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Bad Apple



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Sama al Hamra

Reham Bastawi

Magical Murder Mystery

Nora Ziegler

The Daring Hate

Campaigners

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**Female belonging and
spiritual leadership**

Ghazal Tipu

This is my country

Ghazal Tipu

About us

We are Muslim and Christian women and non-binary activists based in London, Wales and Merseyside. We want to engage in conversations about faith and social justice organising. We are inspired by anarchist, queer, feminist, anti-ableist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist practices and schools of thought. We encourage dialectic thought that challenges the boundaries between the secular and the mystical, the political and the personal.

In these desperate times it's more important than ever that we sustain interfaith conversations and collaborations. We invite you to contribute ideas, artwork, poems, essays and stories on our themes of activism, spirituality or any of the themes of the zine. We are interested in collaborative writing and are happy to work with you to bring your writing into print.

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Sama al Hamra

Reham Bastawi

A stream of consciousness about the conflict in North Sudan¹

Loss...

Loss comes in many forms. For example, losing touch with a friend. This friend at some point in your history meant the world to you and as you grow and develop as individuals you find yourselves taking different paths. Sometimes, this happens naturally or is induced by conflict. Now let's say it was induced by conflict and not resolved. After some time, you begin to reflect on that relationship and a part of you misses their friendship (at least the good parts of it) and you wonder how they are, if they're happy, and do they still think about you the same way you think about them. You feel hurt by their absence but there is hope. Hope that maybe one day your paths will cross again. This time the conflict will be resolved, and you can go back to enjoying each other's company. Now that hope makes the pain of that loss a little less painful.

I lost my older brother Rayan in March 2023. He was not only my brother, but he was also a very dear friend to me. When he passed away, for the first time in my life I experienced another form of loss, a loss that is permanent. There is nothing to be said about a loss like this that argues against the fact it is objective, and no subjectivity can change the fact the person you love is gone. The pain does not lessen, acceptance is what changes. In this reality, hope does not have space when fantasising about paths crossing

one day, and, if you're a faithful person, hope only exists when you pray that one day you will be reunited in a different reality or afterlife. But for now, the density of loss will persist.

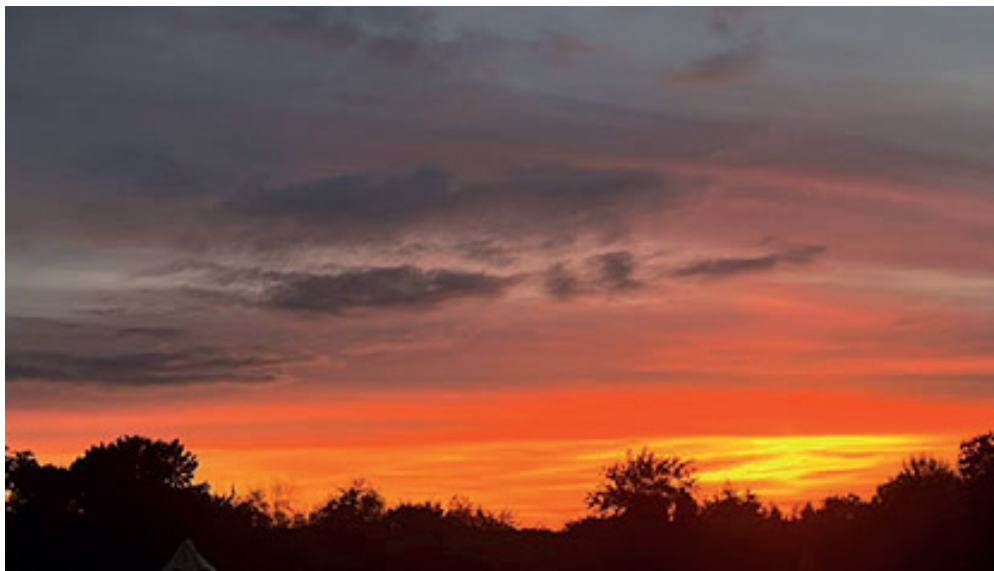
Home...

Just like Loss, Home can come in many forms. It is not necessarily just a location, or physical structure. It can be loved ones, community, smells, environment, sounds such as music and laughter, and a feeling of comfort and safety. Home is not singular; one can experience multiple homes which are unique and special in their own right.

