

Victim of the Victim: Echoes of the Past in the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict

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THIS ESSAY IS THE PRODUCT OF TWO TRIPS to Israel and the Occupied Territories, the first in February 1988, the second in April 1989. I made the first trip as a member of a hastily organized emergency fact-finding delegation sponsored by the United Nations Non-Governmental Organizations on the Question of Palestine. The second trip was sponsored by the Middle East Children's Alliance, a group based in Berkeley, California. Our avowed purpose was to put together a report on the experience of Palestinian children. The report has yet to materialize, but notes jotted in my journal at the time form the basis for the reflections that follow.

These trips were my first to the Middle East. I spent much of the time struggling with language barriers, overwhelmed by the intensity and strangeness of the experience. I felt like an inexperienced swimmer thrashed by a powerful surf. I certainly didn't come away an expert.

My parents were German Jewish refugees — intellectuals, socialists, lovers of German culture, but not Zionists. Without the matter ever being specifically discussed I grew up believing that Jews were that ethnic group whose historical mission was to transcend ethnicity in commitment to a united front against fascism. To be Jewish was subsumed in being anti-fascist. Satisfied with this inherited understanding, I gave little attention to the subject until 1982 when the war in Lebanon, and the massacres at Sabra and Shatila confronted me inescapably with the reality of Jewish torturers, and Jewish war criminals. Obviously I had been naive. Victims of the Holocaust did not necessarily share a commitment to the values instilled in me as a child. The experience could lead in a quite other direction. The reflections that follow are, in part, a meditation on this theme. They are also an attempt to see the conflict as Palestinians see it. They are intended to be more metaphorical than scientific. They are unapologetically provisional and fragmentary.

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The Equation

In the 14th month of the *intifada*, I saw a simple equation sprayed above a doorway on the limestone walls of the West Bank university town of Bir Zeit. Amid a stream of Arabic graffiti that I couldn't interpret, its message was clear: a six-pointed Star of David = the Swastika. I saw the same equation a few days later painted on the side of a trash dumpster in a small town south of Bethlehem.

This equation has become part of the iconography of the *intifada*. To the Israelis, the obscene fusing of opposites that it embodies is a sacrilege. The equation denies history and defiles the treasure of victimhood. It erases the debt owed to the survivors of the Holocaust. It voids their claim against humanity. It is a prelude to the renewal of the project of the annihilation of the Jews.¹

For the Palestinian it expresses a simple fact: the Jews have become their oppressor. Or, to complete the thought: the Jews, who were the victims of the Nazis, are themselves acting like (becoming) Nazis.

The equation says: We Palestinians are the victims of victims who have turned themselves into their opposite. By implication we are *their* Jews, *their* persecuted scapegoat.

It offers a tabooed interpretation of echoes of the past that reverberate in every present moment of this conflict. Like graffiti on a bathroom wall, it reflects the unconscious zipped into respectability in everyday discourse. It may prove useful, therefore, to pause and examine this equation, as a thread through the minefield of unconscious identities which are being formed in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

If we wish to make use of this equation it is important to say at the beginning: there is little to be gained in comparing the magnitude of crimes committed against a people, or the degree of suffering they produce. Peoples should not be forced to compete against each other in a test of who has suffered the most. Such a competition can only diminish the suffering of all who participate.

We pause over the equation not to validate such a competition, but rather to try to understand the forces unleashed in the present by the past suffering of Palestinians and Jews.



The equation captures and interprets echoes of the past that reverberate in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Listen and one finds them everywhere:

- A fact-finding delegation shows slides they have taken on their trip to the Occupied Territories. On the screen is a slide of broken glass lying on the pavement in Ramallah. The narrator explains that the glass was smashed from

a shop window by Israeli troops to punish the shopkeeper for honoring a strike called by the underground leadership of the *intifada*. From the back of the audience a man shouts: “*Kristallnacht*.” Broken glass is broken glass, but this glass on the sidewalk of Ramallah calls up for him memories of November 1938, when Nazi storm troopers smashed Jewish shop windows and desecrated synagogues.

• I have before me a leaflet which reproduces an article from the *San Francisco Examiner* (April 14, 1988). The article reports charges by Dr. John Hiddlestone of New Zealand, who is the health director of the U.N. Relief and Works Agency, that Israeli troops are using “new gases in addition to normal tear gas to quell Palestinian riots in Gaza and the West Bank.” The report also states that:

...one kind of gas caused severe abdominal pain and another immobilized its victims by weakening the muscles when inhaled.

In one incident, he said two young men were beaten and put into a room and an aerosol spray was sprayed into the room. “The room was then shut and after an hour or so two dead bodies were removed.”

Hiddlestone also described injuries he said were the result of beatings of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers using iron rods covered with plastic.

“They hit the cheekbones, causing the eye to come out,” he said.
“There was such a degree of accuracy they must have had training for this particular blow.”

This article is headlined “U.N. Doctor Says Israelis Using Toxic Gas on Arabs.” The author of the leaflet has hand lettered a different headline above the xeroxed article: “Israeli GAS CHAMBERS.”

• In Gaza, after a year of the *intifada*, a Danish hospital administrator, mild mannered, soft spoken, and seemingly not prone to exaggeration, says that what he has seen in the Palestinian refugee camps is “the concentration camps without the ovens.”

And so on.



Palestinians have had much occasion to speculate on the historical victimhood of Jews. They feel that victimhood palpably, as a driving force behind the mercilessness of the Israeli troops who enforce the Occupation. It fuels Israeli violence, masks it, and justifies it. Palestinians have learned that as long as the Israeli is seen only as victim, the Palestinian will not be seen at all. Only they who play the role of the victim — that is, the role of the Jew — are visible. One of the goals of the *intifada* is to make the Palestinian visible. This

strategy grows out of thought devoted to the forms of struggle appropriate to confrontation with a complex and illusive enemy: a victim-oppressor.

The picture of the Jew as victim-turned-oppressor is a difficult one for the world to hold on to. It is like one of those postcards which, when tilted back and forth, shows two alternating images.

One image is that of Jewish boys in soldiers' uniforms, swinging clubs made from two-by-fours, sometimes with a nail in the end, breaking down doors at night, beating women, children, and old men, shouting foul names at them, soiling their belongings, carting them off to jail where they are tortured, burying young men alive with bull dozers, and breaking into hospitals to beat patients. That image must be denied. Tilt the card and it is replaced by another image, that of the Jew as victim — the cadaverous hollow-eyed concentration camp survivor, the fearful Hasid listening for the hoofbeat of the Cossack, the dispersed and despised people. The image of the Jew as victimizer blots out the view of the Jew as victim. One can not see both at the same time. Israel exploits the fear that criticism of her policies will tilt the postcard so that the image of the Jew as victim will disappear — and with it the protections which will prevent Jews from becoming victims again. And so, if we must criticize Israel, we are asked to “balance” our criticism, to keep the postcard constantly tilting, back and forth and back and forth, in an attempt to keep both sides constantly in view.

We should not be surprised if the Palestinians were to come to see this tilting postcard as an illusion, a disguise, a weapon in the arsenal of the oppressor with no more moral value than a tear gas canister. No one else has such effective moral camouflage for their atrocities. Tilting and tilting again, the postcard is mesmerizing. The Palestinians have nothing so fascinating to attract the attention of the world. They are lost from view. Their postcard, a simple view of the homeland, has no buyers.

Next to the multifaceted Jews, the Palestinians are one dimensional and faceless. They are Arabs. The image invoked is of faces hidden behind scarfs. We don't know the names of any of their famous writers. They have no Marx, no Freud, no Einstein. They sleep in airport terminals with satchels of plastic tucked under their arms. Or in tents, in refugee camps that are imagined as permanent trackless squats in the sand, a frozen impermanence like a terrible nightmare of an endless summer vacation in the desert. They are significant only as the current embodiment of the world historical opposition to the Jews.



