

# *Failing Peace*

*Gaza and the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict*

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*In Memory of Edward W. Said*

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# *Preface*

## Humanism, scholarship and politics: writing on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict

. . . the writer's role is not free from difficult duties. By definition he cannot put himself today in the service of those who make history; he is at the service of those who suffer it . . . Not all the armies of tyranny with their millions of men will free him from his isolation, even and particularly if he falls into step with them. But the silence of the unknown prisoner, abandoned to humiliations at the other end of the world, is enough to draw the writer out of his exile, at least whenever, in the midst of the privileges of freedom, he manages not to forget that silence, and to transmit it in order to make it resound by means of his art.

Albert Camus, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech,  
December 10, 1957

When I started out to write this preface, I had planned an academic examination of the role of scholarship and politics in the presentation of politically charged issues. However, after months absorbed in the literature, I realized that such an examination had already been done and done exhaustively.<sup>1</sup> The core issue underlying the discussion—the intellectual's role in society—is a very old one with an extensive history of study and debate. A great deal of inconsistency, confusion and ambiguity surrounds the nature and activities of intellectuals and no one accepted definition of what an intellectual is or has to be. Not wanting to turn this preface into a literature review or summarizing report, I decided to go beyond such a review as it were, to take what I had learned from the literature and from my own two decades of experience working on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and combine it into a more personal reflection of certain themes, which have recurred in my work. These themes are: objectivity and partisanship, process, and dissent.

### On Objectivity

There is perhaps no issue that has been more contentious and unrelenting in my work than that of objectivity and its stated antithesis,



partisanship. Given the politically sensitive nature of my research, I have consistently been accused by those who disagree with my findings and analysis of being unobjective and unbalanced, that is, pro-Palestinian, anti-Israeli, a polemicist for the Palestinian “side,” even a self-hating Jew. The attacks often have been personal, directed at my alleged motives, rather than methodological or academic. According to some, the relationship between humanistic scholarship and politics in writing about the Middle East must be based upon an immutable (and to my knowledge, yet to be agreed upon) standard of objectivity, which mandates deference to balance, neutrality, impersonality, even indifference. In the absence of these criteria, the critique maintains, lies advocacy not scholarship, an argument that lies at the heart of the long debate on intellectual responsibility and how it is exercised.

Yet a review of the literature (both past and present), or at least a good part of it, reveals something quite different. It reveals an argument that calls for individual judgment and imagination in the conduct of research, exposes the insufficiency of detachment, objectivity and essentialism as exclusive moral goals, and embraces the subjective as an essential component in scholarship, rejecting what Northrop Frye refers to as the “naïve ferocity of abstraction.”<sup>2</sup>

The issue of objectivity as a utopia for scholarship is not a given, despite current protestations to the contrary. The great philosopher Theodor Adorno argued that truth cannot be found in the aggregate but in the subjective, on the individual’s consciousness, “on what could not be regimented in the totally administered society.”<sup>3</sup> The philosopher Stuart Hampshire echoed a similar sentiment when, writing during the Vietnam War, he decried the subordination of scholarship and critical analysis to society with a big “S,” which he said is often defined as “some giant boarding school in which we’re all required to prove ourselves as of sound character.”<sup>4</sup> The inevitable result of such intellectual subordination, said Northrop Frye, is a dystopia—“a society maimed through the systematic corruption of its intelligence, to the accompaniment of piped music.”<sup>5</sup> George Orwell perhaps put it best if not most eloquently when he said that uncritical and unthinking accommodation to the status quo in some false quest toward objectivity has the effect of giving “an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”<sup>6</sup>

These writers and many others do not dispute the importance of “detachment”—or a certain degree of it—as a “precondition for

knowledge,” to quote Frye but not to the point where one becomes indifferent to consequences and unable to engage in “a range of imaginative sympathy.”<sup>7</sup> For Frye, “indifference is the vice of detachment”<sup>8</sup> and its only corrective is concern, unrelieved concern, which “has nothing directly to do with the content of knowledge, but that it establishes the human context into which the knowledge fits, and to that extent informs it.”<sup>9</sup>

Commenting on the politics of censorship in American academia, the historian Joan Scott similarly stated:

[C]onflicts of values and ethics, as well as of interpretation, are part of the process of knowledge production; they inform it, drive it, trouble it. The commitments of scholars to ideas of justice, for example, are at the heart of many an important investigation in political theory, philosophy, and history; they cannot be suppressed as irrelevant “opinion.” And because such commitments cannot be separated from scholarship and teaching, there are mechanisms internal to academic life that monitor abuses, distinguishing between serious, responsible work and polemic, between teaching that aims to unsettle received opinion and teaching that is indoctrination.”<sup>10</sup>

For Edward Said, the intellectual’s contribution must be a “critical and relatively independent spirit and analysis and judgment . . . But whereas, we are right to bewail the disappearance of a consensus on what constitutes objectivity, we are not by the same token completely adrift in self-indulgent subjectivity.”<sup>11</sup>

Complete detachment and the struggle to achieve it, a struggle informed by “a moral concern that is unstained by any emotion traceable to an origin in personal history,”<sup>12</sup> is, ultimately, impossible as well as assailable for the “reconciliation of emotion and scientific objectivity need imply no ultimate sacrifice of objectivity.”<sup>13</sup> Again, quoting Hampshire, “My suggestion is rather that committed writing, and committed scholarship in the humanities, is always an imaginative working out of problems that are felt to be urgent, in some external, resisting material. The concern ultimately has its roots in an individual history, but the problem has been displaced and given an objective form.”<sup>14</sup>

If pure objectivity is unattainable and, as argued, undesirable, then to what should the scholar be committed? What should scholarship embrace as its final goal? Again, there is some consensus on the answer: the scholar must seek accuracy (or as some have defined it, a detached

point of reference) instead of objectivity, a requirement as essential in the humanistic and social sciences as it is in the natural sciences. An important corollary of this, of course, is the criticizing function of the intellectual—the critical sense of inquiry that seeks to break down stereotypes and reductive categories, which is the basis of his or her moral authority. This must always precede solidarity or what Julien Benda referred to as “the organization of collective passions”—national, political or ideological commitments. No one, in my view, embodies these values more than Noam Chomsky whose standards of accuracy and morality are unimpeachable.

The intellectual’s moral and political responsibility is a theme that pervades the discourse and it points to the unresolved tension between knowledge and power, between individual reasoning and collective allegiance, between scholarship (with assumed standards of objectivity) and ideology (with none at all?).<sup>15</sup> Given the virtual seamlessness between the public and political realms, can intellectuals ever truly be nonpolitical and should they be? Edward Said asks whether we as scholars must always depoliticize context as if we were trying to clear up an infection? He, like others (including Benda) before him, argues for the importance of passionate public engagement—by the desire for articulation over silence—that is informed by a commitment to principles (notably tolerance) and a willingness to confront those impregnable structures of belief and unmediated assertions that remain unchallenged and undiscussed.

Humanism, writes Said, “should be a form of disclosure, not of secrecy or religious illumination.”<sup>16</sup> And this disclosure is not meant to consolidate and affirm what we have always known but is a means of disarming it by making more information available to critical scrutiny, by presenting alternatives too often marginalized, thereby contesting our comprehension of reality, so long protected and inviolate. The danger lies not in taking a position but in doing so unthinkingly, mechanically, ritualistically, unconscious of the patterns of tyranny within us.<sup>17</sup>

The need for continuous questioning, demystification and testimony that is required of humanistic scholarship—particularly as the artificial demands for greater objectivity become more hysterical and irate—reflects certain problems that have always been central to my own experience with the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and writing about Israeli

occupation in particular. These include: the absence of a more accurate model of occupation; the “absence of a greater sense of abhorrence” to quote Gabriel Kolko, one based essentially on empathy with the sufferings of Palestinians rather than only Israelis; the ways in which policy—American and Israeli—has numbed or, perhaps more correctly, mutilated our understanding of reality, impoverishing and narrowing our vision, and the seeming impossibility of achieving an undomesticated, let alone commonly accepted representation of that reality.<sup>18</sup>

The disinterested pursuit of knowledge—that is, objectivity—in writing about the Palestinian–Israeli conflict aims, among other things, to create balance or equity where none in fact exists. Consequently, not only does the process of inquiry become severed from the local realities it is there to examine, it has the effect of displacing any kind of sustained attention to those realities and their damaging impact, to what is taking place before our eyes. Instead, the “need” to be objective results in ideological warfare and political gamesmanship where the stronger party, Israel, predominates. Within this paradigm, to borrow from Said, it becomes easy to denigrate, demonize and dehumanize Palestinians on presumably humanistic grounds.

This points to the kinds of choices intellectuals make when writing on the Palestinian–Israeli issue. Although there are many exceptions among whom I humbly include myself, the propensity is to reflect extant divisions rather than bridge them, to reproduce accepted orthodoxy rather than confront and possibly redirect it, to remain still rather than articulate a different way of thinking. In this way, the intellectual mainstream can (continue to) define and control the terms by which we understand the conflict and the boundaries of legitimate (and illegitimate) debate. To disengage from such public identifications or otherwise reject them violates a status quo that has long demanded and assumed our silence.

Intellectual transgressions have seldom gone unpunished. Punishment is typically in the form of an attack against one’s character, motives or academic rigor (within which the objectivity argument is often couched). I have always found the latter most disturbing although the easiest to address. Just as there is historical evidence that distinguishes history from legend, so there are natural facts that distinguish political repression and social injustice from polemic. Exposing the mechanisms

that govern such repression may not end or even mitigate the attacks but it does provide hard data that are difficult if not impossible to assail.

There are two important lessons here I have learned over time, particularly as it regards the issue of objectivity. The *first* is that every individual involved with the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, no matter the extent, has a position. Any claim to neutrality or, for that matter, objectivity, is, in my experience, nothing more than calculated indifference. The concern, however, should not be with the position but with how it was formed, how it evolved and on what it is based. The *second* lesson is that challenging the consensus is, by itself, insufficient and ineffective; doing so on rational, methodologically rigorous and evidentiary grounds, however, can be far more powerful—regrettably or not—than any moral argument. As Frye said, “It is fatally easy to name things that are not there.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Who Do I Represent?*

The gross lack of objectivity of which I am often accused involves, among others, the issue of who I represent. The common response, of course, is that I represent the Palestinian side as an advocate or polemicist. This answer, however, is incorrect and misleading for it reduces years of study, research and analysis to mere ideological positioning. I do not and have never represented the Palestinian point of view or some version of that viewpoint. I reject those expectations, no matter who articulates them, that would have me think, say and perform in a certain way, as if some external authority was directing me. In the end, I represent only myself and what I believe. My commitment is to accuracy—to representing the facts to the best of my ability—not neutrality or objectivity; neither is possible in any event. Neutrality is often a mask for siding with the status quo and objectivity—pure objectivity—does not exist and claiming it is dishonest. The commitment, fundamentally, is to be as close to knowledge as possible rather than to truth with a capital “T.”

The really difficult issue for any scholar involves the kinds of problems and questions we choose to address and our reasons for choosing them: Why do I do what I do and how is my work constructed? What is my starting point? Why do I look for the material I do? What does it mean to examine a certain kind of problem? What constitutes rational

evidence? What is justifiable to include that others exclude? What is a legitimate set of guiding principles on which to base my analysis? What is intolerable for people to think about and why? Who benefits from my work and who does not? Who is my natural constituency? What does my work reveal about my choices and priorities?

In committing oneself to a given issue, one is forced to confront the consciousness of what one really is and wishes to be. In representing something to their audience, Said argued, intellectuals also represent something to themselves. Who I am and what I represent and the basis of my work are deeply tied to my Holocaust background, which cannot help but transform how one looks at the world. The concerns that propel me are rooted in the belief that there is an essential humanity in all people. As a child of Holocaust survivors I have, throughout my life, experienced, insofar as I could, the meaning of lives extinguished, futures taken, histories silenced. Although my parents survived the horror and went on to live full and productive lives, they were never again who they once were or able to know the people whom they loved so much. There was always within them a reservoir of loneliness, a mournful longing that could never be resolved.

One of my greatest struggles as a child of survivors is how to remember those who perished. How do we speak of their lives—how do we celebrate those lives—beyond the carnage and destruction? How do we preserve and protect their identity as human beings while grieving for them? The themes of my life have always centered on the loss of humanity and its reclamation, and on its amazing resilience even in the face of unimaginable cruelty. That these themes would extend to my work with Palestinians and Israelis was not random.

Many of the people—both Jewish and not—who write about Palestinians fail to accept the fundamental humanity of the people they are writing about, a failing born of ignorance, fear and racism. The suffering inflicted on Palestinians directly by Israel and indirectly by the larger Jewish (and non-Jewish) community does not affect us, or our view of the world. Such willful blindness causes destruction of principle and destruction of people. Hence, if one of my greatest struggles is remembrance then one of my greatest fears is indifference and disinterest. Within the Jewish community especially, it has always been unacceptable to claim that Palestinians are like us, that they, too, possess an essential humanity and must be included within our

moral boundaries, ceasing to be “a kind of solution,” a useful, hostile “other.”<sup>20</sup> That any attempt at separation is artificial, an abstraction.

By refusing to embrace proximity over distance, we find ourselves living in a dissonant place, a dissonance borne of fear and uncertainty. Brian Klug states it thus: “[w]e do not honour the dead if, in memorialising them, we dishonour the living.”<sup>21</sup> Do we choose to be among “those who memorialize the dead in institutional and liturgical settings,” asks Marc Ellis, “or those who recognize and accompany the victims created in the shadow of the Holocaust?”<sup>22</sup> (See Chapter 3.) What is at stake in our continued representation of the other is the loss of our own humanity.