Sudan...

Sudan is a home for me. My parents were born and raised in Khartoum. They moved to the UK in the nineties with ambitions for a better quality of life. They left their home to find a new home.

The home my parents created in the UK was a huge compromise. From the outside it looks like a normal British home but, as soon as you walked in you would be transported to Sudan. The smell of *bahkooor*², the bold red and black of the traditional Sudanese furniture, painted with specks of gold, made out of carved wood and upholstered with macrame, and art and pottery dotted all over makes our family home a home away from home. My parents maintained a strong Sudanese identity and were not too bothered to blend into the culture in the UK, or at least disassociate from the Sudanese heritage. So I lived in a funny paradox. Outside my home I was British,



Above: Sama al Hamra, The Red Sky **photo: Reham Bastawi**

but as soon as I stepped inside, I was Sudanese. Both cultures have played a role in who I am, and make up pivotal parts of my identity.

With the political climate and crisis that Sudan is in currently, I'm experiencing a loss of a home, and it feels permanent. War throughout history causes permanent change, and this change is usually a product of damage and destruction. The damage isn't strictly limited to infrastructure, houses, restaurants, and material things; the damage in my eyes also impacts the culture.

When I think about what is happening to Sudan and what has happened, I wonder about the culture. What will happen to it? Will it be able to stay the same? How much of it will we lose? Will we forget?

From spending time with my Sudanese community in the UK, and my family, while we all support each other and grieve the loss of our collective home, I begin to notice potential butterfly effects beginning to occur.

For example, my mother and her friends speak about how their stock of Sudanese herbs and spices that they brought in bulk from their last trip to Sudan is running low, and they're concerned about how they can make their daily meals.

It would be inconsiderate to suggest that they just make different recipes with ingredients they could easily source in the UK or elsewhere but that's not the point.

The point is, in these trying times, all they have from home are these traditional Sudanese meals. Amongst the clothing, bahkoor and songs, it's their way of keeping Sudan alive. It's their rebellion against the power-hungry war proprietors. It's their way of saying, 'They've bombed us, kicked us out of our homes, caused a mass displacement, inflicted many levels of violation and violence but they haven't taken our Sudanese spirit from us (the Sudan from within us).

[continued on page 14]

Magical Murder Mystery

Nora Ziegler

Exploring power dynamics in migrant solidarity organising

These are some initial reflections from my research with the London Catholic Worker, where I lived and worked as a volunteer for 5 years. Over the past year I have interviewed around 20 people who were involved with LCW as residents, volunteers and supporters. LCW is a volunteer-run house of hospitality that provides accommodation for refugees and migrants with no recourse to public funds.

The driving force behind my research has been a fairly simple question: what the hell happened? What happened to me, my health, and my relationships with other people? What happened to our collective? Why did we struggle to make decisions? Why did we struggle to look after each other or hold each other accountable? This is why I have described my research as a murder mystery, inspired by Elena Pagani³ who has used this term in her own militant research.

On the one hand, I want objective answers because what happened matters. Our lives and bodies matter and shouldn't be swept under the carpet of movement history. At the same time, I know this search will be frustrating and incomplete. Ultimately, healing and growth is about (re-)gaining confidence in my own subjective knowledge, my ability to engage with complex situations, as well as rebuilding relationships.

To understand and engage with complex power dynamics, we need structural lenses that examine the intersecting identities and oppressions at play, and subjective approaches that deal with our choices, desires, delusions, nightmares, and intentions. These different approaches both challenge and complement each other. We can only weave them together unevenly, haphazardly, but we can have fun with it too. Just because we can't know something on a rational level does not make it irrelevant. We have many more languages and tools for engaging with reality and using them is direct defiance and subversion of the monolingual dominating culture.

One such tool might be conspiracy theory. Erica Lagalisse⁴ interprets conspiracy theory as a 'voluntarist' account of power that can serve to highlight the agency of powerful people, which is why middle-class intellectuals feel so uncomfortable with this way of thinking. Of course, conspiracy theory can also work to distract from the systemic nature of racism, sexism, poverty, transphobia etc. However, it highlights something that is missing in systemic accounts of power and is therefore worth engaging with.

