

**Army of Roses, Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers by Barbara Victor. Robinson 2004.

My Life is a Weapon – A Modern History of Suicide Bombing by Christoph Reuter. Princeton University Press 2004.

Growing up Palestinian, Israeli Occupation and the Intifada Generation by Laetitia Bucaille. Princeton University Press 2004.

Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict – A History with Documents – 5th Edition ed. Charles D Smith. Bedford/St Martins 2004.

The scale of the problems afflicting the Middle East in particular, and those engaged in moving it from violence to peace, and dictatorship to democracy, in general, is amply revealed in these four books.

Army of Roses, Barbara Victor's analysis of women suicide bombers in Israel-Palestine is a deeply disturbing account of blighted lives, torn by conflict and occupation, infected by religious bigotry and political polarisation; it is also a very human story of women who chose to end their lives in one of the most horrific ways imaginable, usually for a cause in which they believed but occasionally for other entirely separate reasons. Motivation aside, of course, the end result of a successful mission is always the same.

My Life is a Weapon, by Christoph Reuter, considers the phenomenon of suicide bombing in a slightly wider way, including the suicide battalions of the Iran-Iraq War, the various Middle Eastern Terrorist groups, the Japanese *kamikaze* and the Tamil Tigers who have used suicide bombing as a weapon for many years. It is a fascinating but depressing read, even though the author tries to discern hopeful changes in attitude, albeit in Iran.

Growing Up Palestinian by Laetitia Bucaille considers the lives of three young Palestinian militants, refracted through the lens of life in Gaza and the West Bank territories from the 1980s to the present. The general political situation in the region looms large, as does the conventional powerlessness felt by the protagonists towards Israel and its army, but the author does not spare the Palestinian authority from criticism for its failure to do more to ease the lot of otherwise blighted lives.

Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict is now in its fifth edition, and is probably one of the best one volume compendiums of information on the subject that one could ever need. Divided into twelve sections, it covers every dimension that one might think of, and several others besides, and concludes each section with key documents from the period and a chronology. This is a vital tool for those seeking to make sense of the present conflict in the Middle East.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh