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# counterpunch

edited by alexander cockburn and jeffrey st.clair

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March 27, 2006

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March 25 / 26,  
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Alexander  
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March 27, 2006

## *The Shooting of Little Akaber*

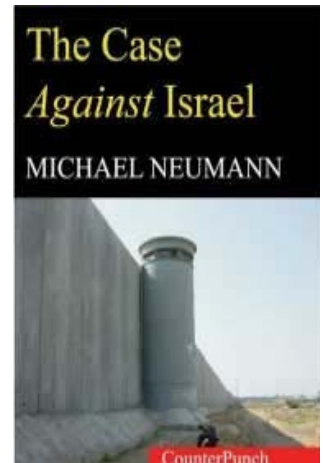
## Are We Done Killing Children, Yet?

By GIDEON LEVY

A bullet in the head from a distance of a few meters, fired

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suddenly and without warning shots aimed at the wheels, which the Israel Defense Forces claims there were. This is the way undercover soldiers from the Border Police killed Akaber Zaid, an eight-and-a-half year-old, who was on her way to the doctor, according to her uncle, who was with her and was also wounded.

Little Akaber was going to the doctor and he did indeed see her, but there was no longer a reason for him to do so. She had been on the way to have him remove stitches from her chin, but instead arrived dead at the same doctor's office, with her head smashed and her skull gaping.

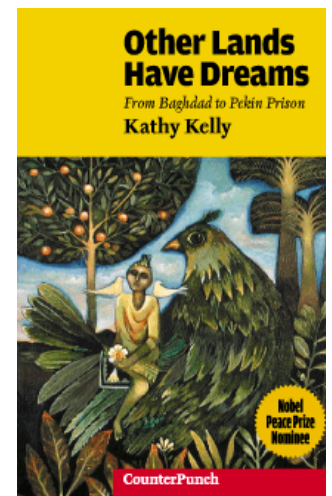
Soldiers from the Border Police's undercover unit, known by the Hebrew acronym Yamas, shot at her uncle's taxi at close range as he was parking the vehicle next to the doctor's office. All the soldiers' claims, as presented to the media by the IDF, to the effect that they had shot at the taxi's wheels in accordance with the "regulations for arresting a suspect," were nothing but lies, says the girl's uncle, who was sitting next to her.

The car was sprayed from the right and from behind with bullets, which entered through its windows. The shots were fired from just a few meters away, the uncle stresses, in the light of a street lamp.

We saw the taxi this week: All its wheels are intact. However,

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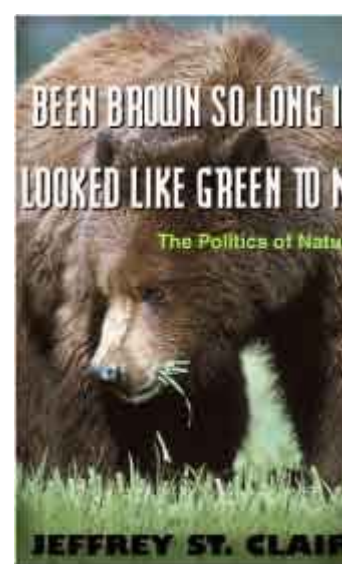
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those who carried out the "investigations" on behalf of the IDF and the Border Police did not even bother to examine the vehicle, or to question the man who had driven it. He was also wounded and is hospitalized.

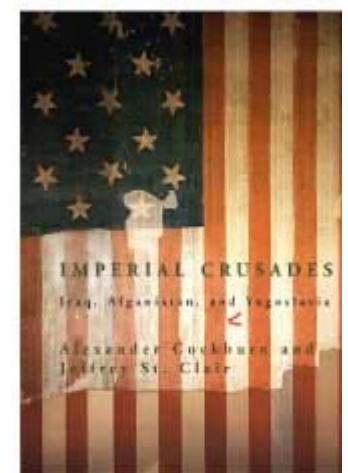
We also took testimony from him and could not find a single fact on the ground that contradicts what he reports: The undercover soldiers shot at the girl from two directions, from nearby and, the uncle says, without warning. No soldier with a gun, certainly not an expert sharpshooter from the Yamas, would aim at close range at wheels and hit someone in the head instead.

Down the road, hundreds of meters from the shooting, are the remaining signs of the destruction wreaked by the Border Police. Not one wanted man was detained, but a five-story apartment block was badly damaged and there are wrecks of cars that were completely crushed, one after the other, still standing in the street.

