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Newtown, Te Whanganui-a-Tara

Essay by Milly Mitchell-Anyon

The photographs in this exhibition fundraiser at Drive-Thru are a collaboration between Te Whanganui-a-Tara artists Emily Hartley-Skudder and Pinky Fang. Pinky is an artist, designer, illustrator and activist – having co-created the Boycott Zine Aotearoa alongside collaborator Laura Robinson. Emily is a visual artist who works with mass-produced objects, focusing on cosmetics and hygiene products and the strange ways in which we attempt to control our bodies.

For Pinky and Emily, this project was borne out of the desire to maintain the momentum and keep people talking about Palestine, now over 300 days into the genocide. Every day we see updates about the atrocities being committed, because "the humanity of the Palestinians is made conditional on their suffering, on what they've lost, and what they endure."[1] Social media is awash with posts highlighting war crimes, human rights abuses and the ongoing genocide being committed by Israel. Sometimes it's hard to know what to do or how to contribute.

In the book *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (2009), political theorist Jodi Dean writes about activism fundamentally foreclosing as it enters the online realm.[2] The TLDR version of it is that social media is touted as offering 'quick easy universal democracy' where anyone can make their voice heard. Remember the black square profile pictures on Instagram in 2020? In this context, democracy is a marketable product to buy into. Whether this is purchasing the technology and the use of these platforms or where companies capture and sell your data. This 'convergence of media, neoliberalism and democracy is termed communicative capitalism.'[3] Putting it more bluntly, the best thing you can do is go out and do something. You can boycott, you can protest, and contribute in whatever tangible way you can to the emancipation of Palestine. As Dean reiterates, in a blog post that had her stood down from her duties: "Palestinians get sympathy but not emancipation; emancipation would eat away at sympathy."[4]

The series itself originally came about because of a collection of cosmetics and goods that Pinky's mum purchased at an Estate sale in Hastings in the 1970s. The point of origin for these products she collected was 'Palestine,' emblazoned on the labelling. Clearly dating it to pre-1948 after the 1947 UN Partition Plan (Resolution 181) was passed. Relics of a bygone era.

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[1] Jodi Dean, "Palestine speaks for everyone." *Verso*. Accessed: https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/palestine-speaks-for-everyone
[2] Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics*, Duke University Press: Durham, 2009.
[3] Jodi Dean, "Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics." *Cultural Politics*. Vol. 1, Issue 1, p 55.
[4] Dean, "Palestine speaks for everyone."

The estate sale was local Hastings man Simson David Joseph Cohen, who passed away in 1977. Cohen ran S.D.J. Cohen Manufacturers' Agent & Importer, which was a shop located at 102 Warren Street North in Hastings. Constructed in 1931, the shop started to appear in local paper The Hawke's Bay Tribune advertising their wares. The advertisement published by S.D.J. Cohen on 14 October 1933 states: "The Bible refers to Palestine as the land of milk and honey" and notes that Palestine is known for its agricultural prowess.[5] The land of milk and honey is a phrase that we learned in school. A token of nationalist pride synonymous with the colonisation of New Zealand. A great agricultural nation brimming with abundance, untapped and waiting to bust out as the global outpost of the British empire.

In the Israel Film Archive, the 1924 film 'The Land of Promise' (Dir. Yaackov Ben Dov) reiterates this same narrative for Palestine. It was a 'waste land' finally being put to good use. The survey and ploughing of the fields, the absence of indigenous people in the film propelled by the idea of *Terra Nullius* – that Palestine, much like Australia and New Zealand, was *nobody's land*. Naiomi Klein reiterates that Israel itself "became a doppelgänger of the colonial project, specifically settler colonialism."[6]

For S.D.J. Cohen, "Palestine products mean quality" because there was a certain "prestige" when it came to Palestinian manufacturers.[7] Pinky and Emily have been ruminating on this strange mash-up of the existence of Palestine as a place to be exported around the world. An article titled *Happy Palestine*, re-published by the Whanganui Chronicle in 1935 writes that "all pessimistic estimates of the economic possibilities of Palestine had been swept aside by the unparalleled progress the country had made..." After all, an economic base must exist for a nation to prosper.

Jewish historian Ilan Pappé writes about factories in Palestine employing both Israeli and Palestinian workers prior to the Nakba in 1948.[8] This is where these products in the photographs hail from. After 1948, Palestine has systematically been actively erased from history. This is why these products and the photographs accompanying them are so interesting. They transport us back to a period in time, trying desperately to be forgotten by the Zionist project.

For Pinky and Emily, the cosmetics that are "Made in Palestine" are a starting point to understand the capitalist dimensions of the conflict. Palestine is an area rich in natural resources; like gas, oil, water and arable land. It is the land of milk and honey, after all. Just as the ads in The Hawke's Bay Tribune stated – Palestine is the home to the best olive groves, orange orchards and grapes for wine in the world. It's the Garden of Eden, but the Palestinians were expelled for just living near the fruit trees.

The products in these photographs are mostly of toiletries. To cleanse is a daily ritual. Washing away the grime, the makeup, the sunscreen – is one of the daily rituals I take for granted. Actually, I loathe it. It's easy to forget as I'm reluctantly splashing my face and lathering cleanser into my skin that this routine activity in itself is an immense privilege. Access to safe and clean drinking water is a human right, in theory.

Refugee in the Jabalia camp, Amer Alian, talks about the current water crisis in Gaza: "How can an ordinary citizen live? He can't find food or water to drink like normal humans."[9] The United Nations have reported that many in Gaza are resorting to seawater for cooking and cleaning, despite the fact that raw sewage is being pumped into the ocean.[10] The impacts of this are, as Louise Wateridge of UNRWA for Palestinian refugees reiterates, that disease is "spreading everywhere" because of the "difficulties disposing of garbage, treating sewage and delivering clean water, as well as humanitarian aid and basic hygiene products."[11] No water. Let alone no deodorant, cold cream, or toothpaste. Toiletries are a luxury.

In April 1948, Operation Bi'ur Hametz (otherwise known as *Operation Cleansing the Leaven*) took place in Haifa. Bi'ur hametz is a Hebrew term referring to 'total cleansing.' It traditionally takes place the evening before the Passover, where flour is removed from people's homes. Operation Bi'ur Hametz also took place the evening before Passover in April 1948. Instead of Leaven, it was Palestinians being removed from their homes.

The photograph *PALORANGE PALESTINE FRUIT PRODUCTS (Orange Syrup)* of the orange syrup made in Haifa, sold in New Zealand by Hastings man S.D.J. Cohen imagines the time before Operation Bi'ur Hametz. But this historical trajectory is continuing today, as territory is increasingly being occupied by settlers. Using the visual language of advertisements and the tug of consumerism, Pinky and Emily are here to remind you that Palestine products actually mean *ceasefire now*. It's a line in the sand, a reminder that Palestine exists and will continue to exist.

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[5] Advertisement for S.D.J. Cohen Manufacturers' Agent & Importer, *The Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 14 October 1933.
[6] Originally from Naiomi Klein's *Doppelganger: A Trip Into the Mirror World* but two chapters pertaining to Israel and Palestine have been made publicly available here: https://naomiklein.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Israel-Palestine-and-the-Doppelganger-Effect.pdf
[7] Advertisement for S.D.J. Cohen Manufacturers' Agent & Importer, *The Hawke's Bay Tribune*, 13 October 1934.
[8] Pappé, Ilan, *The ethnic cleansing of Palestine*, Oneworld: Oxford, 2006.

[9] de Silva, "Clean Water Becomes an Increasingly Scarce Resource in Gaza amid Israeli Offensive," NBC News, July 18, 2024, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/israel-hamas-war-gaza-water-scarce-dehydration-warnings-unrwa-rcna162257.
[10] de Silva.
[11] de Silva.

EMILY'S NOTES ON THE VINTAGE BRANDS

SHEMEN

'Shemen' is the most commonly used word for oil in the Hebrew scriptures. It often appears in the marketing of cosmetic products in Israel – there's quite a few contemporary companies which include it in their name.

The Shemen that appears on these products refers to Shemen Industries Ltd., established in 1906. The idea of innovating and founding industry in Palestine has been attributed to a group of Hovevei Zion (Lovers of Zion) from Minsk, Russia. In 1903, Nahum Wilboshvitz (later known as Wilbosh), who headed the group, travelled to Palestine to check the possibilities of industrial development in the country: searching for energy sources, examining ways of improving and developing the traditional industries, mainly of oil and soap. The 'Hadid' factory, later known as 'Ben-Shemen', began operation by 1906. Shemen Industries put much effort into promoting and marketing the consumption of Palestine-turned-Israeli products, and was 'among the first factories which played a major part in building the country of Israel'.

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shemen_(bible)#References,
https://farkash-gallery.com/our-shop/1-vintage-israeli-posters/advertising-posters/vintage-israeli-palestine-sign-shemen-beauty-creams-1936/

TAYA PALESTINE COSMETICS

You'll find a couple of contemporary beauty brands using 'Taya' in their name. On a website of baby names, Taya is described as a 'sweet name for girls that has English and Hebrew origins. In the Modern Hebrew language and culture, the name Taya is an acronym for "Made in The Beautiful Land of Israel"'.

A man named Shimon Schestowitz, who served in the British army, emigrated to Palestine around 1945, following his parents who moved in 1935. Once there, he found a job as a salesman in the Taya Cosmetics Company. In 1954 he set out on his own, renting a small room on Nathanson Street in Haifa, buying a motorcycle with a sidecar, and selling cosmetics, combs, toothpaste throughout Haifa. This is when The Schestowitz Company was born, which today is one of Israel's leaders in the field of importing, marketing and distributing international brand-name consumer goods.

Sources: https://www.momjunction.com/baby-names/taya/, https://www.sch.co.il/en/about/

ORIENT CHEMICAL WORKS & SHOFMAN'S: made by ADIF Ltd.

While there isn't a huge amount to be found about Orient Chemical Works or Shofman's products, there was an Israeli politician and diplomat named Yosef Shofman who immigrated to Palestine in 1940, where he managed the ADIF Cosmetics factory, along with other companies. In 1946 he was elected chairman of the Palestine branch of the New Zionist Organization, and in the same year was arrested by the British authorities. In 1947 he travelled to South Africa as a Revisionist emissary. He served as a member of the Knesset for Herut and Gahal between 1955 and 1969, and as the country's ambassador to Venezuela between 1971 and 1974.

Is this the same 'Shofman' from *SHOFMAN'S SUDOFORM PERSPIRATION POWDER?* The signature 'S. Shofman' appears on one of the labels, so the presence of the 'S' complicates this theory. Was it named after him or a relative? Or is it just pure coincidence?

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yosef_Shofman