For example, although not a conspiracy theory in the traditional sense, the critique of 'white women tears' highlights the agency of individual white women in using vulnerability to manipulate people of colour. At the same time, this critique can be used to minimize white women's oppression, exaggerate their power, and reinforce the sexist trope of the devious woman making up stories of violence.

Anti-feminist backlash contributed to the popularity of the concept of white women tears, and yet that does not negate the valid criticism of white women it entails. Bringing systemic and voluntarist accounts of power into conversation enables a more nuanced understanding of how people can oppress and be oppressed at the same time.

In an essay about activist ethnography⁵, David Graeber speculates that the need, in horizontally organised groups and societies, to constantly put the best possible construction on other people's intentions in public, might explain people's obsession with secret evil motives and magical powers in such settings. This resonates with my experience at the Catholic Worker.

People would speculate about another person's dark past, and I also often worried what terrible secrets my house mates might be hiding. There were frequent accusations of sabotage, such as deliberate damage to people's belongings, or the fear that people with a shared ethnicity or religion were conspiring against other members of the community. In my interviews, the core group running the house was described as a 'secret society' by one person, and a 'shadowy group operating in the background' by another.

These patterns suggest to me that the LCW heavily relied on everybody, volunteers and residents, acting in good faith. This need to always trust other people's good intentions was difficult for all of us but would have been most difficult for residents who were the most vulnerable and had the least power. To help reduce this immense pressure on individuals, one could introduce more transparency and consistency. However, that alone doesn't solve the problem, because we also need room to be flexible and creative, to make exceptions. This

is why rituals such as shared meals and prayers play an important role, and addressing interpersonal conflicts so that they don't end up haunting us through dreams and paranoia.

Lagalissee argues that conspiracy theory can function as an 'allegorical index' of real forms of oppression. For example, she suggests that urban myths about organ theft can be seen as a metaphor for colonial extraction. I would add that the conspiracy theory is real in its own way, and not just a metaphor for something else. It speaks to an 'intensity'⁶ of experience that is lost in systemic explanations.

For example, a Christian anarchist group offered to give a public talk at the LCW about altruistic organ donations and we accepted. Years later I was told that some of the residents were terrified by the talk because they thought we might pressure them to donate their organs in exchange for the support they receive. This story gives a visceral and haunting sense of the power that volunteers had over the bodies of residents, and how this power was experienced.

There have been plenty of theoretical attempts, including my own, to combine subjective and structural accounts of power. They fail because power relations are relationships between complex and contradictory beings that cannot be reduced to theory. Theory is only one of many tools that we can use to get involved in concrete situations, to simultaneously try to understand and transform them.

'Intelligence springs neither from erudition nor cleverness, but rather from the capacity for involvement' (Colectivo Situaciones)

Nora is currently working on a book, doing care work and training as a local preacher in the Methodist church

The Daring Hate Campaigners

Rowshon Rumana

I say how dare!
They lie.
It is they who spy.
Yeah, they watch and stalk on me.
Then they lie.
They are the hate campaigners.
They hate me and want to frighten me.
The white midwife is particularly jealous.
Yeah.
She lies.

They were our neighbours in that beautiful,
little, old street, the quiet neighbourhood by the Estuary
where we moved during a politically difficult time,
when secularists were threatened with being cleansed from Bangladesh and
many were slaughtered in their homes by extremists.
My home country, my hometown,
Dhaka turned into a graveyard
of atheist writers.
I say how dare!

Protesting the murders of secularist
and atheist murders in my homeland,
I wrote a couple of opinions.
That was it.
Questioning the authority
for the brutal murders was seen as an offence.
Found myself listed on what they
called an extremist hitlist.
I say how dare!

The detective police worked jointly with the counter-terrorism police to find out what was happening, the source of the hitlist and the latter incidents. The detective who came to visit us advised us to move to a safer location. Just to be on the safe side, the detective advised us to keep an alarm at all times somewhere on the body, I felt so depressed.

It was just before the pandemic in late September 2019, when the couple moved into the building. Before them, we had four other neighbours who lived in the same flat on the ground floor. I swear nobody had ever reported having any issues with us before them.