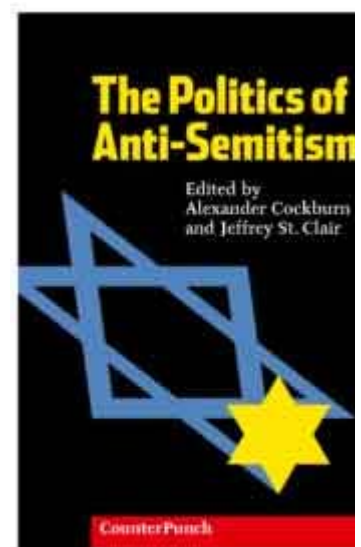
Why did the undercover soldiers shoot at a young girl? How could they dare claim they aimed at the wheels? Why did they have to shoot at innocent people in a taxi in the first place? Why did they wreak such havoc? Why did they crush vehicles that were the last source of income for their owners? What is the difference between this action on the soldiers' part and a terrorist attack? And why are these questions not being asked?



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The father did not accompany his daughter to Dr. Samara. He said he could not bear to see the doctor removing the stitches from her little chin. Akaber was a second-grade pupil from the village of Al-Yamoun, northwest of Jenin. In her picture from kindergarten, she can be seen wearing a square black graduation cap, like those worn by university graduates and people receiving doctorates. That is the custom in the Al-Yamoun kindergarten: The children who excel are photographed with the special hat. That is how she will remain in the collective consciousness of that town, whose sons once worked in Israel.

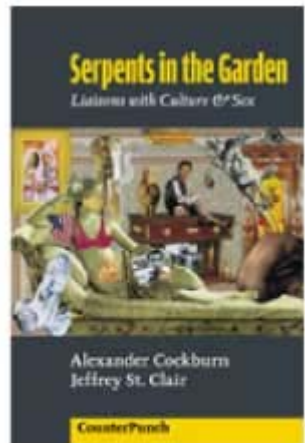
Akaber is not the first girl they are burying. How many children were killed in Al-Yamoun in the past few years? The school principal, who came to pay his condolences to the family, begins to list them, one by one, but stops suddenly and asks: "Why should I count them? Are we finished having our children killed?"

The father enters the mourners' room in the local council building, his eyes red with crying. Abdel Rahman Zaid, 31, the father of six, drives a commercial van that travels in the West Bank, when possible. About three weeks ago, Akaber fell on the stairs in her house and hurt her chin. Last Friday it was time to remove the stitches.

When Abdel Rahman returned



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Norman

from work, he asked his brother Kamal--a 27-year-old taxi driver, whom he calls Hamoudi--to go with Akaber to the doctor's house on the hill, where he has his office. It was Friday night, the last night of her life. His brother took the girl and she sat beside him in the passenger seat. The father stresses that the taxi's windows were transparent; there were no curtains covering them or hiding the passengers. Any soldier could see the occupants, any soldier from the Yamas could see that there was a small girl with a braid sitting there.

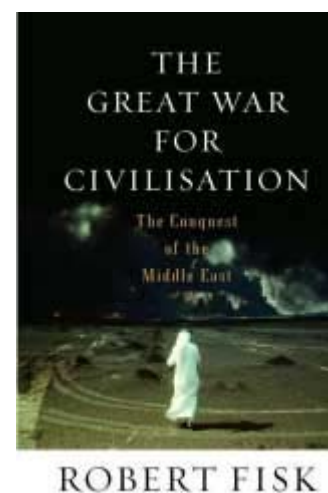
The two left for the doctor's and soon reached his street. From his bed in the government hospital in Jenin, his wounded hand in a bandage, Kamal relates that after parking, he suddenly noticed some soldiers to the right of the car. It is a narrow road and they were standing barely a few meters away. He says they began firing immediately, from the right and from behind. Only after that did he hear shouting in Hebrew, which he does not speak. Little Akaber was already lying on the seat with her head smashed.

Kamal lifted her up in his arms; the soldiers instructed him to leave her on the road. Thus, they remained on the road--the dead girl and her wounded uncle.

The Yamas soldiers ordered him to stand, to lift up his shirt and then to sit back down. They continued to shoot in the air, Kamal says. A neighbor took the



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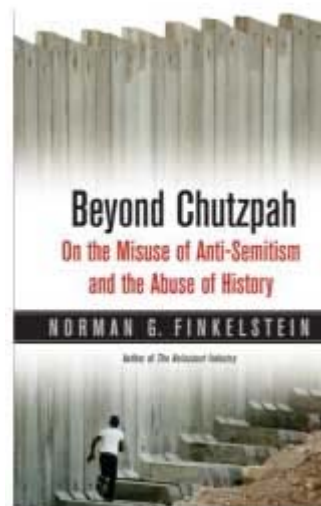
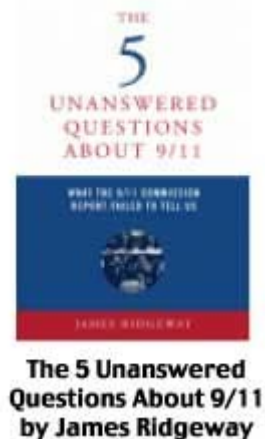
Juan Santos  
[Brown Skin, Yellow Star: Making Latinos](#)

girl to the doctor who was expecting her. From there she was taken to the hospital in Jenin where her death was confirmed.

The uncle's arm was bandaged on the spot and he was taken by military Jeep for interrogation. He says the soldiers beat him. There was a dog in the vehicle, who sniffed him, and a soldier called Raslan who, he says, hit him in the head when he spoke Arabic. Kamal took three bullets in the arm and leg. He says seven bullets hit the girl, three of them in her head.

The yellow Renault taxi tells the story: Its wheels are intact, but its body is riddled with bullet holes. The back window is shattered, and there are bullet holes in the back head rest and in its sides. There are blood stains everywhere, the blood of the dead girl and her wounded uncle. All this time, they hid her death from her father. Abdel Rahman had heard the shots--the doctor's office is not far from their house--but he never thought of his daughter somehow, only of his brother. He went to the doctor's office and there they told him that Akaber had been wounded. The doctor injected him with a sedative, and he says he did not wake up until morning. Only when he awoke and went home, at about 5 A.M., did his other brother break the bad news. His wife already knew: She heard the news on an Arabic-language TV station.

Through his tears, the father



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**March 21, 2006**

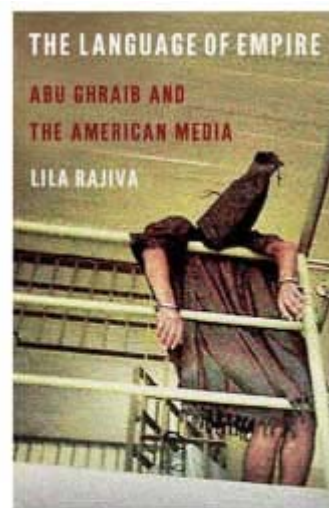
Paul Craig

wants to tell us something: The girl's mother, Ikram, was born in Israel. Akaber was also Israeli. She was born in a Nazareth hospital and has an Israeli birth certificate. She was buried in the Al-Yamoun cemetery on Saturday morning.

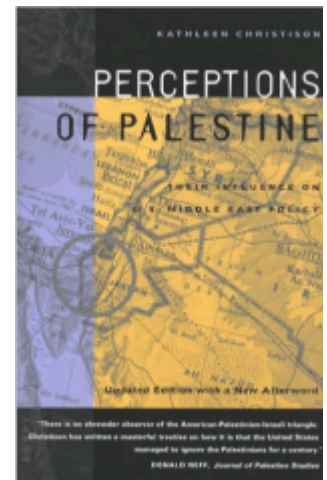
The IDF Spokesman: "On March 17, while a special forces unit of the Border Police was engaged in arresting wanted men in the village of Al-Yamoun, northwest of Jenin, the unit surrounded an area in which there was a suspicion that wanted men were hiding. During the operation, the force saw a taxi that seemed suspicious approaching the area and began the procedure of arresting a suspect. When it failed to heed the soldiers' calls, they opened fire in the direction of the taxi."

Does anyone think the uncle would not have heeded the calls to stop if indeed the soldiers had called out? The man was taking his little niece to the doctor. The army announced merely that "the IDF regrets harming the Palestinian girl and is conducting a comprehensive examination of the circumstances of the event."