Jaballia is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the Gaza strip. It is one of the most densely populated places on the planet, a warren of concrete huts, tin roofs, crisscrossed with narrow alleys down which open sewage runs, a

tangled indecipherable maze through which Ariel Sharon bulldozed wide, dirt freeways to make easier access for military vehicles. It has been the scene of some of the most intense confrontations of the *intifada*. For weeks at a time its inhabitants have been punished by a total curfew that confines them to their homes, on pain of death, 24 hours a day. The smoke of burning tires, stacked as barricades, was in the air when I visited in February 1988, three months after the beginnings of the *intifada*.

In an UNRU clinic in the center of the camp we met a group of Palestinian doctors. As we talked the wounded were being brought in by ambulance from confrontations that were taking place around the perimeter of the camp. The doctors all seemed exhausted. They struggled to convey the medical dimensions of the situation in the camp. It was as if all their energy was needed to maintain the objectivity of their profession in the midst of a chaos that threatened at every moment to overwhelm them. One of the doctors, towards the end of the presentation, tried to make sense of the brutality of the Israeli soldiers:

I'm afraid the Israeli soldier will become a sadist. They hit and they sing and laugh. Unfortunately, the Israelis were the victims of the Nazis. Now the Israelis are the offenders of the Palestinian people. This is a very bad thing. This is really a kind of disease. When the soldiers attack, the others say "*Tov*." *Tov* means good. And they start to sing and to laugh. This is going to turn the soldiers into a kind of sadist people in the future. This is for their future as human beings not good. This policy is going to destroy the Israeli people in the future.

He concluded:

When a raped boy — suppose six years old, raped by older boys — becomes a young man around 21 or 22, he would like to rape the others. This is the situation. We are sure of this as medical men.

- A year later in another camp in Gaza, another doctor, noticing that a considerable number of our delegation appeared to be Jewish, asked us what we felt as Jews about the behavior of Israel. When I began by saying that a grandmother of mine had died in Buchenwald I was met by a storm of protest. They did not want to hear about the Holocaust. They knew it only as justification for Israeli behavior. Thus, only with difficulty could I speak of my own relation to the Holocaust as the source both of my anti-fascism and of my support and sympathy for Palestinian aspirations.

Many times Palestinians spontaneously assured us that what was happening to them was "worse by far" than the Holocaust. It was as if they would

never be worthy of the world's attention and sympathy, unless their own suffering ranked with or surpassed that of the Jews.



Let us return to the equation: Star of David = Swastika. The equation is dynamic. It suggests a transformation: victim into oppressor, Jew into Nazi, Jew into anti-Jew. There is a corollary to this transformation which is not lost on Palestinians. If the Israeli Jew has become a Nazi, he has become an anti-Jew; and his enemy, the Palestinian, becomes the Jew.

The propaganda value of this apparently paradoxical proposition is obvious: "World," the Palestinians say, "you have an apparently inexhaustible sympathy for the Jews, which does not allow you to see our situation. But look, we are the dispersed, endangered fragment whose existence is at risk. *We are the Jews.*"

But there is more here than mere propaganda. Palestinians identify as Jews. A Palestinian journalist listing for us the names of the refugee camps on the West Bank mischievously included in his list Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Palestinians speak of their dispersal in exile as the Palestinian "diaspora." They demand "a right of return" for those exiles. This is only partly a manipulation of imagery in a war of propaganda. It seems to represent something deeper, a complex self-definition in terms of the other, in which the Palestinian says: "As you become like Nazis, we become like Jews; the identity you rejected, that you maintain now only as a cloak for your misdeeds, truly belongs to us."

The portrait the Palestinians draw of themselves resembles the portrait of the dispersed, wandering Jew, stranger in strange lands, as Sartre says, "this quintessence of man, disgraced, uprooted, destined from the start to either inauthenticity or martyrdom" (in Fanon, 1967: 182, *fn.* 4).

Author Fawaz Turki observes his compatriots in the lobbies of airports:

There is something formidably, unendurably pitiful about the way a person, stateless all his life, clutches a passport once he gets one. I look at all the other Palestinians around me, coming from a bewildering multiplicity of countries, and experience a kind of emotional vertigo. We have all grown up and lived not only in diverse locales in the Arab world, but also in Western and Eastern Europe, in North and South America, in Africa and the Far East. Yet we have managed to keep our communal sense of national reference bounding and rebounding among us, like jugglers' weights, from year to year, from place to place, from generation to generation, so that we now understand each other, as if through a common trick of feeling (1988: 7).

And Turki again:

Indeed, Palestinians have traditionally considered themselves the most outstanding theoreticians, ideologists, novelists, belletrists, bankers, and engineers in the Arab world. They have believed they were chosen, if not by God, certainly by history, to be the vanguard of the Arab Resistance and fall into the garb and glove left by the Vietnamese after *their* victory in 1975. Somehow Palestinians believed all these myths and tried to lay them on people everywhere. And though they have not, after two decades of struggle, liberated any part of the homeland, they have carried within them no germ of preordained failure. It is the world that has failed, not them (1988: 10).



If the Palestinians come to play the role of the Jews in their conflict with the State of Israel, if they recognize this role, and if this equation embodies that recognition, then there is perhaps another important corollary to be drawn: Palestinians can not be anti-Semitic. How reassuring and simple this would be. What an easy way out of the maze. But the knot is unlikely to unravel so easily.

The charge that in struggling against Jews, they march in the ranks of anti-Semites, produces a bitter frustration in Palestinians. It re-emerges no matter what they do, turning black into white, and night into day, a stain that will not come out in the wash, a blood lie that will not be erased, trotted out when needed to combat some nascent emerging sympathy for their struggle. If the Palestinians are anti-Semites, then they cease to be people with legitimate grievances and goals with which we sympathize. They become part of the world-historical majority that has persecuted Jews. They cease to be victims.

It is too easy to say, as some do, that the Palestinian cannot be "anti-Semitic," because Palestinians are Semites. Call it what you will, a Palestinian could perfectly well be anti-Jewish and associate his hatred with classical anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews. These stereotypes are reported to abound in the Arab world, there for easy access, fused with the particular caricatures of the Israeli. In his book *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land*, David Shipler, the former *New York Times* Jerusalem correspondent, quotes a number of these stereotypes from Jordanian textbooks used in West Bank schools. He entitles one chapter "The Violent, Craven Jew," and another "The Alien Superior Jew" (1987: 249).

It is also too easy simply to say that anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are necessarily distinct. They are distinct, but the former can be the vehicle for the latter. Nothing is simpler than to say: "Look how those Jews act. No wonder they have been hated." During a heated debate in Berkeley, California, over

whether the City Council should pass a resolution criticizing Israel's policies in the Occupied Territories, a stream of representatives of the established Jewish community spoke at the microphone to denounce the proposal. An American woman supporter of the proposal (not a Palestinian) leaned over to her companion and whispered. "Their conduct is leading to more ovens."

In a world context of lingering hatred of Jews, how can the Palestinians distinguish their conflict with the Israelis from the world-historical miasma of anti-Semitism? How can they show that their longing for the orange groves of Jaffa is simply that — a longing for the land that was their home, a longing made poignant by childhood memories of smells and colors. It is so easy to insist on compartments and guarantees. But what proofs would be sufficient? Confronted with an outrageous Jew, an obnoxious vicious Jew, a torturing murderous Jew, how can one vaccinate oneself so that not a smidgen of the virus of anti-Semitism enters into one's legitimate outrage. How would I, as a Jew, defend myself against the charge, continually brought against Jews who offer support to the Palestinians, that we are "self-hating," that we have been infected with the virus?

In the Military Court in Ramallah

Outside the gate to the military compound, families and friends of the prisoners had been lined up for hours. They were hemmed in behind barricades, waiting for a chance to get into the already overcrowded courtrooms. A swarthy sephardic guard with a green beret and an Uzi responded to their pleading for information with curt annoyance and threats.

The lucky ones who made it in sat on long wooden benches, waiting for the court to get about its business; the women wore traditional long dresses and black shawls over their heads; old men were dressed in brown robes and a white scarf fixed with a black band. They waited. Like wood. Like stone. As if they could wait forever.

They had seen this proceeding before. It was a rock sitting on them. They could not engage with it as human beings anymore than they could with a storm that beat on them and threatened their olive trees.