By reflecting on who we are and what we stand for, we are also engaged in a process of self-investigation, of judging and understanding our own behavior from viewpoints outside our own. If real detachment is possible and has a role it is in enabling us to see ourselves as others see us, using what Doris Lessing called the “other eye.” And a critical component of this lies in maintaining a living connection with the people whose problems we are trying to understand, experiencing with them the conditions of their lives, “tak[ing] into account the experience of subordination itself,”<sup>23</sup> making those connections that allow us to “unearth the forgotten”<sup>24</sup> and create linkages too often denied, helping us learn—“what to connect with, how, and how not.”<sup>25</sup>

At the core of this needed connection, writes Jacqueline Rose, lies a “plea for peoples, however much history has turned them into enemies, to enter into each other’s predicaments, to make what . . . [is] one of the hardest journeys of the mind.”<sup>26</sup> This was a crucial part of Said’s quest as a humanist and scholar, for it is only with such understanding of the other, especially perhaps a shared understanding of suffering and loss, that we can humanize him, allowing us to find and then embrace what joins and not what separates us.

Humanizing the other, who is often perceived as the enemy, is, in my view, a critical task of the humanist scholar but in order to do so one must hold to a universal and single standard of basic human justice (and of seeking knowledge) despite ethnic or nationalist affiliation. There can be no other way. If it is wrong to harm Israelis then it is just as wrong to harm Palestinians, Rwandans or Americans. Anything short of this requires a kind of ethical and intellectual contortion and inconsistency that has no place in humanistic scholarship. This is a

lesson I learned from a very young age from my mother and father: justice applied selectively is no longer justice but discrimination. Moral ambivalence ceases to be moral and becomes, inevitably, repression. The task, ultimately, of the humanist scholar is to universalize crisis, to give greater human scope to suffering and “to associate that experience with the sufferings of others.”<sup>27</sup> The challenge lies in this: “[H]ow to reconcile one’s identity and the actualities of one’s own culture, society, and history to the reality of other identities, cultures, peoples.”<sup>28</sup>

Conor Cruise O’Brien takes the lesson further, arguing that intellectuals must also pay attention to those parts of the world over which their societies have power, looking at their involvement elsewhere and what it created. He writes:

Professor Frye . . . has said that “the only abiding loyalty is one to mankind as a whole.” The principle is surely sound, though the expression in practice of “loyalty to mankind” is extremely difficult, since one’s conception of what is good for mankind is conditioned by one’s own culture, nationality and class, even when one speaks in terms of transcending such limitations. But if we are to move in the direction of a meaningful loyalty to mankind, the first step must be the realization of moral responsibility in relation to those regions over which our society has power—open economic and partly concealed political power. That is to say, if the intellectual community is going to be moral at all, its morality, whatever form it takes, must concern itself with those great and populous regions which live, to use Graham Greene’s words, “in the shadow of your great country.” On postulates of morality and responsibility, imaginations should be haunted by these regions and their peoples. On the same postulates, intellects should be preoccupied with their problems . . . .<sup>29</sup>

Yet, this is seldom the case. We are not haunted or preoccupied, seldom comparing our behavior to a moral norm. To the contrary, we fight hard for our known beliefs, refusing to change the pattern of our understanding and lacking the courage to confront a history that demands to be retold.

## On Process

What is the relationship between scholarship and everyday life, between the universal and the local? The scholar’s need for connection—for experiences actually lived through, for an association with people and their problems—that I described above is vital to our comprehension of



knowledge. I have always felt that if people “outside” knew, saw and lived—even in small part—what Palestinians do every day, they would be transformed and the boundaries between them would shift, creating possibilities that for now remain abstract. Thus, if it is authority’s role to obfuscate then it is the intellectual’s role to reveal, to challenge the dominant discourse by providing a different way of thinking about a given problem and introduce a different set of questions, to exercise “criticism in a society of submissive courtiers,”<sup>30</sup> making their work public and accessible. As Edward Shils often argued, the intellectual must be concerned with the “elaboration and development of alternative potentialities.”<sup>31</sup>

Being tied to a continuous and concrete experience in society means seeing realities as having evolved over time. It also means resisting the displacement of those realities into simple and rigid theoretical constructs. It is essential not only to see things as they are but how they came to be, and to show that they are not inevitable but conditional, the product of human choices that can be changed, even reversed.<sup>32</sup> If my research teaches anything, it is hopefully this—that Palestine’s economic de-development, for example, was not natural but imposed, that the growing violence within Palestinian society is not predetermined or inexorable but the logical and tragic result of unabated oppression. Thus, under the right conditions these problems can be resolved. By understanding how events occurred and why, they assume a history and rationale that defy static and reductive explanations, allowing, says Said, description (and explanation) to become transformation.

The kind of direct engagement I am calling for, one that situates the present in an unfolding and elaborative past, forces choices on the scholar he or she may be unwilling to embrace. Perhaps the most difficult involves choosing between inclusion and exclusion and their attendant consequences.

## On Dissent

Why is it so difficult, even impossible to accommodate Palestinians into the Jewish understanding of history? Why is there so little perceived need to question our own narrative (for want of a better word) and the one we have given others, preferring instead to embrace beliefs and

sentiments that remain inert? Why is it virtually mandatory among Jewish intellectuals to oppose racism, repression and injustice almost anywhere in the world and unacceptable—indeed, for some, an act of heresy—to oppose it when Israel is the oppressor? For many among us history and memory adhere to preclude reflection and tolerance, where “the enemy become, not people to be defeated, but embodiments of an idea to be exterminated.”<sup>33</sup>

“No,” wrote Doris Lessing, “I cannot imagine any nation—or not for long—teaching its citizens to become individuals able to resist group pressures.”<sup>34</sup> Yet, there are always individuals who do, and the role of dissent is another important theme in my work. Within the Jewish tradition (but by no means exclusive to it), dissent and argument are old and revered values—deeply embedded in Jewish life be it religious or secular, political or Talmudist<sup>35</sup>—but like any tradition, less valued—at times, vilified—when the dissenter stands out against his own group, against what Hannah Arendt called their organic sense of history. For those of us who challenge those assumptions so sacred and silenced by the group, we are often disqualified as marginal and traitorous, existing outside the boundaries of legitimacy and influence.

For me being an outsider from within means speaking with an unclaimed voice, beyond what we as a people have been given and educated to see, but very much from within our own tradition. “We belong to something before we are anything,” wrote Frye, “nor does growing in being diminish the link of belonging.”<sup>36</sup> Being a part of the Jewish community does not mean accepting—often uncritically—the social laws that govern us, the self-perception of our members or the collective “we.” It does mean situating oneself within a cultural value system and choosing ethical consistency over collective engagement, exposure over concealment.

In one of his last works, Edward Said wrote that the “intellectual is perhaps a kind of countermemory, with its own counterdiscourse that will not allow conscience to look away or fall asleep. The best corrective . . . is to imagine the person whom you are discussing—in this case the person on whom the bombs will fall—reading you in your presence.”<sup>37</sup>

How morally tenuous is our condition? Have we become brutal and desensitized? My mother was not shy about saying that we as a people must fight against our own savagery and struggle to maintain our moral

center. Having suffered great horrors does not assure us of that center but can just as easily dissolve it. The difference between maintaining our humanity and abandoning it is often slight, and ultimately lies in remaining faithful to our ethics rather than to ourselves.

### A Concluding Thought

In the end, who we are and what we offer is often rooted in the people with whom we have lived our lives. For me there is no question of my parents' precedent and impact, especially my mother's. There are so many stories, memories and moments I could point to describing this woman's profound example but I will end this reflection with just two. These stories are from the Holocaust and were told to me not by my mother but by her sister Frania with whom she survived the war (see Chapter 2).

One story that my aunt Frania has always insisted on telling me took place when she and my mother were in the Auschwitz concentration camp:

Whereas I was the stronger in the ghetto and took care of Tobka [my aunt's name for my mother], your mother helped me survive in Auschwitz. Without her I would have died. She saved me because she hoarded and rationed our food, our few pieces of bread, spreading it out over time so that I had something to eat each day. Had it been up to me, I would have eaten it all at once and starved. Your mother also gave me her bread, sometimes part of it, sometimes all of it, which I ate as I cried. Do you know what this meant, to give up your bread to another under such horrible circumstances? Bread was life. People beat each other for it and some were killed for it. Mothers would steal from children and children from mothers, sisters from sisters and so on. In the midst of all this horror and shame your mother gave me her bread, an act of selflessness that I shall never forget. Of course I love her deeply but there is no person in my life for whom I have more respect and admiration.

In another story, Frania describes how she and my mother were standing in a line outside their barracks in Aushwitz:

I turned to Tobka and said, "Let's start to run and they will shoot us. It will be quick and all of this will be over." Frania says my mother refused not out of fear but out of conviction and determination. "There is plenty of time to die," she said to my aunt, "let us concentrate on living. If we must die then let them kill us but we will not kill ourselves." She then held

my aunt by the arms and said, “Whenever we are in a line together you must always stand in front of me, never behind. I will always follow you no matter where you go, even to death. I will not leave you. We shall survive together or we shall die together. You will never be alone.”

Each of us is responsible for how we live our lives and the kind of society we want to create. My mother was a remarkable human being and she left me an equally remarkable legacy, one I have always tried to honor. She and my father both are written into every word of this book.

# *Introduction*

AS THE PREFACE TO THIS book has hopefully shown, I have always been greatly impacted by the tradition of intellectual humanism—the belief that knowledge should improve humanity at the universal level. The purpose of scholarship, therefore, is to inform. The purpose of politics is to develop and implement public policy based on the knowledge provided. This relationship between scholarship and public policy, especially in the area of foreign policy, is rarely achieved. More often than not power politics produces the “scholarship” it needs to legitimize itself. Given my commitment to the tradition of intellectual humanism, I offer my life’s work to date as a way of addressing the disconnect between scholarship—as I define it—and politics.

This book—a compilation of my selected works—represents 20 years of research, fieldwork and analysis on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and the impact and strategic consequences of Israeli occupation on the Palestinian economy, society and polity. The focus of my work has been on the Gaza Strip, an area consistently neglected by both Western and Arab scholars, particularly before the start of the Middle East peace process, and an area that remains painfully mischaracterized and misunderstood despite its political centrality. This book is a chronicling of what I have learned and observed over two decades, much of it living and working in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. It is my attempt to contribute to knowledge on this issue in a way that challenges and often refutes the dominant discourse through a combination of rigorous scholarship and first-hand experience.

The core of the book can perhaps best be understood as an example of humanity weakened. Israel’s occupation of the Palestinians, now almost four decades old (and among the world’s longest), has, without question, resulted in the systematic incapacitation—and now,

decimation—of the Palestinian economy, and in the slow but consistent decline of its society, a process that I first defined as “de-development” in my earliest writings (a concept that has since gained wide use and currency in the literature on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict). De-development refers to a process that undermines the ability of an economy to grow and expand by preventing it from accessing and utilizing critical inputs needed to promote internal growth beyond a specific structural level. Unlike underdevelopment, which may distort but not forestall development entirely, de-development precludes, over the long term, the possibility of any kind of developmental process, even a disarticulated one, by destroying the economy’s capacity to produce. In Gaza, the de-development of the economic sector during the first two decades of Israeli rule transformed that economy into an auxiliary of the state of Israel. The social ramifications of de-development have similarly been devastating and in the selections chosen for this book are examined in detail over two decades. Today, given the massive destruction of its economic base over the last five years in particular, some analysts question whether an economy—as opposed to a set of economic activities—still exists in Gaza.

In my early writings I was primarily concerned with the economic impact of Israel’s then 20-year occupation on the Gaza Strip because it was the economy that so starkly and unsparingly illustrated the profound inequities that form the structural and philosophical core of occupation policy. My initial focus on the economy stemmed from the profound shock and confusion I felt when I first lived in Gaza. The chasm between what I had been taught and what I actually encountered in Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians stunned me. As an American Jew growing up in the 1960s and 1970s and educated in elite schools, I was told—often implicitly—to believe in and never question Israeli beneficence and morality and Arab incompetence and incivility. Although my parents taught me to think critically and often provided some needed balance, the intellectual and political weight of the times was difficult to cast aside. There was simply no context for speaking critically about Israel or sympathetically about Arabs, who were forbidden—as we were—to embrace the word “Palestine” or “Palestinian.”

Although I had visited Israel many times during my childhood, my first trip to the West Bank and Gaza occurred in the summer of 1985.

I traveled there (against the wishes of my Israeli family) to conduct fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation, which examined an American program of bilateral economic assistance to the Palestinians. My thesis asked whether economic development was possible under conditions of military occupation and my search for an answer immersed me in a reality, indeed, a world, I was wholly unaware of and unprepared for. As a well-trained graduate student I felt I had an understanding of the political complexities of the area, the actors involved, their histories, and the many arguments and sides of the conflict. I went, I believed, with a critical but open mind, prepared for anything. I was wrong. Those first months in the West Bank and Gaza Strip changed my life as my personal essay in Chapter 2 explains in greater detail.

