INFORMATION SHEET: UPDATE OCTOBER 1, 1989
(English Version)

BANNED BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Compiled and edited by Daphna Golan

B’Tselem, the Israel Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, was founded in February 1989 by a group of lawyers, intellectuals, journalists, and Members of Knesset. The objective of B’Tselem is to document and to bring to the attention of policy makers and the general public, violations of human rights in the territories.

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Seven years ago, Amos Elon met with the person responsible for deciding which books would be banned on the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The Censor, who cannot be mentioned by name, “a man of serious demeanor about 50 years old,” explained to him that “the work was difficult and sometimes thankless.” Difficult in what way? “According to him, last year, he examined 21,342 books... He at least glanced at each of them. About one percent of the books are banned.”

Many books. Difficult choices. Why did this man ban Yigal Alon’s book about the IDF? Because of the translator’s introduction. Why did he ban the biography, Herzl, the Man and the Belief, by Desmond Stuart? Because of what was written on the back cover, “Know the enemy” -- the meaning of this phrase is readily apparent, and also because of “the relationship of Zionism to imperialism,” and “the plunder of Palestine”, but these kinds of books are banned only here and there. Poetry is completely banned. “The poets especially are the black sheep of the censor”, wrote Amos Elon. The man banned almost every important book published by a Palestinian poet during the last forty years. And here the Censor extensively cites not only silly lines from book covers, but numerous ugly and demented passages about eating the flesh of Israelis. Were that conversation held today he could have also cited the poem in which Mahmud Darwish calls on us to take our dead from the earth and march into the sea.

I asked him if he had read Bialik. He was somewhat shaken. Suppose I have, he says with some anger. “In the City of Slaughter” No. I recite, “this is but the way we have been besieged roundabout/were we to be transformed into a wild animal/then with furious anger/your blood would we drink without mercy.” Yes, says the man responsible for the Index, but this was meant against the hooligans in the Ukraine! That’s okay. That they can recite to their hearts’ desire. In Judea and Samaria, we would gladly permit it. But if it is aimed at me, that’s quite another thing. A poem like that must be banned. A poem like that can be dangerous.

Is it not the character of all ‘nationalist poetry’ to be like that at a certain stage? The man thought about this possibility. Perhaps. But one must nevertheless fight against it. Does he really believe that poetry can be fought -- effectively? Certainly. Where and when has that succeeded historically? Perhaps it has never succeeded. But we are trying to change history, he says.

He will be the first.

(“The Literary Border Patrol” Ha’aretz, May, 7 , 1982)

Readers of B’Tselem’s publications are not used to smiling. Lists of fatalities and the testimony of people whose limbs were shattered by beating do not elicit laughter. The list of banned books published here reminds you that comedy always appears alongside ugly acts. The conqueror cannot but be laughable. Especially when he is overly concerned, when he exercises great care with every detail and makes minute distinctions.
Should we, then, relate laughingly to the promises to drink our blood and remove our dead from their graves? Should we consider these ugly words -- both of Darwish and of Bialik -- within the bounds of ‘poetic license’, in the realm of speech full of metaphors which do not oblige anyone?

No. I never met a serious poet who gave himself poetic license such that he had license to write nonsense simply because it was moving, or license to write a word and not mean it. Poetic license is the last refuge of the literary snob, and the snob never reads with ‘all his soul and all his might’. Snobs are everywhere, but to be a Jew and to forget what it is to read, is more difficult than to do so as anyone else. When Isaiah Berlin wrote about Hayim Weizmann, he found it necessary to reemphasize that, regarding the Jewish people, “there was never a people who lived so thoroughly according to the written word.”

Devotion to the book, distancing from the book (precisely because one must oppose the serious things written there) -- all occur in the universe of people who read. What would Zionism have been without the books that Jews read throughout the generations? What would it have been without the revolt against the books which had been made holy to them? One thing is not happening, never happened and never will happen. The written word cannot be buried beneath the earth -- people cannot be kept from reading. Each year there appears somewhere on the map some legal scoundrel who attempts to prevent it, and at each such moment some curious person finds a quiet corner under the nose of that scoundrel and reads, simply reads.