The white, crafty midwife lies very well.
She knows what she is doing.
She is jealous and desperate to harm
and destroy our social life.
Her boyfriend watches me from the kitchen door.
The midwife knows it all.
She lets her partner watch, stalk and scare me.
They lie.
She wants to scare me, she says: 'she will be petrified'
I say how dare!

Rowshon Rumana is a Bangladeshi-born, anti-racist, feminist educator and climate justice activist.

Female belonging and spiritual leadership

Ghazal Tipu

The case for a women's mosque

It is common knowledge that a mosque is a man's space that he has carved as his own, spiritually and institutionally. There is often limited or no space for women to pray. It is no surprise that Muslim female campaigners have been calling for increased mosque space for women for some years. Earlier this year, the Open My Mosque campaign launched a report finding that 59 percent of respondents had female friends or family members unfairly or negatively treated in a mosque. There were also accounts of women being blocked from entering, including two who had been violently blocked from entering a mosque in London.

The prayer space is often adapted to meet a man's needs, particularly around the increased numbers of worshippers during Ramadan. Islam is pragmatic and provides women the option to pray at home. Indeed, this is part of the lofty station afforded to women as mothers.

The Prophet Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, famously said: 'Heaven lies at the feet of mothers'. But due to patriarchy, over two thousand years of Islam's evolution has resulted in women not being guaranteed a place at the mosque. This is not harmonious with the ethos of Islam.

It is often cited that praying in a mosque is mandatory for men and merely optional for women. This common attitude which shapes the male, Muslim psyche fails

to realise the potentialities for Muslim women in their full participation of mosque spiritual and civic life, as well as the benefits of a dedicated sacred space for women. Like a church, synagogue or gurdwara, a mosque is also more than a place of worship. It is full of institutional potentiality to serve the spiritual, emotional and practical needs of the Muslim community. The Easton Jamia Mosque in Bristol provides support and activity days for elderly women and men, while the Maryam Centre in East London provides a counselling service for women, to name a few examples.

More sophisticated mosques also connect with the social and political fabric such as faith groups, media, education, local government and civil society leaders. Since it is the Imam and the mosque committee – who are virtually always men – who represent the mosque, the female worshippers often do not have direct contact with their local civic leaders through their local mosque. This stunts their potential to represent their faith in British civic life.

One Ramadan, I visited my home town in Kent. The mosque invited local civic leaders to a community *iftar*. The male, local leaders gave a speech on the men's side, while the women, including a local policewoman and prospective parliamentary candidate had the opportunity to engage with the female worshippers within the female prayer space. While this was a positive initiative, it was disappointing that these two local female leaders were not provided a platform to give a speech to the female

and wider congregation, unlike their male counterparts. This would have role-modelled female leadership.

The way our environment is structured spatially constitutes our reality. Even the mosque architecture lends itself to women being othered. The *pièce de résistance* of the mosque is the dome that is positioned over the men's area on the ground floor. This dome is often the aesthetic centrepiece of the mosque. The women's section is often upstairs, at the back, or in a basement. The main section with its adornments is reserved for the men as if they are the main attraction.

These limitations for women suggest the need for a more radical provision, the founding of a women's only mosque in the UK. Such a mosque would be a place in which to gather unscathed, to feel a sense of belonging and to feel comfortable in your own skin as a Muslim woman. We need spaces for women to lead spiritually and to be visible to their congregation to facilitate organic interaction. In current mosque practice, the imam or speaker is the spiritual leader that a male member of the congregation can approach without fuss. The reality is that a woman will have to arrange to speak to the imam about a spiritual or pastoral matter. What would

be even better is a women's only mosque with a female imam who is available to engage with her congregation in the prayer space.

A women's only mosque has been realised before in Copenhagen, Los Angeles and throughout China's history. While we do not yet have such a mosque in the UK, the Inclusive Mosque Initiative which describes itself as an 'intersectional feminist mosque' is bridging some of the gap and re-imagines the mosque as a place that puts women's leadership front-and-centre as well as supporting queer Muslims. This initiative supports the training of female imams, provides a monthly Qur'an discussion group aimed primarily at women, non-binary and gender queer Muslims and provides regular prayer events online and in-person which practices Islam in an inclusive feminist environment, often led by women. It's a start.

Ghazal Tipu is a communications professional, writer, artist and recently gained an MA in Psychology. She lives in Cardiff.