I distinctly remember the day I first entered Gaza. I had been in the West Bank for some time and had acquired some familiarity with the people and the region and felt comfortable living there despite the harshness of the occupation. However, the thought of living in the Gaza Strip made me nervous, even scared. I had heard terrible and frightening stories about Gaza and its people, especially from my Israeli friends. I remember one U.N. official telling me that there were never more than 35 foreign visitors in Gaza at any one time (excluding those who worked for international organizations) because it was so inhospitable a place. I have no idea where he got that information or really, what it meant, but it did not ease my anxiety. Much was weighted against Gaza despite my best efforts to remain “open” and “objective.”

I was taken to the Marna House, which was then one of only two hotels in the area and, I was told, the best (I read: safest) place for foreigners to stay. It was managed by Alya al-Shawwa, who belonged to one of Gaza’s oldest and wealthiest families and who would become my dearest friend. Alya welcomed me but clearly viewed me with some suspicion. After all, why would an American be visiting Gaza? The implicit answer was obvious. And when she learned I was Jewish her concern (and my anxiety) grew. In those days prior to the first Palestinian uprising, one of the first questions I was often asked by Gazans (but not West Bankers) was “are you a Christian?” I never lied and told everyone who asked that I was a Jew. To my surprise, it was not fear or anger I typically encountered when people learned I was Jewish but shock, suspicion, some confusion and considerable curiosity. I took advantage of their curiosity and my somewhat unique status to

begin a discussion of why I was there, explaining that I had come to Gaza to learn about its economy, people, society and history, and about military occupation and how it affects their lives. I thought it would take a long time to gain their trust but again I was wrong.

Within one week of arriving in Gaza, I was immersed in local life in a manner I could not possibly have foreseen, taken from one end of the Strip to the other by people I barely knew (but whom Alya initially vetted), entering areas seldom (if ever) seen by foreigners, helped by people whose support and encouragement would have been inconceivable to me just days before. (Many of those same people would later risk their lives to help me collect data during the first Palestinian uprising.) I was invited into homes, both rich and poor, where no request was too great or question too burdensome. (The Israeli authorities also did nothing to interfere with my research.) Not only did my being a Jew cease to be a source of concern, it actually became an asset.

Although I could not possibly know it at the time, that summer set the stage for the next two decades of my life. The injustice of the occupation and the inability of Palestinians to defend themselves against it affected me deeply. My research among them was not only a matter of scholarship—it went to the core of who I was, where I came from, the meaning of my Judaism, my identity as a child of Holocaust survivors, my relationship with Israel and the nature and purpose of my work.

One of the most troubling and frightening aspects of the occupation during my initial encounter with it—and something that has only recently changed—was its mundane, prosaic nature. For Palestinians, occupation was *the* ordinary—a way of life that had to be lived defensively without recourse or appeal, without protection or choice, largely absent of accountability, predictability, rationality or control. Furthermore, the distortion of Palestinian life remained unquestioned by those beyond it, for whom the realities of occupation were wholly unknown. What was for Palestinians a narrative of crisis, of territorial dispossession and displacement, was for others an example of benign and legitimate control. It is this absence of context and its continued mystification that my research has sought to redress.

In rereading the material selected for this book I realize that the underlying impulse of my work has always been toward society—



women, children, men, families, neighborhoods, communities—and occupation’s destructive impact on them, a topic that has received far too little attention in the literature on the conflict. The selections as a whole reveal certain themes that clearly have society at its heart: the dehumanization of Palestinians and Israelis and its ravaging effects; the traumatization of children and the denial of youth; the etiology of violence in the Palestinian context and the radicalization of society (born of continued and strengthened Israeli domination, economic and social decline, institutional fragmentation, lack of political leadership and the erosion of political trust and the options that attend them); the relationship between economic incapacity, political economy, the emergence of political and social movements, social fracture, a weakening civil society, political violence and the (im)possibility of political reform; the loss of ideology and creativity within society and its consequences; the nature and processes of internal dissolution, especially the withering of the community and communal relations, and the transformation of structures into constituencies and its impact on political and social order.

Other themes embrace the unchanged imperatives of Israeli control—to restrict and delimit the development of a Palestinian economy and create a template for continued dependency, weakness and control; and preclude the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state and dismember the Palestinian people and weaken if not destroy their national and cultural character—and their impact on an already weakened society, which struggles to remain whole and humane; the emergence of Palestinian political and social movements, notably the rise of the Islamic and Islamist movements and their role within Palestinian society, and the varied nature—political, social and economic—of their resistance; the consistent failure of the Palestinian leadership and its damaging effect on society, and the inevitable failure of the peace process and subsequent initiatives.

Today, solutions to the conflict are framed by the values of political realism and not by those of history. Solutions of this sort—for example, the Oslo peace process, the American “road map” for peace, and Israel’s disengagement from Gaza—attempt to address “what is” rather than “why it is.” By so ignoring root causes, such ahistorical approaches have failed and will continue to fail. The works selected for this volume collectively, cumulatively and systematically build a

context for understanding Palestinian life under Israeli occupation over time. This context is not widely known or understood, having escaped formulation and notice, and it explains, among other things, why peace has continually eluded.

In this collection I not only chronicle Palestinian socioeconomic decline as seen largely, but not exclusively in Gaza, but predict this decline and many of its now-realized outcomes in a manner that consistently challenged accepted belief at the time. I say this at the risk of appearing arrogant—I claim no exceptional intellectual qualities or powers of prophecy. What I do claim is considerable experience living with Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and observing the deleterious impact of Israeli occupation on them over nearly a generation. With this understanding, the ability to predict outcomes is largely a matter of basic humanity and common sense.

One of the questions guiding my work is “how is society possible?”—a question posed by Georg Simmel and in so many different ways by earlier philosophers as well. This question is important because it directs our attention to the economic, political and communal networks and cultural values and norms that allow a people to rely on expected and accountable behaviors. People who live under occupation or other repressive forms of power experience the weakening of the societal foundation, for they cannot rely on what is normal, rational or predictable. The imposed structure may generate reactions that lead to social breakdown and reactive social movements. Hence, I ask “Why does society become distorted and how does this distortion take place? How can society be repaired?” A key objective of this collection, therefore, is not only to provide new answers to questions long posed but also to raise questions that have for too long remained unasked.

The book is divided into five remaining parts, each of which contains selected articles chosen according to a specific theme, with the themes organized chronologically. Each part begins with an introductory essay summarizing the content of the articles and explaining the context within which they were written. Part I, “Learning from the Holocaust and the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict”, begins with a reflective essay that situates my personal history as a child of Holocaust survivors in the work I do, and how and why I came to do it. With this essay, written in 2002, I address, for the first time in my work, Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians from a Jewish ethical perspective and argue that this

tradition, so central to Jewish life, is becoming increasingly inaccessible. My review of Marc Ellis's critically important writings expands on this theme. My decision to begin with the personal, something I had always omitted from my work and writing, represents a closing of the circle as it were.

Part II follows with "Israel's Military Occupation and the First Palestinian Intifada: The Nature of Israeli Control" and discusses the concept of de-development and the damaging ways in which it affected and shaped Palestinian economy and society. This is seen largely through the lens of the first Intifada (1987–93) and its truly damaging impact on Gaza's economic and political structure, the individual and community, and civil society and women in particular.

"Israeli Occupation and the Oslo Peace Process: De-development Accelerated" is the title of Part III, which examines the period of the Middle East peace process (1993–2000) and the ways in which Palestinian society and economy were changed by it. Contrary to accepted belief, the Oslo process did considerable damage to Palestinian life and introduced new and pernicious realities—economic, political and social—that set the stage for future and devastating Palestinian decline, effectively precluding any possibility for meaningful reform. This Part also looks critically at the role of the Islamic movement in Gaza, arguing for its variety and complexity, and further examines the important transformations that took place within the movement during the Oslo period.

Part IV is titled "The Failure of 'Peace' and its Consequences: The Second Palestinian Intifada" (2000–) and posits the inevitability of Oslo's failure. This is followed by a more detailed discussion of the ways in which the peace process (contrary to all prediction and expectation) further weakened and, in effect, undermined the Palestinian economy and reconfigured Palestinian social structure. Part V concludes the book by asking "Where Next?" and reflects on whether Israel's highly praised disengagement from Gaza really represents a new possibility for peace.

It is my wish that the pieces assembled here will provide some insight into the development of modern Palestine, its multiple and diverse dimensions, its socioeconomic and socio-political actuality, and above all, its dynamic and undefeated people.



*Part I*

*Learning from the Holocaust and  
the Palestinian–Israeli conflict*



# 1

## *Introduction to Part I*

THE TWO PIECES CONTAINED IN Part I represent, in a certain sense, the culmination of my work, for they explore ideas and questions that for almost two decades I was unwilling to write about but which emanated from, and deeply shaped, who I was and the nature and purpose of my work. It could not have been otherwise. For me there was a natural connection and intersection between my personal history as a child of Holocaust survivors and my work on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, a linkage that did not represent a departure from my Holocaust background as others have argued, but a logical and unbreakable extension of it.

I should say that my unwillingness to examine these ideas in writing stemmed from a strong belief that my work should not be about me but about the issues I was researching and the questions I was trying to raise. But the time did come to look inward and write about it, and it began with an invitation from Professor Marc Ellis to give the second annual Holocaust Memorial Lecture at Baylor University in Texas in 2002. It was this lecture that became the first essay in Part I, and at its heart lies a plea, a counsel of dissent, that looks at the distortion of the Jewish ethical tradition and the particularization of Jewish conscience and moral sensibility by Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

The second essay is a review of three books by Marc Ellis—one of the most courageous and powerful Jewish religious thinkers of our time—in which some of the themes I examine in my own essay are more deeply explored, and new ones raised. Marc asks some desperately needed questions: What does it mean to be Jewish and free after the Holocaust and within a Jewish state that is empowered? What is the

meaning of memorialization without justice, and (Jewish) celebration in the context of (Palestinian) oppression? How does one affirm and remain faithful to a tradition that grows increasingly misshapen and alien? What are we as a people seeking: empowerment or renewal?

Today—and here I borrow from my review of Marc’s work—renewal and injustice are silently joined, and in their joining Jews also are denied a normal life, something they have not yet found in Israel. As the British scholar Jacqueline Rose has said, exultation does not dispel fear. How then do we as a people move forward and create meaning? For some Jews this meaning is now found in a personal narrative that is slowly shifting from identification with a strong, militarized state to one that embraces a history of displacement and loss. Perhaps this is one way of dealing with our oppression of the Palestinians—by seeking engagement over disengagement, inclusion over exclusion.

As both essays show, the ethic of dissent and its crucial importance in remaking a world gone wrong is a core tenet of Judaism and one by which my own family lived. For dissent is tied to justice and justice to dignity. Opposing harm—indeed, laying siege to it—was a profound part of who my mother and father were, how they defined themselves and how they reimagined the world. Yet, dissent is often considered a form of defection and betrayal, particularly in times of conflict when the impulse to silence and conformity is acute. This is no less true of the Jewish people than of any other people. Today, there is a war against dissent, a dangerous war that not only threatens what we think but how we construct our thoughts and who, in the end we become. Whether we are talking about the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, the war in Iraq or global terrorism, our right to oppose is being stigmatized and invalidated.

Dissent therefore becomes equated with a lack of belief or commitment, with disloyalty or treason. At a 2003 conference at the University of California at Berkeley on media coverage of the Iraq war, journalists explained that one reason for their lack of critical reporting prior to the invasion was a fear of appearing unpatriotic. President Bush’s now-famous injunction less than ten days after the September 11 attacks—“either you are with us or with the terrorists” (which consciously or not takes from Jesus’ call, “anyone who is not with me is against me”) leaves us with no alternatives and perhaps more importantly delegitimizes those we may articulate. Under such



a polarized scenario, where is the recourse to justice? This desire for “order at the cost of justice, [d]iscipline at the cost of dignity, [a]nd ascendancy at any price”<sup>1</sup> creates a context of fear in which speaking one’s conscience becomes not only difficult but wrong. Yet, to insist on the legitimacy of criticism of unjust policies is at the core of dissent and of democracy; without such criticism, to quote Lear, lies madness.

The legitimacy of dissent—and of Jewish dissent in particular—is perhaps nowhere more challenged than in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. To be Jewish and opposed to Israel’s occupation of Palestine is still untenable for many Jews and certainly for the American Jewish establishment. We are called self-haters and heretics and viewed as aberrations and deformities. Yet, the tradition of Jewish dissent, of speaking with another, unclaimed voice is an old and revered one, having arisen in large part as a response to Zionism.<sup>2</sup> A wonderful example comes from Bernard Lazare who, writing to Theodore Herzl in 1899, reproached him for ignoring the impoverished condition of Eastern European Jewry in his vision of a new Zionist nation: “We die from hiding our shames, from burying them in deep caves, instead of bringing them out into the pure light of day where the sun can cauterize and purify them . . . We must educate our nation by showing it what it is.”<sup>3</sup> In a similar plea, Ahad Haam, the founding father of cultural Zionism, asks, “How do you make a nation pause for thought?”<sup>4</sup>

The answers of course are not simple or easy and certainly beyond the scope of this brief introduction but at their core rest some fundamental questions that both Marc and I feel compelled to ask: What have we as a people made from our suffering and perhaps more importantly, what are we to do with our fear? Are we locked into repeating our past while continuously denying it? As Jews in a post-Holocaust world empowered by a Jewish state, how do we as a people emerge from atrocity and abjection, strengthened and unafraid, something still unknown to us? How do we move beyond fear and omnipotence, beyond innocence and militarism, to envision something different, even if uncertain? How do we create a world where “affirmation is possible and . . . dissent is mandatory,”<sup>5</sup> where our capacity to witness is restored and sanctioned, where we as a people refuse to be overcome by the darkness. It is here that I would like to share another story from my family, to describe a moment that has inspired all of my work and writing.