Written words act. They move -- from the curse of Bialik to the understanding of Weizmann, and back to the curse of Darwish. They are quick, they change more quickly than you imagine -- you think that you left them with the Ukrainians and you find them written about Israeli clubs. They also disappear. Fortunately for us, many texts have been forgotten. But they were forgotten when they stopped speaking to the hearts of people. They were not forgotten on command. No one has succeeded at that till now, and the man of serious demeanor who met with Amos Elon won himself, through hard labor, the right to be added to the very long list of fools who preceded him. He read 21,342 books in 1981, and 1,100 of them he turned the pages and forbade. And now, in 1989, he has an Intifada, in which every five year old Palestinian child probably spends days and nights in secret libraries becoming expert in the forbidden poetry, without which he would not know how to do what was written there.

In the “Song of the Ten Brothers”, Alterman made the following request from books:

May God preserve the scrolls for eternal life and for the duration of all life,
May he preserve them from mold, moths and the revenge of the conqueror,
May God preserve them from fools and foolishness
And from the wisdom of the simpleton as well as from fire.

--Nissim Calderon.
BANNED BOOKS

This publication includes a partial list of the publications which are forbidden on the West Bank. Despite repeated approaches to the IDF spokesperson, to the censor and to the Military Attorney General for the West Bank, we were unable to obtain a complete and up-to-date list. All of the responsible authorities agreed with us that this list ought to be published and known to the public at large.

The publications are forbidden according to the Emergency (Defence) Regulations, 1945, and the list is updated occasionally by new orders from the legal advisor. The text of the regulations is as follows:

THE DEFENCE (EMERGENCY) REGULATIONS, 1945.

IN EXERCISE of the powers vested in the High Commissioner by Article 6 of the Palestine (Defence) Order in Council, 1937, and of all other powers enabling him, the Officer Administering the Government hereby makes the following regulations:

87 -- (1) The Censor may by order prohibit generally or specially the publishing in publications of matter the publishing of which, in his opinion, would be, or be likely to be or become, prejudicial to the defence of Palestine or to the public safety or to public order.

(2) Any person who publishes any matter in contravention of an order under this regulation and the proprietor and editor of the publication in which it is published and the person who wrote, printed, drew, or designed, the matter shall be guilty of an offence against these Regulations.

88 -- (1) The Censor may by order prohibit the importation or exportation, or the printing or publishing of any publication (which prohibition shall be deemed to extend to any copy or portion of such publication or of any issue or number thereof), the importation, exportation, printing or publishing of which, in his opinion, would be or be likely to be or become, prejudicial to the defence of Palestine or to the public safety or public order.

(2) Any person who contravenes any order under this regulation and the proprietor and editor of the publication in relation to which the contravention occurs, and any person (unless in the opinion of the court he ought to be fairly excused) who has in his possession or control, or in premises of which he is the occupier, any publication prohibited under this regulation or who posts, delivers or receives any such publication, shall be guilty of an offence against these Regulations.
As of now, there are 3 Palestinian writers and poets imprisoned without trial, in administrative detention:

Izzat al-Ghazawi
37 years old, resident of Ramallah, married and father of seven. Has a master's degree in English literature from an American university. Primarily writes short stories.

Sami al-Kilani
38 years old, resident of Nablus, married and father of two. Graduated of the Physics Department and is an instructor in al-Najah University. Writes poetry and short stories. Spent 1983-1985 confined to the village of his birth, Y'abed, far from his residence and work. Confinned under administrative detention since March 1, 1989, in Ketziot. Adopted by Amnesty International as a Prisoner of Conscience.

Ali al-Jariri
38 years old, resident of the village of Dir Jarir, in the district of Ramallah. Married, and the father of four. A candidate for a master’s degree at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Writes literary criticism, children's literature, analytical studies, and poetry. Confined under administrative detention at Ketziot since July 2, 1989.