Quite differently sat the soldiers who lined the edges of the court room. They engaged in casual conversation with each other, attempted to make themselves comfortable, and stared at whatever momentarily caught their attention. They were present in their entirety. The Palestinians were a palpable absence; they had withdrawn consent.

The prosecutors and judges and clerks were all in a variety of casual military attire, befitting a country that sees the informality of public attire as symbolic of its democratic roots in the physical working of the soil. Israel prefers the open collar to the tie. But these trappings of egalitarianism seemed oddly out of place — even insulting — in this classic scene of occupation. The pros-

ecutor in a grey-blue sweater consulted with clerks, and went over the files; a prisoner was brought in; discussions swirled about him in Hebrew; occasionally the official translator conveyed a phrase or two as if giving spare change to a beggar. The Palestinian attorney pled for his client. The panel of three judges seated on a raised platform behind a long desk consulted among themselves. One of them looked bored and cleaned his glasses. Sentence was pronounced. The prisoner was led away.

The proceedings continued. More prisoners had to be processed, sorted. It was unpleasant, untidy work. They remain human beings, resistant, despite whatever they have been subjected to. The bailiff, a young soldier with a thin face and a long nose, appeared perpetually dissatisfied with their slowness to stand when he wanted them to stand, to move when they were told to move. It was to this bailiff — or more particularly to his nose — that my attention kept returning. I found myself staring at him and hating him, and for a moment, I, with my own large Jewish nose, associated my anger with him with his nose and his dark elongated face — his “Jewish” face, in short, his Jewishness.

The anti-Semite is a Lamarckian, believing in the inheritance of acquired characteristics. The anti-Semite looks at this cruel and unfeeling bailiff and sees his meanness as an expression of a mystical set of inherited Jewish traits, a defining substratum, that is expressed in his conduct precisely as it is expressed in his physical appearance. He looks Jewish. He acts Jewish. He owns his character trait of meanness as he owns his nose.

It is easy to make this leap, to associate his brutal inhumanity, the role he plays without protest, with his physical features, and to associate his features with some aggregation of characteristics that are, or are imagined to be, Jewish. All that he is and does is connected to his corrupt essence, which expresses itself in his look, his smell, his conduct.

This explanatory framework marks anti-Semitism and all racism. Once loosed on the world it persists with varying degrees of virulence. Behavior that is idiosyncratic, born of some particular set of circumstances, becomes generic — an expression of Jewish greed, Jewish overweening, Jewish manipulation, Jewish desire to conquer the world, Jewish conspiring, Jewish cunning for Jewish benefit.

Sitting in the courtroom in Ramallah, it is easy to imagine the Palestinians sitting there thinking: “Jew, Jew, Jew.” Would it be surprising? Could they be blamed?

Undoubtedly fundamentalist forces swirl around the edges of the *intifada*. Hamas, and the Islamic Jihad, were they to take over leadership of the uprising, would undoubtedly be less rational and discriminating than those who are now in control. In a camp in Gaza, a delegation observed a swastika painted on the walls of a clinic that was quickly painted out again by Palestinians. The April 17, 1989, *Jerusalem Post* carried a report headlined: “Swastikas and

Slogans in Hebron Jewish Cemetery.” The report contains an unconfirmed allegation by extreme right-wing settlers that they found:

the walls of the Hebron cemetery daubed with swastikas and graffiti. Kiryat Arba’s Rabbi Dov Lior told *The Jerusalem Post* that a tombstone atop a grave for desecrated torah scrolls was also vandalized.

The army rubbed out the swastikas and the settlers held a memorial service, following with a statement saying the desecration proved that elections in the territories “will enable the Arab neo-Nazis to come to power just as Hitler did democratically, in 1933” (Brilliant, 1989).

Despite such incidents (and although I take the *Jerusalem Post* story with a grain of salt, I nevertheless assume they happen) and despite the inability to enforce a strict compartmentalization in the unconscious of those who must struggle against Jews, I believe there are inherent forces which work to distinguish the emotional core of Palestinian grievances with Israel from anti-Semitism. Simply put, the roots of racist stereotypes take firmest hold among those who, despite their protests, accept the status quo and have not liberated themselves from internalized oppression. In so far as the *intifada* genuinely mobilizes Palestinians for the project of their liberation, it is fueled by a quite different energy than that which drives the hysterical posturing of anti-Semitism.

This theoretical belief corresponds to my empirical observation. One simply does not feel that clouded, mystified rage of the racist when one travels in the Occupied Territories. In my two trips there during the *intifada*, I often identified myself as an American Jew and never felt any animosity or suspicion as a result.

It is true, though, that Palestinians often use “Jew” and “Israeli” and “soldier” interchangeably. But why should they make a distinction that Israel itself fudges for its own benefit? Palestinians repeatedly expressed to us their concern that a protracted conflict would create hatreds which will not allow for future mutual coexistence. The head of a women’s organization told us they try to teach the children to avoid the use of “Jew” for Israeli or soldier; others expressed similar concerns. An eight-year-old Palestinian girl told me — very matter of factly — that she was afraid the Jews would kill her. I, quite shaken, told her that I was a Jew and that I hoped she would meet other Jews she did not have to be afraid of. The adults listening in quickly said that although the young did not easily make this distinction, they themselves did.

Palestinians convey what is happening to them in a great variety of tones. Professionals, doctors, and lawyers describe arrests, tortures, beatings, and killings in the language of their particular discipline. Often they speak quietly, with a tinge of exhaustion because their experience has overwhelmed the

boundaries and order on which their professionalism is based. A lawyer in Gaza, for example, described the Kafkaesque situation of defending prisoners from charges he is not allowed to know, in courts where there are no rules; courts in which all brought before it are automatically guilty and success means to achieve some small moderation on the sentence imposed. This lawyer, from a wealthy family, spoke to us from a room richly carpeted and appointed with brass and silver objects. He methodically described the torture his clients were subjected to, and how, after protesting this torture, he was himself thrown into prison and tortured. The description was chilling in its precision, describing the irrational without itself succumbing to irrationalism. The same quality imbued the description given by a young Palestinian mother of her encounters with Israeli torturers. She had her first experience of torture when she was a young girl of 15 and the second seven years later. They were brutal, horrible tortures that almost killed her. Her description dwelled in a kind of terrible quiet. She drew a simple chilling portrait of her torturers. The picture was not decorated with hooks to catch features of a stereotype. This same woman explained that during the tortures she experienced as a 15 year old, she became delirious and would beat on the walls of her cell and yell for Hitler to come and avenge her. To her it was a sign of the insanity into which she felt she was sinking. One can imagine the satisfaction of her torturers in hearing her shouts "confirm" their opinion of Palestinians.

The concreteness to the Palestinian demands and the preciseness of their descriptions of their condition differ from the amorphous distaste of the racist, who believes the characteristics he dislikes are programmed in the object of his hatred as the shape and smell of an animal are programmed in its genes. And this quality of preciseness, of matter-of-fact specificity, is found not only among Palestinian professionals. Often we entered simple rooms in the poorest refugee camps, sometimes only hours after troops had been through, homes where mothers had lost sons, and they would tell us the story of their "martyr" without adornment. Their was no need. The facts were eloquent enough in themselves.

The *intifada* is an attempt at self-definition, and an attempt to project that definition onto the world. It is an attempt to precisely define the situation of the Palestinian under occupation and thereby to define the occupier, simply as occupier. Each act of resistance within the *intifada* defines the Palestinian. The measures taken to suppress that resistance define the Israeli. It is these definitions, rather than the clouded historical images of the saga of anti-Semitism, that the Palestinian wishes to put before the world.

Within the *intifada*, there is the development of consciousness, the slow unreported creation of an infrastructure of a new, revolutionary society, and thought given to the development of the consciousness of that society. As part of this process Palestinians are thinking about the psychological impact of the

Occupation and the *intifada* on their children. What happens to the children will have a profound impact on the future of Palestinian/Israeli coexistence. Certain wounds will not heal. Palestinians believe that the crimes inflicted on Jews in Europe are being recycled on them. They know the Israelis are a wounded people, and see those wounds as forming keloid scars, hard and inflexible. They know that this history of wounding is dangerous to those that struggle with the Israelis. Somehow, for both people's sake, the knot of history must be broken.



