Pappé brought new light to the process of the founding of the state of Israel, including massacres, expulsions and demolition of villages.

In this book he reveals the thoughtful, methodic process of ethnic cleansing which allowed a Jewish state to be declared on in Palestine where Jews had historically been a small minority.

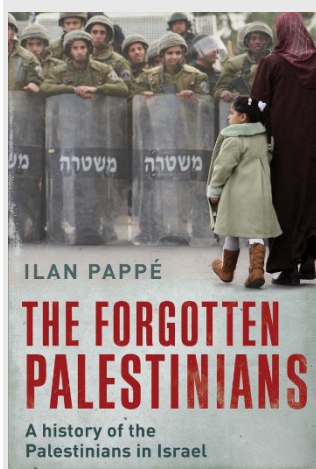


The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine

– Miko Peled (2016)

Miko Peled comes from Zionist lineage. His grandfather was a signatory of the Israeli Declaration of independence, and his father was a general in the Israeli Army. He followed his father's footsteps at first, joining Israel's Special Forces after high school and earning the red beret, but he soon grew to regret his decision.

Peled's book is both about how he abandoned Zionism and his work since then to defend human rights for Palestinians.



The Forgotten Palestinians

– Ilan Pappé (2013)

Most Canadians think that Palestinians live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories which Israel conquered in 1967. Some do of course, but nearly 2 million Palestinians live as second class citizens inside Israel.

In this book, historian Ilan Pappé examines how Israeli Palestinians have fared under Jewish rule. He discusses Israel's attitude toward minorities and Palestinians' attitudes toward the Jewish state. Drawing upon significant archival and interview material, Pappé analyzes the Israeli state's policy toward its Palestinian citizens, finding discrimination in matters of housing, education, and civil rights.



This Time we went too far: Truth and consequences of the Gaza Invasion

– Norman Finkelstein (2010)

For many Israelis, the history of the Israel/Palestine conflict started on October 7th, 2023. But This 15 year old book by Norman Finkelstein, a fearsome Jewish American intellectual goes back to 2008, when Israel invaded Gaza, killing of 1400 Palestinians including 350 children.

The invasion, carried out by one of the most advanced militaries in the world against what was by comparison a defenceless 'enemy,' was overwhelmingly supported by the Israeli populace.

Finkelstein proves conclusively in the book that Israel used massive disproportionate force, deliberately targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure - a "strategy of terror."

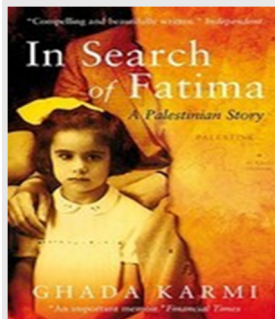


Mornings in Jenin: a novel

– Susan Abulhawa (2010)

Susan Abulhawa is one of the best known Palestinian American writers. Her stories are touching and insightful. This is the story of one family's struggle and survival through over sixty years of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, carrying us from Jenin to Jerusalem, to Lebanon and the anonymity of America.

It is a story shaped by scars and fear, but also by the transformative intimacy of marriage and the fierce protectiveness of motherhood. It is a story of faith, forgiveness, and life-sustaining love.



In Search of Fatima

– Dr. Ghada Kharmi (2002)

This is a warm autobiography of a Palestinian woman whose family is forced to flee her home and village when she was eight years old. Her well-educated father eventually takes his family to London, but Ghada continued to wonder what ever happened to her nanny “Fatima”. She returns to Palestine many years later to find out. A touching story.

Films/Documentaries

Available free online



Gaza How to Survive a Warzone

BBC documentary (2025) 59 minutes

The lives of four young people trying to survive the Israel-Hamas war as they hope for a ceasefire. A documentary about life in Gaza during the war. Filmed by two cameramen on the ground over 9 months, remotely directed by two producers in London for the BBC.

BBC came under intense criticism from the Israel lobby and was finally obliged to take it off the air and YouTube. But it is now available on other sites.

<https://www.kalamullah.com/gaza-how-to-survive-a-warzone.html>



October 7th

Al Jazeera investigation (2024) 59 minutes

Al Jazeera’s Investigative Unit (I-Unit) has carried out a forensic analysis of the events October 7, 2023. It revealed widespread human rights abuses by Hamas fighters and others who followed them into Israel. But the investigation also found that many of the worst stories (such as the mass killing of babies and allegations of widespread and systematic rape) that came out in the days following the attack were false. In particular it reveals that claims by the IDF that it found 8 burned babies at a house in Kibbutz Be’eri were entirely untrue. There were no babies in the house and the 12 civilians inside were killed by Israeli forces when they stormed the house.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= 0atzea-mPY&rco=1>



The Promise

BBC (2011) Four - 90 minute episodes

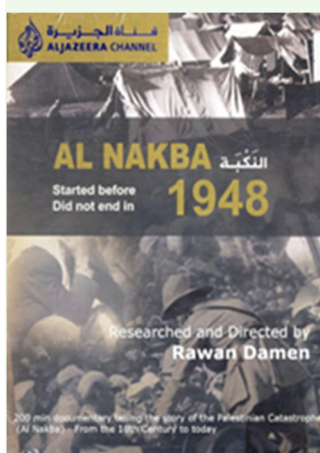
A British television serial in four episodes written and directed by [Peter Kosminsky](#), with music by [Debbie Wiseman](#). It tells the story of a young woman who goes to present-day [Israel](#) and [Palestine](#) determined to find out about her soldier grandfather's involvement in the final years of [Palestine](#) under the British [mandate](#).

Part 1 <https://youtu.be/6BBjjl0QHoY>

Part 2 <https://youtu.be/l3Cmq4mCFaA>

Part 3 <https://youtu.be/OkVQvgkwxNY>

Part 4 <https://youtu.be/1N2V1ohaHF4>



Al Nakba

Al Jazeera (2002) Two - 90 minute segments

This is an excellent series on the history of Palestine. Featuring a lot of archival film footage, and interviews with Palestinian, Israelis and independent observers and scholars. The first part deals with the history of Palestine from 1800 to 1947. The last part deals with the conflict that Israel calls its "War of Independence" and which the Palestinians call "Al Nakba" (the catastrophe), and the subsequent events. It comes right up to about 2000.

Part 1 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bm7dMhE80dw&NR=1>

Part 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYvimRnlTqE>