As of today’s date over 1000 Palestinians have died and 5000 have been injured in Israel’s strike on the Gaza strip (“More Than” 1). Many more will have forfeited their lives by the time this is read. It’s Sunday on this side of the world and day nineteen of the attacks. I’m sitting on the floor in front of my coffee table thumbing through several stacks of magazines and newspapers that I have every intention of reading but won’t. My road to hell is paved with unread periodicals. They clutter multiple surfaces throughout my home and gather dust as time passes, and on the rare occasion that I find the time I’ll skim the surface, reading mindless filler, cartoons, ads, and glance over the contents to remember why I’m saving it. Tonight is one of those rare occasions, I pick up a copy of The New York Times Magazine that I’ve been saving for an article on Castro’s Cuba, but instead stumble over something far more interesting.

As I open up to the first page I’m taken in by the image of a serpentine shoreline wet with receding ocean waves and a clear blue sky filled with the golden glow of the setting sun. I’m greeted by the words “You’ll love Israel from the first “Shalom.” In the foreground of an otherwise empty sandy beach is a stout man with an athletic build, forty or so, flanked by his two exuberant, blonde haired, running children. The man, whose name is Armour Kanzapolski, stands still in confident repose holding the top of a surf board wedged in the sand beside him. The tranquil city of Jaffa rests in the distance standing firm on stone foundations. The walls of
the city reflect the color of the sands and hold themselves low to the ground, with only the occasional spire or palm disrupting the cloudless skyline. The scene is perfection; I can smell the salted waters and feel the cool relief of evening breezes and the last rays of the setting sun on my face. This is a beautiful place for a beautiful family.

The ad encourages me and many others to come to Israel to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Tel Aviv (where Jaffa is located) by introducing to us photogenic Israelis such as Armour and his family against the backdrop of the Promised Land. The North American office of the Israel Ministry of Tourism, who is behind the ad, has just wrapped up its promotion of Israel’s 60th “birthday” and uses a verity of slogans as “Israel. Who knew?”; “Israel. Taking you higher.” And the highly problematic, featured in this ad, “Israel, no one belongs here more than you do.”

The latter is a powerfully ironic statement for the Israeli Ministry of Tourism to be touting, although I have my doubts on it being published in any Palestinian periodicals. Coming across this ad after perusing the pages of various publications displaying page after page of designer fragrances, uninterested skeletal models, and watches worth more than I care to know, I have to wonder what the difference is between trying to sell 17,000 dollar calf skin handbags during the worst global economic crisis to date and trying to sell the image of a peaceful Israel during mass bombings of the Gaza strip.

After the start of the 2000 intifada Israel’s four billion dollar tourism industry virtually collapsed (Mackie). Apparently people weren’t interested in seeing Calvary in flak jackets. In a
2007 interview Israel’s Tourism Commissioner for North and South America, Arie Sommer, shared with The New York Times the motivations behind the 11 million dollar campaign. According to Mr. Sommer it is felt that there is a “Changing perspective among Americans of the Israeli political situation. After the war last summer, we think the atmosphere has changed, people feel more comfortable, there’s an openness to listen to messages. This is the time to do the campaign” (Levere 1). This optimism and confidence is what helped the Ministry to set its lofty goal of doubling North American tourism by 2010. It’s safe to think Arie and his colleagues were expecting a little more time in-between wars.

In a land of holy promise polarized by faith, and a culture of victimization, escalation, and response one has to wonder if the Ministry truly believed that putting 11 million dollars into advertizing could ultimately change the perception of the decades long Palestinian/Israeli conflict, or was this simply meant as a distraction, smoke and mirrors, a song and dance, a band aid over a missing limb? Ethics and advertizing often make for strange bedfellows and the campaign in question is no exception. However, I do find the total and complete lack of regard for reality puzzling. We have moved far beyond the moral implications of the Marlboro man when a peaceful Israel could just as well be motor oil, toilet paper, or tampons, simply a product, something to sell.

My coffee is cold and I’m thinking about my mother, a Christian Zionist with a subscription to a news letter called Jews for Jesus who keeps the extra copies next to the toilet and shaloms everyone she sees. Does she feel sympathy when she watches the news? Does she laugh at the absurdity in private? I’d call and ask but I know she’s watching John Hagee now and I wouldn’t want to interrupt. My mind has wandered. I close the cover and toss the magazine
onto my coffee table next to my car keys, my cold cup of coffee and a stack of this week’s news papers with their rising death tolls bottom to top. The evening has passed and it’s later than I’d like it to be. My left leg has fallen asleep under the weight of my body and I’m well past starting time for my nightly rituals. It’s no wonder I can never get any reading done.
Works Cited


"More than 1,000 killed in Gaza." BBC News 14 01 2009 22 Jan 2009