My mother, Taube, and her sister, Frania, had just been liberated from the concentration camp by the Russian army. After having captured all the Nazi officials and guards who ran the camp, the Russian soldiers told the Jewish survivors that they could do whatever they wanted to their German persecutors. Many survivors, themselves emaciated and barely alive, immediately fell on the Germans, ravaging them. My mother and my aunt, standing just yards from the terrible scene unfolding in front of them, fell into each other's arms weeping. My mother, who was the physically stronger of the two, embraced my aunt, holding her close and my aunt, who had difficulty standing, grabbed my mother as if she would never let go. She said to my mother, "We cannot do this. Our father and mother would say this is wrong. Even now, even after everything we have endured, we must seek justice, not revenge. There is no other way." My mother, still crying, kissed her sister and the two of them, still one, turned and walked away.

Marc Ellis asks, Can our identity as a people survive a life without barriers? Can we create a future beyond the past while holding onto remembrance? The following essays hopefully show why we cannot leave the world as it is.

## 2

### *Living with the Holocaust: The Journey of a Child of Holocaust Survivors\**

SOME MONTHS AGO I WAS invited to reflect on my journey as a child of Holocaust survivors. This journey continues and shall continue until the day I die. Though I cannot possibly say everything, it seems especially poignant that I should be addressing this topic at a time when the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is descending so tragically into a moral abyss and when, for me at least, the very essence of Judaism, of what it means to be a Jew, seems to be descending with it.

The Holocaust has been the defining feature of my life. It could not have been otherwise. I lost over a hundred members of my family and extended family in the Nazi ghettos and death camps in Poland—grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, a sibling not yet born—people about whom I have heard so much throughout my life, people I never knew. They lived in Poland in Jewish communities called shtetls.

In thinking about what I wanted to say about this journey, I tried to remember my very first conscious encounter with the Holocaust. Although I cannot be certain, I think it was the first time I noticed the number the Nazis had imprinted on my father's arm. To his oppressors, my father Abraham had no name, no history and no identity other than that blue-inked number, which I never wrote down. As a very young child of four or five, I remember asking my father why he had

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that number on his arm. He answered by saying he once painted it on but then found it would not wash off, so he was left with it.

My father was one of six children, and he was the only one in his family to survive the Holocaust. I know very little about his family because he could not speak about them without breaking down. I know a little about my paternal grandmother, after whom I am named, and even less about my father's sisters and brother. I know only their names. It caused me such pain to see him suffer with his memories that I stopped asking him to share them.

My father's name was recognized in Holocaust circles because he was one of two known survivors of the death camp at Chelmno, in Poland, where 350,000 Jews were murdered, among them the majority of my family on my father's and mother's sides. They were taken there and gassed to death in January 1942. Through my father's cousin I learned that there is now a plaque at the entrance to what is left of the Chelmno death camp with my father's name on it—something I hope one day to see. My father also survived the concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald and because of it was called to testify at the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961.

My mother, Taube, was one of nine children—seven girls and two boys. Her father, Herschel, was a rabbi and *shohet*—a ritual slaughterer—and deeply loved and respected by all who knew him. Herschel was a learned man who had studied with some of the great rabbis of Poland. The stories both my mother and aunt have told me also indicate that he was a feminist of sorts, getting down on his hands and knees to help his wife or daughters scrub the floor, treating the women in his life with the same respect and reverence he gave the men. My grandmother, Miriam, whose name I also have, was a kind and gentle soul but the disciplinarian of the family since Herschel could never raise his voice to his children. My mother came from a deeply religious and loving family. My aunts and uncles were as devoted to their parents as they were to them. As a family they lived very modestly, but every Sabbath my grandfather would bring home a poor or homeless person who was seated at the head of the table to share the Sabbath meal.

My mother and her sister Frania were the only two in their family to have survived the war. Everyone else perished, except for one other sister, Shoshana, who had emigrated to Palestine in 1936. My mother and Frania had managed to stay together throughout the war—seven

years in the Pabianice and Lodz ghettos, followed by the Auschwitz and Halbstadt concentration camps. The only time in seven years they were separated was at Auschwitz. They were in a selection line, where Jews were lined up and their fate sealed by the Nazi doctor, Joseph Mengele, who alone would determine who would live and who would die. When my aunt had approached him, Mengele sent her to the right, to labor (a temporary reprieve). When my mother approached him, he sent her to the left, to death, which meant she would be gassed. Miraculously, my mother managed to sneak back into the selection line, and when she approached Mengele again, he sent her to labor.

A defining moment in my life and journey as a child of survivors occurred even before I was born. It involved decisions taken by my mother and her sister, two very remarkable women, that would change their lives and mine.

After the war ended, my aunt Frania desperately and understandably wanted to go to Palestine/Israel to join their sister who had been there for ten years. The creation of a Jewish state was imminent and Frania felt it was the only safe place for Jews after the Holocaust. My mother disagreed and adamantly refused to go. She told me so many times during my life that her decision not to live in Israel was based on a belief, learned and reinforced by her experiences during the war, that tolerance, compassion and justice cannot be practiced nor extended when one lives only among one's own. "I could not live as a Jew among Jews alone," she said. "For me, it wasn't possible and it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to live as a Jew in a pluralist society, where my group remained important to me but where others were important to me, too."

Frania emigrated to Israel and my parents went to America. It was extremely painful for my mother to leave her sister but she felt she had no alternative. (They have, however, remained very close and have seen each other many times both here and in Israel.) I have always found my mother's choice and the context from which it emanated remarkable.

I grew up in a home where Judaism was defined and practiced not as a religion but as a system of ethics and culture. God was present but not central. My first language was Yiddish, which I still speak with my family. My home was filled with joy and optimism although punctuated at times by grief and loss. Israel and the notion of a

Jewish homeland were very important to my parents. After all the remnants of our family were there. But unlike many of their friends, my parents were not uncritical of Israel, insofar as they felt they could be. Obedience to a state was not an ultimate Jewish value, not for them, not after the Holocaust. Judaism provided the context for Jewish life, for values and beliefs that were not dependent upon national boundaries, but transcended them. For my mother and father Judaism meant bearing witness, raging against injustice and forgoing silence. It meant compassion, tolerance and rescue. It meant, as Ammiel Alcalay has written, ensuring to the extent possible that the memories of the past do not become the memories of the future. These were the ultimate Jewish values. My parents were not saints; they had their faults and they made mistakes. But they cared profoundly about issues of justice and fairness, and they cared profoundly about people—all people, not just their own.