**Below: women at a mosque in Cardiff
photo: Ghazal Tipu**



This is my country

Ghazal Tipu

This is my country.

Like the time the wards of Gravesend Hospital
Witnessed my warbles as a newborn babe
In '83.

This is my country.

Like the time I returned from holiday in Pakistan
And saw the green landscape on the Sussex motorway
Driving back from Gatwick Airport
Thinking: 'I'm happy to be home.'

This is my country.

Like the time I joined the grief of a nation as Lady Diana died far too early
And I saw Wills and Harry walk the procession, children, like me
And felt their pain.

This is my country

Like the time I was a student of 19 in London
Joining two million people, young, old, black, white and brown
from across the land

On the War on Iraq we said: 'Not in my name'
And we made a stand.

This is my country.

Like the time I witnessed Partygate, Grenfell, and the Post Office scandal
And every other damn case of cronyism, corruption and abuse
And thought: 'I hate this country.'

But this is my country to hate.

My chocolate skin has kissed the waters of Kenwood Ladies Pond,
and Penarth, and Oxwich Bay, and Brighton Beach and Margate,
My feet have traipsed and trodded and trundled across Dorset, Kent,
Bannau Brycheiniog, and Yr Wyddfa,
My feet leaving imprints of me.

This is my country.
Don't you see?
Where else would I go?
I think Pakistan would be a bit too hot, you know.

One day my body will return to the soil of this land,
My cells will merge with the dirt
And I will become one with these ancient lands.
This is my country.

Sama al Hamra, the Red Sky, by Reham Bastawi [continued from page 5]

'We will still cook our home dishes, sing our home song and dance our worries away together. We will stick together, and one day return to what is ours. Sudan isn't just land. The true Sudan is the culture, and the culture is in the people'.

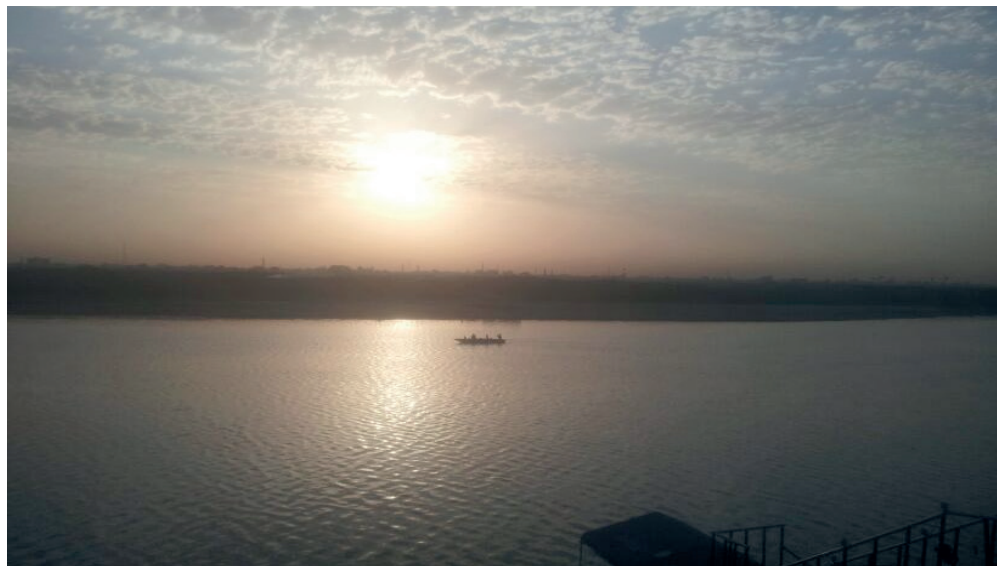
However, the sad thing is that these things that remind us of our culture are now becoming sentimental, no longer casual tools of daily life, and sentimentality is symbiotic with a fond memory. I fear that parts of our colourful and vibrant culture will remain a memory, and what if that memory is forgotten...?

Parts of the culture will remain alive in the displaced and orphaned peoples of Sudan, and other parts will be lost because it can only be experienced while in Sudan. Like going to sit under a shade tree by the River Nile and drinking a hot, mint tea to cool yourself down, sitting with friends, family and strangers while you chat, and people watch. That's

something I can only hope to experience again. Will I ever be able to visit my grandmother's neighbourhood where the doors to everyone's home are always open, and you're welcomed without an invite, you're guaranteed a decent feast and quality time with family, friends, and your neighbour.