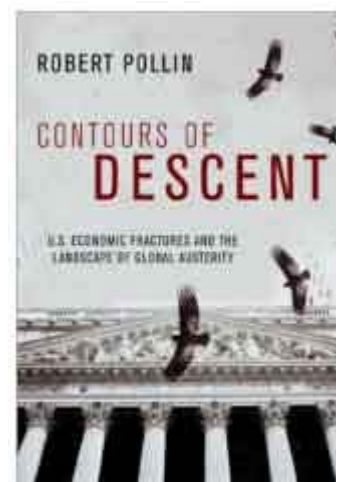
The scene of the destruction: A Palestinian bulldozer removed the wreckage next to the Zaid family's house on Sunday. A five-story building, which the soldiers suspected was housing wanted men, has been partially destroyed. The family members are now covering the huge holes in it with gray bricks, and its



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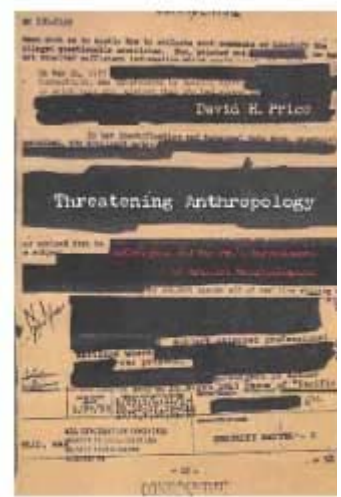
elegant columns are in danger of collapsing. In the yard below are the other wrecked cars: a yellow Mercedes taxi, a white Subaru, and another few pieces of metal that were once cars.

Mohammed Zaid, who owns one of the apartments, emerges from the debris: "This is the Jewish army--this is the bad Jewish army," shouts his uncle who is with him. Mohammed recalls that at about seven on Friday night, he saw another group of soldiers outside his grocery shop. They demanded that he tell all the residents to leave the building.

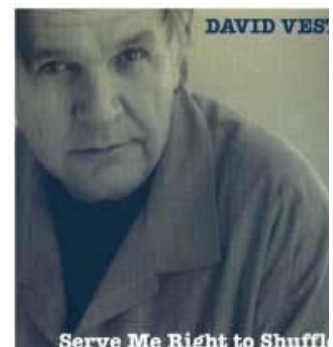
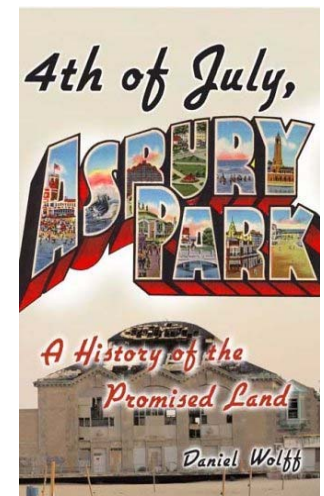
There are five large families--families of a lawyer, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher--living in the five stories. All the tenants went out into the street and had to wait there until morning--dozens of children, women and men--until the soldiers finished their work.

Mohammed says that the women and children acted as a barrier between the area where people were shooting at the soldiers, from one house, and the area where the Border Police was returning fire. When the building had been evacuated, they sent Mohammed to turn the lights on in all the rooms to see if someone was still there.

An IDF bulldozer was ready to tear the structure down. Mohammed says he suggested the soldiers accompany him to see that no one was left inside, but they shut him up, saying,



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"We know what work we have to do."

Around midnight, the bulldozer started tearing things down. The house across the street was also damaged.

Mohammed says he asked an officer: "Does Israeli law permit you to do this?" The officer said, according to Mohammed: "Go and complain at the UN."

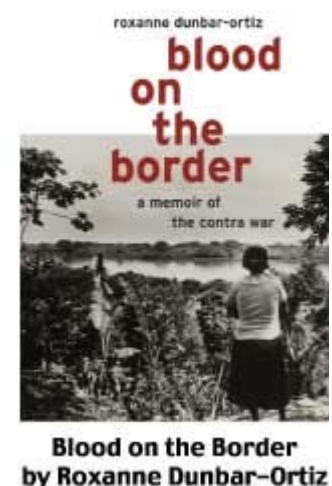
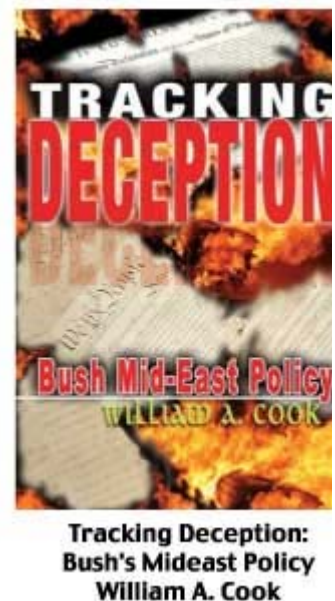
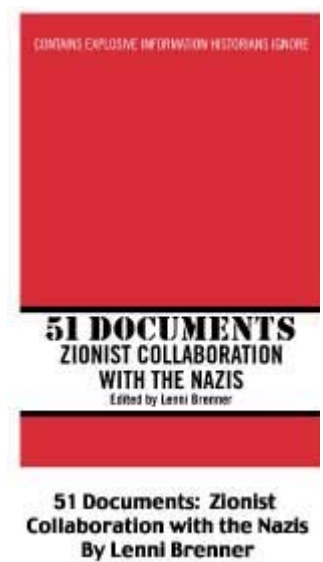
Mohammed's brother, a dentist, whose clinic was completely destroyed, tried to tell an officer that he was a doctor "for humans," and the officer replied: "Shut up."

Mohammed was taken for interrogation at the Salem facility and was released only on Saturday at noon. He says he told his interrogator: "On TV, you say you are a democracy." The interrogator replied: "Democracy is only for the TV."

Mohammed, a teacher, says: "I always tell my pupils that we like peace. What will I tell them now? That this is what peace looks like?"

We go to the top of the hill where Akaber was killed. A sign points the way to Dr. Samara's clinic. Someone has placed a row of little stones on the road where the taxi stood, to mark where the little body was. The bloodstains have not yet been wiped away.

From an old elections poster, Yasser Arafat's picture looks



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down on this makeshift memorial to Akaber.

Gideon Levy writes for *Ha'aretz*.

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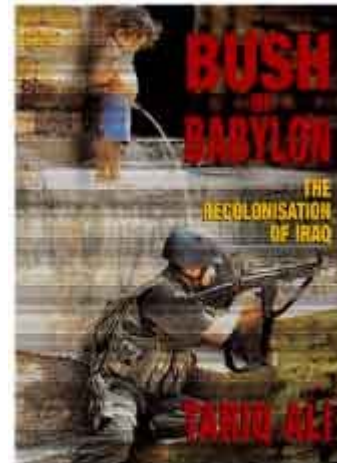
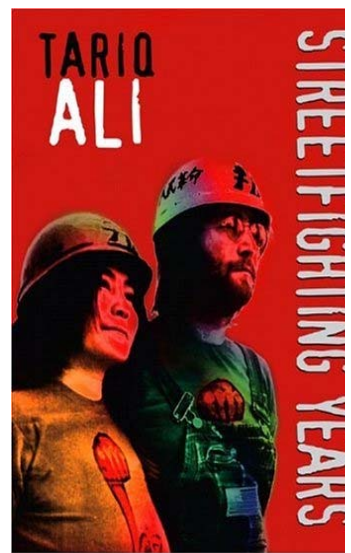
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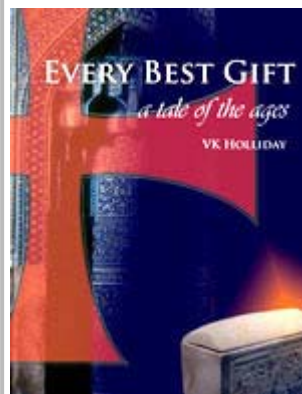


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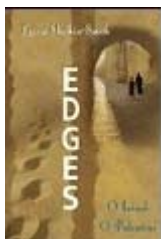
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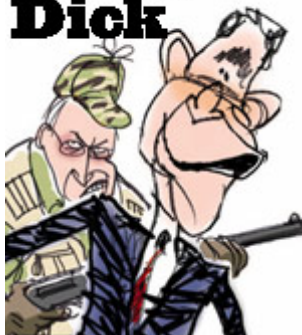
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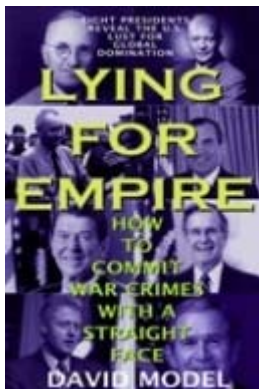
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