The Holocaust Museum

The Holocaust museum, Yad Vashem, spreads itself over many acres of West Jerusalem. Installed in the main entrance hall is a monumental cast-aluminum bar relief by the Israeli artist Natalie Bezem. It has four sections — Holocaust, Revolt, Going up to the Land, and Rebirth. The images are not easily decipherable without a guidebook, and the final section is the weakest — a stylized lion and candlesticks that look like the silver jewelry sold to tourists in the shops by the Old City. Nevertheless, the message is clear: the museum is designed to frame the Holocaust experience as a prelude to the creation of the state of Israel.

The building that houses the museum has been built wide and low to the ground. Its central halls are painted black and designed as a kind of winding path — through the dark history of the pogroms, the rise of the Nazis, and the Holocaust. Space represents time; the winding dark path is the winding dark history of Jews in exile. The exhibit concludes with a triumphal image: a photograph of Jews arriving by boat on the shores of Israel. And with this image one emerges into the light of day in the outskirts of West Jerusalem. The tour is done.

Museums define the heritage of those who establish and endow them. They are the repository of the historical treasure that has been amassed. They assemble it, define it, and make it available to the public for its enlightenment. This museum is perhaps unique. What other state museum enshrines a catastrophe? The purpose is clear: the catastrophe is the treasure. The embalmed memory is talismanic. It is the source of energy for survival, the key to invincibility, the landmark by which state policy is to be chartered. There is no similar museum in Israel to the achievements of the Jewish diaspora — only to its most hideous moment of destruction.

Architecture is symbolic. The buildings and paved courtyards and plazas of this museum spread themselves authoritatively over many landscaped acres. It could be in Arizona for all its apparent lack of concern that space might be a rare commodity in this part of the world. It is designed so that one's lungs ex-

pand as one leaves the cramped claustrophobic corridors of history. There's all this space to wonder about in and meditate on the theme of **Never Again**.

This museum denies all present fears, embalms a moment of terror as a treasure, and sends the visitor out into a conquered space. But a few miles away the intricate tangled space of the Holy Land reasserts itself. More truly symbolic of the Israeli predicament is the space of the old walled city of Jerusalem, an intricately and densely compacted maze of stone streets and arches that knots together the holy shrines of Jews, Christians, and Moslems. In the Old City the architecture says there is no escaping the other, no solution but coexistence. As if to defy the symbolic message of this space, Ariel Sharon bought a house on the main street in the Arab quarter leading to the Dome of the Rock, the third most holy Muslim shrine and placed on its roof overlooking the street a giant steel menorah, which says to every Palestinian who passes beneath it: even this knot we will break.

Architecture is symbolic because space is symbolic. In the section of *Childhood and Society* devoted to the young Hitler, Erik Erickson writes:

Every person and every group has a limited inventory of historically determined spatial temporal concepts, which determine the world image, the evil and ideal prototypes, and the unconscious life plan. These concepts dominate a nation's striving and can lead to high distinction; but they also narrow a people's imagination and thus invite disaster. In German history such outstanding configurations are encirclement versus *Lebensraum*; and disunity versus unity. Such terms are, of course, so universal that they seem unspecific; the observer who realizes the weight which these words carry in German thinking must suspect them of being insincere propaganda. Yet nothing can be more fatal in international encounters than the attempt to belittle or to argue another nation's mythological time space. The Non-German does not realize that in Germany these words carry a conviction far beyond that of ordinary logic (1963: 345).

Germany, surrounded, hemmed in, longing for *Lebensraum* and frustrated in that longing vented frustration on the Jews. Israel, encircled, hemmed in, wages a war against Palestinians whose presence they feel denies them breathing room. Having been dispersed, and now newly a nation, Israel fears dispersal again, as Germany feared again being carved up by the great powers, hostile and surrounding.

The Jews in Europe were considered an alien presence, unassimilable and unalterably other, threatening the unity of the nation. They would never be true Poles or Russians or Germans, no matter how diligently they took on the trappings of the good bourgeois of those countries. All the ills and insecurities of the nation flowed from their presence. They could not, and would not, be

integrated into the mystical body of the nation. They must therefore be contained, suppressed, forced to flee, or exterminated. Do not the Palestinians play the same role in Israel? With the sincerest desire in the world, there is nothing they could do, to become loyal Jews.

In Europe, Jewry is a singular example of an old entity which clings to its identity — be it racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural — in such a way that it is felt to be a danger to emerging identities (*Ibid.*: 354).

In the Middle East there has been a reversal: Israel is the newcomer to nationhood and to this part of the world, threatened and surrounded by those with the older ties to the land. In this land the Palestinian identity is old and clings to the land: in the military court in Ramallah, the Israeli authorities are the new conquerors, the occupiers, incapable of extracting a glimmer of acceptance from the occupied. The Palestinians, waiting on the wooden benches in the courtrooms, in their traditional brown robes, some with canes, sitting with the “patience of the oppressed,” will wait, immovable, like features of the landscape, steadfast, veiled, their emotions hidden deep inside them, to burst out when the land rejects the new occupiers and returns to its old ways. They remind me of an anti-Semitic caricature to be found near the entrance to the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem: an old Jew, stooped over, beak nosed, dressed in a dark robe. That image triggered the homicidal rage of Nazis. The obstinacy of these Palestinians provokes the fury of the Israelis.

David Shipler quotes Gershon Shaked’s summation of Israeli stereotypes of Palestinians in Israeli literature:

The Jew of literature — conscious that he is living in a foreign land — sees the Arab as the true native, born of the soil, flesh of the land’s flesh, and bone of its bone; he perceives himself as a strange and estranged foreigner trying to strike roots in a hostile environment. In that view the Arab is shown as a kind of desirable anti-norm. He represents all those qualities that the Jewish soul most yearns for, qualities that are in complete opposition to the “blemished” heritage brought by the Jew from his country of origin. To some extent the Arab becomes the authentic Jew — the ancient pre-exilic Jew — before he was tainted by his wanderings (1987: 249).²



The goal of Zionism was sometimes expressed as the “normalization” of the condition of the Jews. Jews, dispersed in exile, would have their own land; a rootless people would send down roots. But normalization has not been a complete success. The achievement of statehood has not put an end to the in-

security of exile. For whatever reasons, deserved or undeserved, by its own doing or by the doing of others, Israel finds itself, as a state among states in the Middle East, reproducing the outcast role that history has traditionally assigned to Jews.

Normalization has proved an illusive goal. This may be due in part to the continued external force of world anti-Semitism. But one suspects the operation of an internal ambivalence as well. Perhaps the break with the past is not entirely desired. In his book, *Jews and Arabs*, Memmi admits to often having wondered:

whether the Jew's own rejection of sociological and historical normalization is not a persistent sign of the interiorization of the rejection by other people, in other words, of oppression (1975: 178).

It is not so easy to walk away from the concentration camp of history. A deep ambivalence pervades each step. The condition of oppression is familiar — a known landscape. The break with the past may bring rage against those who were its victims — and the guilt of the survivor. The camps were a Manichean universe. There were only two roles — victim or guard; only one imperative — survival. There was no normality.

The Israeli Jew, his feet planted in the soil of his own country, longs for security — but does not feel secure. He is still not normal. His right to this patch of earth remains contested. He can not confidently take his boots off and put his feet up on a hassock as any Frenchman or Englishman can. No matter how powerful his army or how well equipped with weapons of mass destruction, at any moment he can be uprooted again, and sent into exile. The insecurity he carries with him as he walks the perimeters of his new nation he blames on the Palestinian in his midst. They are his “Jews” — the cause of his misery. On the one hand, the role they play marks the partial success of the project of “normalization.” If the Israeli has his own Jews, then he must have joined the community of gentiles. He now has his own state in which others feel uncomfortable and unwanted. He has a piece of the earth that is his, to defend with all the modern instruments of state power. On the other hand, Palestinians embody the failure of “normalization.” They are the embodiment of the ancient threat to the Jewish people that will never disappear.

The Palestinians have a dual nature. They are Israel's “Jews” and Israel's “Nazis.” Paradoxically they fill the role of Jew *because* they can be seen as anti-Jewish. Their image oscillates between antithetical poles. It is the obverse of the shifting image of the Israeli Jew, the mesmerizing, tilting postcard that portrays alternatively: concentration camp survivor and guard, vulnerable scapegoat, and arrogant bully. These shifting images in turn are reflected in the shifting national image of the Israeli state: tilt the postcard and we see a threatened, beleaguered, emaciated state, thin, with barely a 19-mile-wide

belly. Tilt it again and we see the Prussia of the Middle East, tightly muscled, merciless.

Israel presents itself to the world as perpetually in jeopardy. This may be a calculated tactic, but it also reflects an emotional truth — the persistence of the “limited inventory of spatial temporal concepts” of which Erickson speaks. Its real strength seems irrelevant. The image hangs on tenaciously independent of actual power relations. Israel’s precarious predicament is only the latest episode in the world historical saga of Jewish jeopardy. Jews have always been outcasts, without friends, surrounded by enemies. The Palestinians are the latest avatar of the historical anti-Semite, successor and heir apparent to a long line of Jew haters to which pride of place belongs to the Nazis. Israeli propaganda insists that we see Palestinians’ national identity as secondary to their racial identity as Arabs. Merged in the Arab “race,” they become the surrounding homogeneous majority wishing to rid itself of the Jewish thorn in its side. Israel is in the Middle East as the Jewish Ghetto was in Warsaw, surrounded by Arabs as the ghetto was surrounded by Nazis.

The image of the thorn comes from Memmi:

Anti-Semitism, as diversionary tactic and catalyst, was one of the Nazi’s best psychological tools. Destruction of the Jews, as the thorn in the side of the Reich, and then in the side of Europe, was one of the prerequisites to the construction of the new empire. Now, there are hardly any Jews left in the Arab countries, and even if there were, such an argument would be greeted skeptically. But henceforth, there is the State of Israel in the side of the Arab nation: *Israel becomes the Jew of the Arab countries* (*Ibid.*: 107, emphasis in the original).

The spatial/temporal image evoked in Memmi’s imagery of the thorn casts the Palestinian in the role of functional equivalent of the Nazi. Erase the Star of David from the equation with which we started and substitute the PLO. But tilt the postcard and the equation changes again. As the image of Jew as victim obscures the image of Jew as oppressor, so the image of Israel as threatened obscures the opposite spatial/temporal image of a threatening Israel. Israel is a military superpower even if its arrogance masks a deep-rooted insecurity. The Arab world has not been unified. The Palestinians have been murdered and massacred and left high and dry by the Arab states to whose body, to use Memmi’s image, they belong. Palestinians have been as much a thorn in the body of the Arab world as part of that body.

If we see Israel as a thorn in the Arab body, it is equally fair to see Palestinians as a thorn in the Israeli body. Israel perceives itself as threatened, from the inside by an ever increasing population of inassimilable Palestinian Arabs. It is the ghettos of the Palestinians which threaten that state. The Palestinian is dark, dirty, sensual, fecund, threatening to swamp Israel in a dusky sea of

breeding children. They are an alien, clannish inassimilable presence, threatening the new, emerging state. Israel may feel itself to be in the Middle East as the Jewish ghetto was in Warsaw, but with equal fairness, Palestinians fear that Israel is their Poland and that those who order the destruction of their ghetto will speak Hebrew.

And we wonder again at the maze-like implications of the spray-painted graffiti of Bir Zeit.

Slips of the Tongue

Erupting in the war against Palestinians have been instances which seem like slips of the historic tongue, revealing that the graffiti on the walls of Bir Zeit stirs restlessly in the unconscious of Israelis.

The following, cited by Noam Chomsky in *The Fateful Triangle*, is a report on an incident which took place in 1982 in the West Bank village of Halhoul:

The men were taken from their houses, beginning at midnight, in pajamas, in the cold. The notables and other men were concentrated in the square of the mosque and held there until morning. Meanwhile men of the Border Guards, [noted for their cruelty], broke into houses, beating people with shouts and curses. During the many hours that hundreds of people were kept in the mosque square, they were ordered to urinate and excrete upon one another and also to sing *Hatikva* ["The Hope," the national anthem of Israel] and to call out "Long Live the State of Israel." Several times people were beaten and ordered to crawl on the ground. Some were even ordered to lick the earth. At the same time four trucks were commandeered and at day-break the inhabitants were loaded on the trucks, about 100 in each truck, and taken like sheep to the Administration headquarters in Hebron.

On Holocaust day, the 27th of Nissan [the date in the Jewish calendar], the people who were arrested were ordered to write numbers on their hands with their own hands, in memory of the Jews in the extermination camps (1983: 131).

The Jewish soldier thinks: "This is how we were treated. Now you can have a taste of your own medicine. See how it feels to be treated as a Jew." The Jewish soldier does not allow into consciousness the other side of the equation: see how I feel being a Nazi.

More recently, the pressures of the *intifada* provoked a cabinet minister's revealing remarks. After an incident in which Palestinians emerging in a demonstration from the Temple Mount threw stones onto worshipers at the

Wailing Wall. Absorption Minister Yitzhak Peretz, of the right-wing Shas party, was reported as saying that Israel could not allow “every dirty Arab” to limit Jewish movement in the Old City of Jerusalem. Following criticism he retracted the remark admitting that “we Jews have ourselves suffered from that appellation” (*Jerusalem Post*, April 11, 1989).

The common citizen does not have to be so careful with his words. The August-September 1989 issue of *Breaking the Siege*, “The Newsletter of the Middle East Justice Network,” carried the following story:

Nearly a year ago, after two Palestinian workers burned to death in the Tel Aviv suburb Or Yehuda when the hut in which they were locked for the night was set on fire, *Yediot Aharonot* quoted a 16-year-old resident of the town as saying, “What does it matter if an Arab burns? What does an Arab matter at all? It’s not a human being. I wouldn’t care if more than 2,000 burned” (August 17, 1988).

The article went on:

Another young taxi driver said we had to do to them what Hitler did to us. A nice kindly guy from Ramat Gan said that he doesn’t care if they put them in concentration camps.

The article also reports on plans — both to make Palestinians wear badges that say “Foreign Workers” and to build an internment camp for Palestinian workers who would be obliged to wear similar badges — that have been denounced in the Knesset for their Nazi overtones.

The question raised by the forgoing examples is not whether Israel is treating the Palestinians as Jews were treated by Nazis, but whether there is a psychological dynamic at work, in which the victim of the Nazis is compelled to create victims of his own — in the image of his own wounded self. Could it be that when the victim becomes the oppressor, then the images of those who are his victims are drawn from the history of his own victimhood?

Psychoanalysts have held that racism is the projection of despised, feared, and rejected images of the self onto a dehumanized other.

The anti-Semite projects onto the Jew, ascribes to the Jew all his own more or less unconscious bad instincts.... Thus, in ridding himself of them by heaping them on the shoulders of the Jew, he has purged himself of them in his own eyes and sees himself in shining purity (Fanon, 1967: 183, *fn.* 47, quoting Marie Bonaparte).

Racism is a response to ill-understood oppression. It is false consciousness. It is a by-product of internalized oppression. The oppressed first internalize a negative self-image propagated by the oppressor, accompanied by self-hatred

and feelings of inadequacy. Unable to find a way to shake off this cruel self-image, incapable of genuine empowerment, the racist seeks a scapegoat. Onto that scapegoat is then projected the negative internalized self-image instilled by the oppressor. The person onto whom the image is projected is considered a less-than-human object. For the racist to allow the humanity of the one he despises would be to admit something unacceptable about himself — it would be to re-incorporate the images he has rejected. Through rising above this less-than-human object the racist feels a false empowerment. He takes on the illusion of the strength of his own oppressor. Racism, then, is partly a mechanism for identifying with the oppressor.