I will miss the feeling that the culture reassures me I have a community, it's assumed even. Access to one is not complicated, and compassion is in abundance. Culture is made up of many elements, physical and spiritual, one isn't separate to the other. War has caused a loss of homes within my grandmother's neighbourhood, amongst other neighbourhoods. I've lost family members and neighbours. So have other Sudanese people who are surviving the war or who have managed to afford to evacuate. So even when the War is over, Sudan as I remember and love will not be the same because of this loss.

Reham Bastawi comes from a North Sudanese Muslim background, and grew up in Brighton and Khartoum. Currently based in Pembrokeshire, Wales.



Endnotes

1 Sama al Hamra: 'The Red Sky' is a Sudanese joke, used in reply to the question 'where are you going?'. It's funny because it's not possible to go to the red sky, and tells the other person to mind their own business. The red sky is beautiful but not reachable.

2 Bahkoor: is a type of incense, a loose mixture of sandal wood, oils, and herbs. .

3 Elena Pagani, 2022 'Organizing Equal Freedom: from Antagonism to Agonism' (PhD Thesis)

4 Elżbieta Drażkiewicz and Erica Lagalisie, 2023 'Conspiracy Theory, Modernity and Class Respectability'

5 David Graeber, 2005, 'The auto-ethnography that can never be and the activist ethnography that might be'

6 Colectivo Situaciones, 2004, 'Something More on Research Militancy: Footnotes on Procedures and (In)Decisions'

Images

Right: Jesus in solidarity with Palestine

photo: Amsterdam Catholic Worker

Left: The Nile in Sudan, **photo:** Rami

Bastawi

Back cover: Nora Ziegler: collage of materials from 2024 World Day of Prayer, 'Praying Palestinian Women' by Halima Aziz, with kind permission from **World Day of Prayer International Committee**

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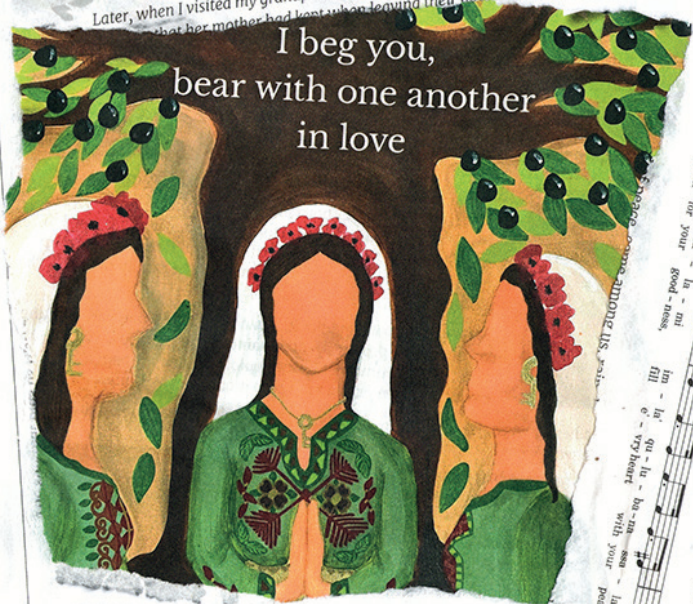
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My grandpa told us stories about his childhood and how he used to plant trees with his father. In fact, that's how we found the house! Everything had changed except for the trees which helped us to identify the place but, sadly, those living in the house were hostile to us.

Later, when I visited my grandparents in Jordan, my grandma showed me what her mother had lost when leaving their house. She, like many

I beg you,
bear with one another
in love



On 11 May 2022, Lina lost her Aunt Shireen, a famous journalist who was killed in Jenin. Aunt Shireen was like the branch of an olive tree, resisting the strong winds that threatened to erase the truth of Palestinian experience.

... Palestine lost a legend and a friend



Before the Day of Prayer

• Gather the following symbols of Palestine:

- Olive branches or leaves (fresh, dried or cut-out), olives, olive oil
- Olive trees are a sign of everlasting and abundant life as they can live for thousands of years. Some of the olive trees in Palestine today were there during the time of Jesus.