In the past, many of the members of the Writers’ Union have been arrested for extended periods, among them:

Yusuf Hamad
Jamal Banurah
Wasim al-Kurdi -- a poet from Al-Birah
Ghassan Abdallah -- a writer from Ramallah
Soheil Khuri -- a lyricist from Jerusalem (accused of writing nationalistic songs)
Al-Mutawakkel Taha -- the head of the Writers’ Union
Abdal Nasar Salah -- a poet from Tul Karem.

BOOK BURNING

On the tenth of May, 1989, the fourth day of the curfew in the city of Nablus, a group of soldiers entered the office of Dar al-Hadara, in which there were about 2,350 books. The soldiers confiscated tens of books and the others were thrown down from the third floor office to the base of the building, and were burnt. Firefighters who arrived on the scene attempted to put out the fire, fearing that it would spread, but the soldiers prevented them from doing so. After about an hour, when the firefighters were permitted to extinguish the fire, most of the books and newspapers had been burned.

B. Michael publicized details of the incident (Ha'aretz, May 19, 1989) under the headline “Please Deny!” No one did.

On the May 22, 1989, Rida Adnan Rashid Zurba the director of Dar al-Hadra office, was sentenced to eight months of detention and a fine of 1,000 NIS. He was accused of “organizing a public library which contained tens of books, publications, and journals of political significance which were of interest to the larger public who needed the services of the library.”
BOOKS BANNED IN THE WEST BANK

ערכו ביקר

ליד האל

622}

1981

1980

1979
Stranger in a Distant City by Ahmad Darwish

When I was young and handsome
the rose was my home
and the springs were my sea,
the rose had become a rand,
and the springs a thirst.

Have you changed a great deal.
When we shall return like a wind
to our home
you'll find the rose had shriveled
and the springs depleted.
and you'll find me as I was
the rose m ray hoie
the rose had become a rand,
and handsae...

Ahmad Darwish (born in 1944) is considered the most important and talented of the Palestinian poets. Darwish has published mostly poetry and some prose. The prose translated above is taken from the collection of poetry: Al-Assaafiir Tawut fil-Jaliili - The Birds are Crying in the Galilee., 1970. For the purposes of translation we have used the Divan of Ahmad Darwish, Beirut, 12th edition, Our al-Iwhab, 1987, p. 282-1. The translation here is based on the Hebrew translation of Avi Eldar.
B’Tselem enquired of the IDF Spokesperson requesting clarification of the army’s position regarding the banning of the publication of books in the territories (letter sent August 28, 1989). We wanted to know who the deciding authority was and what the criteria were for banning books in the occupied territories in general and in prisons in particular. Similarly, we asked if there was any possibility to appeal the banning of a book and if there was any precedent for a book which was banned being permitted after appeal.

B’Tselem also requested a special response indicating the reasons for banning the following books:

- Alouph Har Even, Can the Palestinian Problem be Solved?
- Ezer Weizman, The Battle for Peace
- P.P. Bartholdy, Studies in the History of Palestine During the Middle Ages
- Mahmud Darwish, At the End of the Night
- Mahmud Darwish, Selected Poems
- Issac Deutsch, The Non-Jewish Jew
- Roger Delorus, I Accuse
- The Freemasons, The Disasters in the Area
- Adnan al-Maluhi, Watergate
- Hanna Salah, Afghanistan-The Revolution
- Ghassan Kanfani, The Lover
- Danny Rubinstein, Gush Emunim, The True Face of Zionism
THE IDF'S RESPONSE TO B'TSELEM'S INQUIRY

Office of the IDF Spokesperson
Information Branch
Ref 288/2-
(M 728-
)מ
Tel.: 03-266117
October 3, 1989

B'Tselem -- Zehava Gal’on
Re: The Banning of Books in the Occupied Territories

1. Procedures for banning the distribution and reading of books in the occupied territories

The authority that decides on prohibitions is the censor for journalism and communications (the military censor). The censor's authority derives from the Defence (Emergency) Regulations, 1945, as well as orders from the civil administration, among them an order giving the censor a mandate over areas under civil administration.