If what we have outlined above is part of the dynamic of the transformation of victim into oppressor, then we would seek in the mechanism of projection the meaning (apart from any question of literal truth) of the terrible equation with which we started. Israeli Jews carry within them as a wound the stereotypes of anti-Semitism, the hated images of defeat and wretchedness and humiliation. This image of themselves is rejected and projected out onto the surrounding hordes of Palestinians/Arabs. Thus the young Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier, clubbing and kicking the Palestinian in the Occupied Territories, punishes the Jew in himself that he rejects, the feared self-image of the “castrated” Jew, the Jew of the anti-Semite, the Jew that perished without sufficient protest in the Holocaust, the Jew whose catastrophe must “Never Again” be repeated.

What we posit here is a connection between anti-Arab fanaticism and the rejection of the diaspora Jew, the Jew who is seen as victim. The existence of this connection, again, would be in accord with psychoanalytic theory:

Psychoanalysis shows that the unconscious evil identity (the composite of everything that arouses negative identification — i.e., the wish not to resemble it) consists of the images of the violated (castrated) body, the ethnic outgroup and the exploited minority (Erikson, 1963: 243).

For the Israeli, we would say, the image of the castrated body fuses with the image of the victims of the Holocaust.

Sometimes fanatics act out the unconscious of polite society. It is therefore worth paying attention to the ranting of Meir Kahane who takes out an advertisement in the *New York Times* to demand: “No Jewish Guilt”:

There is a specter haunting Israel and its American Jewish supporters. It is called guilt. Guilt over the “repression of Palestinian human rights....” Guilt over the unwillingness to give the “Palestinians” their own state in the “occupied lands.” And now, guilt over the

killing of “Palestinians” and innocent civilians in the “occupied territories” (Kahane, 1988: A18).

Kahane demands that we purge ourselves of that accursed Jewish universalism that leads us to care for others too much, and insufficiently for our own survival. He demands that we purge ourselves of this Jewish compulsion to be always rummaging in relativity, seeking a point of view and a morality that can be shared regardless of one’s origins. He sees this all as weakness and insecurity. Strength, survival, lies on the other side of this morality, beyond good and evil:

A people who has been the most debased of losers for 2,000 years finds it difficult to cope with victory. It finds it extraordinarily difficult to remain normal. It inherits insecurities, complexes, guilt. It begins to believe its enemies’ slanders. It loses its self-respect and longs for the love of a hating world. That is especially so for the very troubled Jewish liberal! It is important that those who have retained their self-esteem and sense of Jewish survival speak out against the disease of guilt and moral insecurity (*Ibid.*).

Kahane’s complaint against the Jewish liberal mirrors that of Nazi propaganda. The Nazis also saw the Jews as the carriers of the “disease,” of “moral insecurity.”

According to Erikson:

the narrow German always felt endangered, denationalized, by the information which exposed him to the relativity and diversity of cultural values. The Jew [like the Palestinian today] seemed to remain himself, despite dispersion over the world, while the German trembled for his identity in his own country. In fact, the mysterious Jews seemed to be making of intellectual relativity a means of racial self-preservation (1963: 353).

But the “mysterious Jews” who founded the State of Israel were not content to link Jewish survival to anything so treacherous as “intellectual relativity.” They wanted firm ground to stand on. Solid earth. Absolute calamity has a way of changing one’s point of view. For Kahane, it places those who have suffered beyond the obligation to be good; beyond the obligation to seek legitimization in universally applicable principles of reason, and beyond the obligation to make sense. The obligation of Jews is to survive. The world demands goodness, but does not reward it. What is virtue worth if the good are converted to ashes:

Far better a Jewish State that survives and is hated by the world, than an Auschwitz that brings us its love and sympathy (Kahane, 1988: A18).

So the Jew — who sought comfort and hope in the pursuit of human values that transcended the parochial — is transformed into the one who does not worry about any value but survival, and seeks survival where others have found it — in exclusive ownership of a piece of the earth. The others — the non-Jews — did not save the Jews, did not let Jews dock at their pier when Jewish boats were capsizing, and so Jews should cluster in their life-raft state, return to tribal exclusivity, give up on universal values. To be Jewish is a value in itself: a good Jew, a bad Jew — it doesn't matter. The worst Jew is still a Jew. The best non-Jew will not be a Jew — ever.

Kahane urges Jews to turn themselves into amoral creatures. The full measure of his scorn is hurled at the “guilty” Jews, the Jews that do not know enough to protect themselves: “the most debased of losers.” It is these guilty Jews of the Diaspora that allowed themselves to be led into the ovens that Kahane hates with a heat that is a dim reflection of the heat of those ovens. He has internalized the passions of the anti-Semite.

In 1944 Sartre sketched an extended portrait of the anti-Semite. It is interesting to read this portrait, and to substitute for the anti-Semitic Frenchman who posed for it the contemporary Israeli anti-Palestinian zealot. Sartre's anti-Semite makes a choice to be irrational. Sartre asks:

How can one choose to reason falsely? It is because of a longing for impenetrability. The rational man groans as he gropes for truth; he knows that his reasoning is no more than tentative, that other considerations may supervene to cast doubt on it. He never sees very clearly where he is going; he is “open”; he may even appear to be hesitant. But there are people who are attracted to the durability of a stone. They wish to be massive and impenetrable; they wish not to change. Where indeed would change take them? We have here a basic fear of oneself and of truth. What frightens them is not the content of truth, of which they have no conception, but the form itself of truth, that thing of indefinite approximation. It is as if their own existence were in continual suspension. But they wish to exist all at once and right away (1948: 18).

“They wish to exist all at once and right away.” Was it not required of Israel, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, to burst into existence “all at once and right away?” And is this not the deep desire of its healthy hard-working citizens, these new Jews, so different from the “*Luftmenchen*,” the “people of air” whom Erikson describes as thriving on relativity.

The desire to be impervious, the choice of irrationality turns arguments about the Palestinian question into battlegrounds in which reason constantly is defeated. For the Israeli there is history galore to justify the image of the Palestinian as uncompromising anti-Semitic terrorist. The Mufti of Jerusalem slipped away to Hitler's Germany, the Covenants of the Palestinian Liberation Organization call for the "elimination of Zionism in Palestine." There are the scarring memories of Malot, and Munich. But one has the impression that all of this does not precede, but rather is only after-the-fact confirmation for a point of view whose form is fixed by forces that go beyond reason, precede it, and are immune to it. These forces, mobilized in self-defense, require an enemy against which to struggle. They are structured to conform to a threat, and shape reality in the image of that threat. The evil intentions of the Palestinians must be given a priori — their hatred of the Jews, their desire to exterminate Israel and drive Jews into the sea. The idea of a moderate Palestinian is an oxymoron. Any willingness to compromise is seen as a ruse, a seduction, a trick. There is no joy in the two-state solution. The November 15, 1988, Declaration of the State of Palestine is seen as a terrible threat. The moderate Arab poses a greater danger than the fanatic rejectionist who confirms the stereotype.

There is no point in arguing with Sartre's anti-Semite.

If then, as we have been able to observe, the anti-Semite is impervious to reason and to experience, it is not because his conviction is strong. Rather his conviction is strong because he has chosen first of all to be impervious (1948: 206).

Continuing Sartre's portrait of the anti-Semite: he does not want to be unique or special, to stand out from the crowd. The anti-Semite is a snob, but he wants to be part of a superior crowd, a crowd that is superior no matter what.

We must not confuse this precedence the anti-Semite enjoys by virtue of his principles with individual merit. The anti-Semite is not anxious to possess individual merit. Merit has to be sought, just like truth; it is discovered with difficulty; one must deserve it. Once acquired, it is perpetually in question: a false step, an error, and it flies away. Without respite, from the beginning of our lives to the end, we are responsible for what merit we enjoy. Now the anti-Semite flees responsibility and he flees his own consciousness, and choosing for his personality the permanence of rock, he chooses for his morality a scale of petrified values. Whatever he does, he knows that he will remain at the top of the ladder; whatever the Jew does, he will never get any higher than the first rung (*Ibid.*: 27).

How easy it is, in this last clause to substitute "Palestinian" for "Jew." Whatever the Palestinian does in Israel, he will never rise any higher than the first rung. And the Israeli Jew will be superior, not because of merit, but because of his Jewishness. Any moral standard which threatens to dislodge Israel from the top of the moral ladder is the wrong scale. If one criticizes Israel's use of torture and the killing of children for throwing stones, one is accused of singling out Jews and holding Israel to a higher standard of values than other countries. There is always somewhere else in the world where the body count is higher. On the other hand, if one does not single Israel out, but points out the similarity of its policies to those of other repressive regimes one is told one is ignoring the uniqueness of its situation.

In short, judgement is not permitted. What is substituted is balance.

Discussion of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict (to be avoided at all costs if possible) is often permitted only within a framework of a kind of artificial and abstract balance. Thus in Berkeley, California, after four months of the *intifada*, a resolution was introduced which would have put the City Council on record as condemning the violence of the Israeli response to the *intifada*. It was rejected. Instead the Council passed a resolution condemning "violence on both sides" — this when television, night after night, was showing Palestinian bones being broken. No equivalent violence was being inflicted by Palestinians on Israelis.

The demand for this sort of balance is never voiced when an act of Palestinian "terrorism" is criticized. It grows out of the need not to diminish the victimhood of the Jews. It expresses a desire to reassure the Jews that any condemnation does not mean rejection, nor does it diminish a commitment to either the continuing existence of Israel or to the existence of Jews, much less a denial of their past pain. All of this is understandable and appropriate. Both sides in this struggle have contributed to the other's fears of annihilation. Palestinians do not forget that Golda Meir said of them: "They do not exist." For years Palestinians would not say the name Israel, referring to the state only as the "Zionist entity." But the balance remains artificial when it is used to deny an imbalance in the present, to mask and conceal it. And the *intifada* has pointed out a profound imbalance. There is the fundamental lack of equivalence between those who attempt to impose a hated occupation and those who resist it.

It is not necessary for the Palestinians to dehumanize the Israeli who beats them on the street and tortures them in prison. The torturer dehumanizes himself. But the goal of the torturer, indeed the fundamental purpose of his exertions, is to deprive his victim of humanity. The Palestinian hates his torturer because the torturer is inhuman. But the torturer hates the humanity of his victim and tries to crush it.

There are numerous reports of terrible sadistic violence perpetrated by Israeli soldiers against Palestinians. Palestinians told me this violence is inflicted amid curses and obscenities. IDF soldiers curse Palestinians as they beat them, calling them animals, humiliating them in prison. One Palestinian described to me how guards made the prisoners walk on all fours, and say "Arafat is a donkey." At other times they were forced to make a sound like a train, etc. Other Palestinians described how Israeli soldiers broke into and destroyed homes in refugee camps, and both beat and exposed themselves to the young girls. For days, in April 1989, before conducting a massacre in the West Bank village of Nahaline, Border Guards sat on a hill overlooking the village and shouted obscenities into a loudspeaker, bragging that they would murder Arafat as they had murdered his second-in-command, Abu Jihad.

Such reports indicate an unwillingness or inability on the part of the IDF commanders to stem the mounting wave of sadism and to impose restraints on their soldiers. Unconscious elements are coming to the fore.

There is a connection between dehumanization, violence, and pornography. Pornographic arousal is produced by images that trigger sexuality — women become secondary appendages to their breasts, their vaginas, and breasts and vaginas are to be used. They exist only for the penis. The sadist takes sexual pleasure in inflicting pain that breaks resistance, strips away independent identity, and deprives the person on whom they exercise their desire of any interior that could resist objectification. Racial stereotypes and pornographic stereotypes have much in common, and racism is often accompanied by sexual violence.

In order to justify the violence required to suppress the Palestinian uprising, it becomes increasingly necessary to turn the enemy into malevolent icons, without interior. If they persist in resistance they provoke rage, a desire to pulverize them, till they have no more dimension than scribbles on a bathroom wall, triggers for instinctual release, or caricatures. An occupation which can be maintained only by dehumanizing those on whom it is imposed brings with it state-sanctioned brutality, torture, and rape.

Where there is a spark of humanity left in those on whom the occupation is imposed, there will be resistance. The goal of the occupation is to destroy that humanity, to penalize it, to set it against itself. The justification of the occupation is that it is necessary because the occupied were not human to begin with. The goal of the struggle against occupation is to preserve one's humanity at whatever cost.

Without debating whether the creation of the State of Israel is the fulfillment of the national liberation movement of the Jews or an example of settler-colonialism, it is clear that the actual, existing relations in the Occupied Territories fit patterns familiar to colonialism. Sartre describes the psychology of revolt and repression in his introduction to Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*:

since none may enslave, rob, or kill his fellow man without committing a crime, they [the colonizers] lay down the principle that the native is not one of our fellow men. Our striking power has been given the mission of changing this abstract certainty into reality: the order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level of superior monkeys in order to justify the settlers' treatment of them as beasts of burden. Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aim the keeping of the enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours. Sheer physical fatigue will stupefy them. Starved and ill, if they have any spirit left, fear will finish the job; guns are leveled at the peasant; civilians come to take over his land and force him by dint of flogging to till the land for them. If he shows fight, the soldiers fire and he's a dead man; if he gives in, he degrades himself and is no longer a man at all; shame and fear will split up his character and make his inmost self fall to pieces (1968: 15).

"When we have settled the land," said Israeli Chief of Staff Raphael Eitan to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, "all the Arabs will be able to do about it will be to scurry around like drugged roaches in a bottle" (Chomsky, 1983: 130, *fn.*).

The psychological mechanism by which an oppressed, colonized people rejects its condition, dispenses with the myriad accommodations to a hated occupation, and begins a struggle for independence is fundamentally different from the mechanism by which an army hardens itself to impose the occupation. It also has little to do with the anti-Semitic posturing of those who bluff and pump themselves up with rhetoric, while never grasping the true nature of their oppression.

And inevitably there is revolt. The violence imposed on the subject population is thrown back in the face of those who imposed it. And inevitably the occupier does not understand his failure to domesticate the occupied. Their resistance is the product of:

...something which perhaps he has never known: we only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us.... Hardly has the second generation [born under colonial occupation] opened their eyes than from then on they've seen their fathers being flogged. In psychiatric terms they are traumatized for life. But these constantly renewed aggressions, far from bringing them to submission, thrust them into an unbearable contradiction which the European will pay for sooner or later. After that, when it is their turn to be broken in, when they are taught what shame

and hunger and pain are, all that is stirred up in them is a volcanic fury whose force is equal to that of the pressure put upon them (Fanon, 1968: 18).

It is understandable that Palestinians wish to be permitted to feel towards the Israeli Jew all the hatred, anger, contempt, and envy that the colonized have always felt towards the colonizers. In a restaurant in Berkeley, California, a Palestinian professor exclaimed to me in exasperation: "We are their victims, do we also have to be their therapists?" Palestinians are not permitted anger because anger at Jews in the context of historical anti-Semitism can not distinguish itself from the irrational resentments of anti-Semitism. They are asked to put forward iron-clad assurances that they have been vaccinated against anti-Semitism. This, of course, they can not do. We ask again: How does one prove such a thing?

The best proof, for now, lies in the strategy of the *intifada*. Palestinians believe that they have the right to meet the violence of Israeli state with their own violence. But they realize now, after years of struggle that this tactic, alone, will fail. For their battle can not be won until they spring the psychological trap which makes them invisible. Anything which feeds the image of the Israeli as victim reinforces their invisibility. And so, in the *intifada*, they have adopted a form of resistance that guarantees the loss of life will be proportionately on the side of the Palestinians. I've thought of it as "Gandhi with Rocks." But it isn't quite that. This is because the fury of the oppressed is there, the fury of the wretched of the earth, but it is held in extraordinary constraint, tempered by strategy, controlled by a profound self-discipline. How long this self-discipline can hold against the extraordinary pressures put upon it is impossible to say. That it has held as long as it has is an incredible feat. And here again there is no equivalence: the Israeli soldiers spiral out of control, while the web of organization deepens in the Territories. The discipline would not be possible if the forces of anti-Semitism were in command.

We can only hope that the Palestinian/Israeli conflict will be resolved by means of a compromise that allows two peoples to live side by side in two states. The fear is that violence and irrationality will nullify that historical possibility as it appears, leaving Palestinians and Israelis trapped in the historical maze.



Throughout the Territories, since the beginning of the *intifada*, Palestinian children spend their days playing a deadly game with the Israeli soldiers. The game often ends with their death, or the death of a playmate, or their wounding, or torture. The muddy streets of the camps, the paved roads of the towns are their playground. Their imagination may contain little else but these con-

frontations magnified and carried on in fantasy. In the spaces between these confrontations the younger children play a game of soldiers and demonstrators; rock throwers and Israelis. Teachers, throughout the Occupied Territories, report that this game is played with great ferocity; sometimes real injuries occur. This is not surprising. At a time when children play games in which they pretend to die, these children really die. The normal boundaries between fantasy and reality, game and deadly, reality blend.

Throughout the West Bank people tell you things may be bad, but they're worse in Gaza. In Gaza we talked to a teacher in a clandestine nursery school about this game.

"How," we asked, "do they decide who plays soldiers and who plays rock throwers?"

"Well," said the teacher, "the girls play the rock throwers and the boys play Israelis."

Now, of course, consciously, no self-respecting Palestinian boy would express any admiration for the Israeli soldiers. "They are cowards without their guns." And yet beneath the surface, the hidden fantasy of possessing the power of the soldier produces in the child the forbidden desire to be the Israeli.

Menachem Begin is said to have always kept on his desk a picture of a Jewish child with haunted eyes being lead through the streets of Warsaw to extermination — a terrified child who had seen too much. Perhaps he would glance at this picture as he discussed the security needs of the Israeli state with Ariel Sharon, his minister of defense. Ariel Sharon — with his large belly, his bullying arrogance, his propensity for violence and intimidation; he who places the menorah upon the gables of his house in the Arab sector of Jerusalem like a giant middle finger raised in an obscene provocative gesture. Did that haunted boy in Begin's picture grow to be this man? Did that corpulent belligerence grow like a thick carapace to protect that child? And do the Palestinians fear that a similar transformation will happen to their young children hunted in the street? Mazes and transformations.³



Returning to New York after three weeks in the Occupied Territories, I am unloading luggage from the revolving baggage carousel in Kennedy airport next to an Israeli woman who was on the same flight. She asks me where I've been.

"The West Bank and Gaza to do a report."

"Well, I hope you'll be objective."

I don't even remember how I responded, but it clearly was inadequate. In an instant the conversation has spiralled out of control. I'm enraged and she is seething in obstinate fury, yelling at me that Palestinians are better off under the Occupation. Now they have water and electricity. The 600 homes demol-

ished by the Israeli army belonged to terrorists. This is not a reasonable discussion. She seems incapable of hearing anything but her own myth of the benevolent-victim Israeli and the terroristic Palestinian.

We began with a terrible equation, a piece of propaganda, which by asserting a simple identity of opposites leads into a labyrinth of conflicting identities, of interwoven images, mirrors that face each other producing an ever receding infinity of reflections. Terrifying reflections of the past merge in the present. This labyrinth is repellant and at the same time seems to exert a forbidden attraction on all involved in this conflict.

Both sides fear the image of the maze and wish to be extricated from it. The wide spaces of the Yad Vashem memorial deny it. The intricate twisting passageways of the Old City of Jerusalem confirm what is denied. Neither side accepts boundaries though all long for boundaries that would bring security. Within the maze there is no security and no "*Never Again*." The intricateness of the maze tends to impose a false equality and leads to the fallacy of misplaced complexity: the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is simply too intricate to deal with. It is the Bermuda Triangle of politics. All who enter are doomed by its mysterious forces.

The active resistance of the *intifada* works against mystification, moves towards truth, refuses the web that weighs down and restricts flight. I felt more irrational panic in the conversation with the woman at the baggage carousel than in the most intense encounters in the Occupied Territories. Travelling among the Palestinians one experiences an extraordinary juxtaposition: moments of absolute crisis intensity, filled with the keening, ululating cries of people who have been collectively living in their lasts moments, alternate with stretches of quiet conversation, filled with the unadorned plain speaking of revolutionary professionalism. The reason of the revolt is holding within the extraordinary forces produced by the resistance. For those who see the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as a maze overdetermined by history there is enormous hope here. This is a moment that can not be lost.

On the Israeli side the situation is precarious. The society seems to be tearing itself apart. Those who believe that they can not — and should not — survive by denying the humanity of the Palestinians move farther and further apart from those who wish, in their strenuous desire for security, to be beyond good and evil. The suppression of the *intifada* calls forth the irrational and destructive in the Israeli psyche, feeds on stereotypes.⁴ There is no equality here, nor really much complexity. Israelis must master their fears, and realize their true strength for a truer "*Never Again*."

There is a grave danger that if the forces engendered by past pain and persecution are not understood, they will remain unchecked, and result in an unconscious drive towards destruction. This drive will masquerade as the fierce determination to survive. But within that determination something else will be

at work: an unconscious psychological desire for self-annihilation working to create new victims in the footsteps of the old.

In the midst of the Lebanon War of 1982, Dov Yermiya, a reserve officer, was expelled from his unit for publicly criticizing the brutality of the Israeli army towards civilians.

In a letter of protest to his commander he warned:

You are currently riding on the wave of enthusiasm and self-congratulation that the present irresponsible leadership of the IDF and the state have induced. I am watching this wave with a sense of fear and terror, as it encompasses more and more people. Your identification with this path, which may lead to a classic fascist regime, with unique Jewish *Gush Emunim*-like and *Betar*-like characteristics, is both symptomatic and contagious. You should recall that past fascist movements have led their nations to wars that began with victories and ended in shameful defeats. Those movements also attacked the Jews, and tried to eliminate us. And as we all know, they almost succeeded (1984: 126).

Dov Yermiya warns that if Jews again face the threat of annihilation, it could be because, as the spray-painted equation of Bir Zeit suggests, some among them have already identified with a fascist path. That path leads over the bodies of Palestinians. It is a catastrophe for hopes of peace in the Middle East. But in the worst scenario, a far wider catastrophe is possible. With nuclear weapons at their disposal, the victims of the Holocaust could be instrumental in unleashing a new Holocaust that might consume us all. The hope is that those who will find ways to avoid it — like Dov Yermiya — recognize the danger.

NOTES

1. By stigmatizing Zionism:

as a colonial or imperialist phenomenon, they [its critics] single it out for universal blame and calumny and prepare the world for seeing it receive its rightful punishment. *By denaturing Zionism, by destroying it symbolically, they pave the way for its real destruction* (Memmi, 1975: 161, emphasis in the original).

2. An Israeli joke is apropos: an old Israeli who came to Israel before 1948 shows his children pictures of himself working in the fields, digging with a pick and shovel. The children examine the pictures with fascination. "Daddy," one of them says, "we didn't know you were a Palestinian when you were a child."

3. An Israeli joke: if you see a child in the Occupied Territories with Jewish eyes, he's Palestinian.

4. At a recent conference, an Israeli speaker advocating a hard line against giving up "land for peace" began his speech with the following joke. He seemed oblivious to any of its subversive implications:

God has decided to put an end to the world and calls in Bush, Gorbachev, and Sharon so that they can spread the word among the people. "In two weeks," he tells them, "the world will end."

Bush returns and calls a press conference. "I have good news and bad news," he announces. "The good news is that God exists. The bad news is that in two weeks the world will end."

Gorbachev calls a press conference: "I have bad news, and worse news," he says. "The bad news is that God exists. The worse news is that in two weeks the world will end." Sharon summons the press: "I have good news and excellent news. The good news is that God exists. The excellent news is that in two weeks the *intifada* will end."

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