



**JEWISH  
IDENTITY &  
PALESTINIAN  
RIGHTS  
DIASPORA JEWISH  
OPPOSITION TO ISRAEL**

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**DAVID LANDY**





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## Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights



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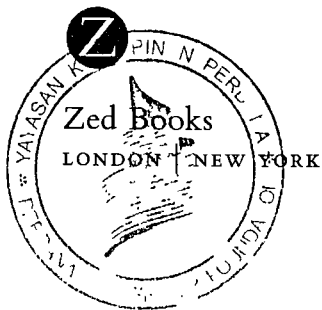


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# Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights

*Diaspora Jewish Opposition to Israel*

DAVID LANDY



PUSTAKA PERDANA



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*Jewish Identity and Palestinian Rights: Diaspora Jewish Opposition to Israel*

was first published in 2011 by

Zed Books Ltd, 7 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF, UK and  
Room 400, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

[www.zedbooks.co.uk](http://www.zedbooks.co.uk)

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Typeset in Monotype Bembo Book by illuminati, Grosmont  
Index by John Barker  
Cover designed by Rogue Four Design  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Antony Rowe,  
Chippenham and Eastbourne

Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of  
St Martin's Press, LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010, USA

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library  
Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data available

ISBN 978 1 84813 927 5 hb  
ISBN 978 1 84813 926 8 pb



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## Acknowledgements

Many people have enabled this book to be written, although the usual disclaimer applies: all the mistakes are mine. First of all, thanks to my colleagues in Palestine Solidarity, especially Raymond Deane, Freda Hughes and Kevin Squires, for their help and their inspiration in showing how a solidarity movement works.

I'm grateful to Anaheed Al-Hardan and Ronit Lentin, as both academics and activists, for conversations on the issue, and also to Laurence Cox for ideas about social movements. Special thanks are due to Hugh Harkin for all his assistance and comments during the writing of this book.

I'd also like to thank those people – too numerous to mention – in all the diaspora Jewish groups I have studied for their interest and assistance; I hope I have represented their work accurately and fairly. And, lastly, thanks to my family for their support, especially my daughter Ruska, for putting up with me as I was writing the book.



## Introduction

Our mission was simple. Above all it was to show that Jews could try to build bridges rather than walls, come with an olive branch and not with a bulldozer to destroy olive trees, come in a simple frail catamaran, not an F16 bomber, to bring the gifts of life, not the instruments of death, to come as supplicants for peace, not as merchants of war. (Neslen 2010)

On 26 September 2010, the *Irene* set sail for Gaza. The boat was captained by Glyn Secker, a British Jew, and had a crew of nine from Germany, the UK, the USA and Israel. It was designed as a joint project among diaspora Jewish groups to break the Israeli siege of Gaza and bring much needed aid to the imprisoned Palestinian population. Originally conceived as an initiative between the German group Jüdische Stimme ('Jewish Voice' for a Just Peace in the Near East) and the British group Jews for Justice for Palestinians, the project became more and more international as it developed. By the time the boat had set sail, it involved the European Jews for a Just Peace federation, American Jews for a Just Peace and Jewish Voice for Peace from the USA, as well as the Australian group Jews Against the Occupation.

Palestinian solidarity activists were delighted, as much by the symbolism of diaspora Jews reaching out to Palestinians and standing up to the Israeli government as by the aid. Hamas, the governing

party in Gaza, also expressed its appreciation for the initiative. The boat sailed in the shadow of the *Mavi Marmara*, the passenger ship which as part of an earlier convoy had been attacked by Israeli soldiers, an attack that killed nine of its passengers. But lurking in the background was an even larger shadow, that of the *Exodus 1947*, the ship that tried to bring Jews from Displaced Persons Camps in Europe to Palestine in 1947. The ship, a symbol of the post-Holocaust diaspora connection with the Jewish state, failed to get through the British blockade of Palestine. British soldiers boarded the boat in international waters and killed several passengers before deporting the rest back to Europe. However, the global outrage that erupted as a result of this heavy-handed military action gave moral force to Zionist demands. History, it seemed, was both repeating and reversing itself, the moral force flowing the other way, but with Jews once again at the helm of a different type of connection with the land of Palestine.

Not all reacted with delight. In anticipation of the boat, the secretary general of Germany's Central Council of Jews, Stephan Kramar, called the activists 'naive and willing tools of the terrorists and enemies of Israel', an opinion echoed by the Board of Deputies of British Jews – the organisation which claims to represent Jews in the UK (Dysch 2010). As expected, the *Irene* failed to break the blockade. The Israeli army – as it had done with previous attempts to bring aid to Gaza – boarded the boat on the high seas, violently attacked the mostly elderly crew members and took them to Israel, not Gaza, so as to deport them back to Europe.

I start the book with this vignette as it encapsulates so much about this movement – its practical orientation and ability to organise media-friendly activities, its tenuous yet insistent internationalism which dovetails with its promotion of an alternative diaspora Jewishness as well as with the universalistic ideas which guide it, the concepts of justice and equality for others. It also demonstrates the concerns with Jewish identity. This was a *Jewish* boat first and foremost, one which did not sail with the international flotilla bound for Gaza. So, finally, this occasion also demonstrates its relationship with other groups – separate from but feted by most pro-Palestine