The lessons of the Holocaust were always presented to me as both particular (that is, Jewish) and universal. Perhaps most importantly, they were presented as indivisible. To divide them would diminish the meaning of both.

Looking back over my life, I realize that through their actions and words, my mother and father never tried to save me from self-knowledge; instead, they insisted that I confront what I did not know or understand. Noam Chomsky speaks of the “parameters of thinkable thought.” My mother and father constantly pushed those parameters as far as they could, which was not far enough for me, but they taught me how to push them and the importance of doing so.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that I would follow a path that would lead me to the Arab–Israeli issue. I visited Israel many times while growing up. As a child, I found it a beautiful, romantic and peaceful place. As a teenager and young adult I began to feel certain contradictions that I could not fully explain but which centered on what seemed to be the almost complete absence in Israeli life and discourse of Jewish life in Eastern Europe before the Holocaust, and even of the Holocaust itself. I would ask my aunt why these subjects were not discussed and why Israelis didn’t learn to speak Yiddish. My questions were often met with grim silence.

Most painful to me was the denigration of the Holocaust and pre-state Jewish life by many of my Israeli friends. For them, those

were times of shame when Jews were weak and passive, inferior and unworthy, deserving not of our respect but of our disdain. "We will never allow ourselves to be slaughtered again or go so willingly to our slaughter," they would say. There was little need to understand those millions who perished or the lives they lived. There was even less need to honor them. Yet, at the same time, the Holocaust was used by the State as a defense against others, as a justification for political and military acts.

I could not comprehend nor make sense of what I was hearing. I remember fearing for my aunt. In my confusion, I also remember profound anger. It was at that moment, perhaps, that I began thinking about the Palestinians and their conflict with the Jews. If so many among us could negate our own and so pervert the truth, why not with the Palestinians? Was there a link of some sort between the murdered Jews of Europe and the Palestinians? I did not know, but so my search began.

The journey has been a painful one but among the most meaningful of my life. At my side, always, was my mother, constant in her support, although ambivalent and conflicted at times. My father had died a young man; I do not know what he would have thought but I have always felt his presence. My Israeli family opposed what I was doing and has always remained steadfast in their opposition. In fact, I have not spoken with them about my work in over fifteen years.

Despite many visits to Israel during my youth, I first went to the West Bank and Gaza in the summer of 1985, two-and-a-half-years before the first Palestinian uprising, to conduct fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation, which examined American economic assistance to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. My research focused on whether it was possible to promote economic development under conditions of military occupation. That summer changed my life because it was then that I came to understand and experience what occupation was and what it meant. I learned how occupation works, its impact on the economy, on daily life, and its grinding impact on people. I learned what it meant to have little control over one's life and, more importantly, over the lives of one's children.

As with the Holocaust, I tried to remember my very first encounter with the occupation. One of my earliest encounters involved a group of Israeli soldiers, an old Palestinian man and his donkey. Standing on

a street with some Palestinian friends, I noticed an elderly Palestinian walking down the street, leading his donkey. A small child of no more than three or four years, clearly his grandson, was with him. Some Israeli soldiers standing nearby went up to the old man and stopped him. One soldier went over to the donkey and pried open its mouth. "Old man," he asked, "why are your donkey's teeth so yellow? Why aren't they white? Don't you brush your donkey's teeth?" The old Palestinian was mortified, the little boy visibly upset. The soldier repeated his question, yelling this time, while the other soldiers laughed. The child began to cry and the old man just stood there silently, humiliated. This scene repeated itself while a crowd gathered. The soldier then ordered the old man to stand behind the donkey and demanded that he kiss the animal's behind. At first, the old man refused but as the soldier screamed at him and his grandson became hysterical, he bent down and did it. The soldiers laughed and walked away. They had achieved their goal: to humiliate him and those around him. We all stood there in silence, ashamed to look at each other, hearing nothing but the uncontrollable sobs of the little boy. The old man did not move for what seemed a very long time. He just stood there, demeaned and destroyed.

I stood there, too, in stunned disbelief. I immediately thought of the stories my parents had told me of how Jews had been treated by the Nazis in the 1930s, before the ghettos and death camps, of how Jews would be forced to clean sidewalks with toothbrushes and have their beards cut off in public. What happened to the old man was absolutely equivalent in principle, intent and impact: to humiliate and dehumanize. In this instance, there was no difference between the German soldier and the Israeli one. Throughout that summer of 1985, I saw similar incidents: young Palestinian men being forced by Israeli soldiers to bark like dogs on their hands and knees or dance in the streets.

In this critical respect, my first encounter with the occupation was the same as my first encounter with the Holocaust, with the number on my father's arm. It spoke the same message: the denial of one's humanity. It is important to understand the very real differences in volume, scale and horror between the Holocaust and the occupation and to be careful about comparing the two, but it is also important to recognize the parallels where they do exist.

As a child of Holocaust survivors I always wanted to be able in some way to experience and feel some aspect of what my parents endured,



which, of course, was impossible. I listened to their stories, always wanting more, and shared their tears. I often would ask myself what does sheer terror feel like? What does it look like? What does it mean to lose one's whole family so horrifically and so immediately, or have an entire way of life extinguished so irrevocably? I would try to imagine myself in their place, but it was impossible. It was beyond my reach, too unfathomable.

It was not until I lived with Palestinians under occupation that I found at least part of the answers to some of these questions. I was not searching for the answers; they were thrust upon me. I learned, for example, what sheer terror looked like from my friend Rabia, eighteen years old, who, frozen by fear and uncontrollable shaking, stood glued in the middle of a room we shared in a refugee camp, unable to move, while Israeli soldiers tried to break down the front door to our shelter. I experienced terror while watching Israeli soldiers beat a pregnant woman in her belly because she flashed a V-sign at them, and I was too paralyzed by fear to help her. I could more concretely understand the meaning of loss and displacement when I watched grown men sob and women scream as Israeli Army bulldozers destroyed their home and everything in it because they built their house without a permit, which the Israeli authorities had refused to give them.

It is perhaps in the concept of home and shelter that I find the most profound link between the Jews and the Palestinians and, perhaps, the most painful illustration of the meaning of occupation. I cannot begin to describe how horrible and obscene it is to watch the deliberate destruction of a family's home while that family watches, powerless to stop it. For Jews as for Palestinians, a house represents far more than a roof over one's head; it represents life itself. Speaking about the demolition of Palestinian homes, Meron Benvenisti, an Israeli historian and scholar, writes:

It would be hard to overstate the symbolic value of a house to an individual for whom the culture of wandering and of becoming rooted to the land is so deeply engrained in tradition, for an individual whose national mythos is based on the tragedy of being uprooted from a stolen homeland. The arrival of a firstborn son and the building of a home are the central events in such an individual's life because they symbolize continuity in time and physical space. And with the demolition of the individual's home comes the destruction of the world.