Books are banned if their contents, in the opinion of the censor, are liable to damage state security, public safety, or public order, either within the State of Israel and/or in the areas under civil administration. The titles of banned books are removed from merchants’ import lists (about 20,000 Arabic language books are imported annually). From time to time orders listing banned books are released.

2. Banning books in prison facilities

Does not fall under the authority of the military censor. The banning of books in prison facilities is one of the responsibilities of the postal and telegraphic censor in the Ministry of Defence. (Please apply to the Ministry of Defence for details).

Everything brought into prison facilities by various bodies, including books, is done so via the Red Cross. The Red Cross coordinates its activities with the Ministry of Defence, which is responsible for passing the books on to the postal and telegraphic censor. (In recent months, hundreds of approved books were brought into prison facilities. During this period, only 2-3 books were banned in the prison facilities.)

3. Appeals

The banning of a book can be appealed to the commander of a censorship base or to the Chief Censor (for distribution in the territories).

4. Reasons for banning the books listed in your inquiry

These books were banned because their contents were damaging to state security, public safety, and public order; they also included calls for uprisings, unrest support for terrorists, and encouragement of violence. It should be noted that some of these books were banned for additions made by the translator, which include slanderous and inflammatory comments, and not for the content of the book itself.

Wishing you a good year,

Lieutenant Liat Menachmi
Information Officer
What do William Shakespeare, Amnon Rubinstein, and Jack London have in common?

In her visit to the Ketziot detention camp (October 11, 1989), attorney Tamar Peleg received two packages of books she had brought to prisoners two months earlier from prison officials. She was told that reading the books was prohibited in Ketziot. The banned books are:


All of the banned books were in English with the exception of Amnon Rubinstein's book, which was banned in the original -- in Hebrew. Two of the books that Peleg had brought, An Album of Picasso's Paintings, and One Hundred Personalities in Hebrew, were not returned, and are likely to have reached their intended recipients.

The criteria for approving books for reading by Palestinians held in military prison camps are in the realm of mystery. As far as we know, in Meggido prison, there is a list of about a thousand books whose reading is permitted. In Ketziot, however, there are apparently more severe restrictions.

MK Yair Tzaban has been corresponding for many months with the Minister of Defence in an attempt to clarify the factors involved in approving or rejecting books for reading in Ketziot. In his letter of May 30, Minister Rabin tells Tzaban: "For well-known reasons of security, books are not allowed into facilities before they have undergone an appropriate security check to assure that no books which contain inflammatory materials get into the facility."
In the month of September 1989, 23 Palestinian residents of the territories were killed by Israeli security forces. Regarding 3 of the incidents the IDF Spokesperson told B'Tselem that it had not yet been clarified whether IDF soldiers were involved in the killing and that a military police investigation had been begun.

All the fatalities were due to bullet wounds.

6 of the dead this month are minors: 3 are 12 or younger and 3 are between the ages of 13-16. The percentage of fatalities among minors returned to the level of about 25 percent after a precipitous rise during the month of August.

More than half of the fatalities, 12 people, were killed in the week of September 10-16.

The extent of fatalities on the West Bank continues to be high, even though the number of fatalities in the Gaza Strip declined significantly during the past month relative to the previous months: 7 were killed in September in the Gaza Strip and 16 in the West Bank. In the months of March-August '89 the number of fatalities in the Gaza Strip was never lower than 10 per month.

In the districts of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and Jerusalem, where there were many fatalities during the month of August, no one was killed by security forces during the month of September.

9 people were killed in the city of Nablus, among them a boy and a girl, both aged 12 years old. This is a very high figure even for a city like Nablus, where the numbers of fatalities are amongst the highest in the territories.

The B'Tselem's data is based on field work, independent investigations, and official Israeli sources, as well as on the data of Palestinian human rights organizations such as PCHR and Al-Haq.