EDITOR'S NOTE

The region of the Middle East is thick with defining histories and daunting contemporary complexities. Among the specific factors that command our attention are: (a) the location of some of the oldest and most remarkable human civilizations; (b) the site of the birth of the three Abrahamic faiths; (c) an area shaped by the intrusions of colonialism; (d) a congested environment in which some of the hardest and most flammable contestations over identity, aboriginal belonging, and access to scarce resources are being waged; (d) a terrain susceptible to foreign interventions by other forces, including non-state actors; and (e) a milieu in which the contemporary supreme tasks include the making of peace and cosmopolitan orders—ones in which difference will be respected, existential angst reduced, and liberty and justice become the grammar of life for all.

Perhaps no other zone of the Middle East manifests this matrix of attributes more than Israel and Palestine. Communities so similar in numerous, important, and cultural ways are now caught up in deadly "othering" of each. An immediate question that arises out of the Israeli-Palestinian encounter, then, and subsequent bloody conflagrations is this: What is the nature of the conflict? One way to respond is to suggest that two peoples' identities, each with deep historical claims in the area, came to an open clash with the establishment of the Israeli national state in 1948. Animated by the dreams and programmatic agenda of Theodor Herzl's first Zionist Congress, that met in Basle, Switzerland, in 1897, the World Zionist Organization was founded. Buffeted by centuries of "Judeophobia"—a toxic mixture of anti-Semitism, pogroms, and marginalization by European Christian societies and states, Zionism's principal objective was the creation of a secure homeland for the Jewish people. As discussions on such a possibility gathered steam, the British imperial government, through its then colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, suggested the colony of Uganda, in east-central Africa, as a possible site. But the Zionist leadership, under Herzl's dominant personality, declined the offer. Given the infamous and alarming Dreyfus Affair in France, a country hitherto believed by many Jews as the most accommodating, and the Holocaust a few decades later, the Jewish (particularly those in Europe) desperation and primal resolve for a territory of their own became most acute. To telescope, the birth of the state of Israel was at once an exhilarating triumph and a catastrophic defeat. The first underscored the tangible

and desired consequence of the intensity of the purpose of the Zionist project; the latter testified to the depth of the weaknesses of the Palestinian people. Here, however, it is crucial to register that there were notable Jewish voices in the early stages of Zionism that spoke against what they saw as grave liabilities inherent in a triumphalist, if not conquest-fuelled, new creed. It is instructive to reproduce, at some length, Arno J. Mayer's rendition of this perspective.

> Practically from the outset of modern Zionism, a galaxy of prophetic internal critics warned of the dangers of taking a narrow political road to Palestine. As they saw it, a mainstream Zionism was proposing to establish a state for Jews in a land which was not theirs for the taking, and which was by no means without people. To win through, besides needing imperial patronage, they would most likely have to fight an unconsenting local population. The internal critics of cultural and spiritual Zionism feared that a politics of violence and force would pervade the Zionist project, all the more so since statehood would have to be imposed on distrustful neighboring countries as well.
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> Starting with Ahad Haam in the 1890s, the internal critics discussed the 'Arab Question,' proposing ways to smooth the encounter between Jew and Palestinian. They stressed the cardinal important of dialogue to the growth of mutual understanding and responsibility. Among their most prominent members, Martin Buber and Ernst Simon urged that the injunction to 'Love thy Neighbor' cease being interpreted exclusively as applying to Jewish neighbors. They advocated revising the rabbinic tradition with regard to the non-Jewish Other, opening it up to a 'common humanity' embracing Jew and gentile equally. Theirs was a call for a universalist ethics and morality, without which there could be no positive encounter with the local and neighboring populations.
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> Ahad Haam was the first of many critics to suggest that the persecuted past of the Jews, coupled with their Western supremacism, would predispose the settlers to act toward the subaltern natives like colonial masters. The only way to avoid such an outcome, the Zionist dissenters argued, was for the new arrivals to foster mutual understanding between the two communities by way of social, economic, and civic collaboration at the local and regional level—an essential first step toward a *binational*, *single-state* [my emphasis] confederation providing equal powers and rights for Jews and Arabs, with guarantees against minority oppression.[1]

The brief existence (just sixty years) of the state of Israel categorically demonstrates that, though some Israeli voices still echo the spirit of

the early critics,[2] the overwhelming victory of the establishment of the Jewish home has created its own intense antithesis: Palestinian nationalist rage,[3] and virulent anti-Jewish fever among Arabs and some parts of the Islamic world. The present, then, though not always to be a hostage of the past, nonetheless carries with it memories that die hard, especially when each generation is reminded and then recycles—often with exaggerations or amendments—its own version of acrimonious historical moments. Even before the creation of Israel, Jewish communities who have lived in the vast ancient landscape of the Middle East came under attack from the rising tide of Islam in Arabia. As early as the years of Prophet Muhammad and his follower's zealous drive to win believers, the Jews of Arabia, particularly the Quraza tribe of the town of Medina, were annihilated after being accused of treachery. The pivotal moment was the Battle of the Trench in 627 A.D., when Muhammad and his relatively smaller army defeated the main opposition—the Prophet's own powerful Quraysh community. This episode refortified the Prophet's earlier and deeper suspicion of the Jews of Hijaaz. As Davis Levering Lewis relates:

> His revelations now told him that the Jews were a willful people who had dishonored the word of God. Theirs had been the highest honor bestowable upon a people—to be the custodians of God's universal plan. But the Jews had slipped twice: long ago when Moses brought the tablets; in the here and now by their insufferable condescension and tragic blindness before God's final revelation to mankind. 'When they are told: "Believe in what God has revealed," they reply: "We believe in what was revealed to *us*," the Prophet was told to recite. "But they deny what has since been revealed, although it is the truth, corroborating their own scriptures." '[4]

Yet, Jewish and Arab Muslims have not always lived in constant antagonism. On the contrary, there are numerous examples of epochs of productive and civilized co-existence, if not firm alliances.[5] For instance, the reign of Abd al-Rahman I in Islamic al-Andalus, with the rightly fabled Cordoba as the economic and cultural center, exemplified such possibilities.[6] To be sure, even in this context, Jews were classified as *dhimanis*. That is, while having their distinct rights, including the operation of rabbinic law amongst their midst, they still were categorized as less than equal to Muslims. Perhaps the same could be said about most of the Jewish populations who lived in majority Arab countries before the inception of the state of Israel. The moral of this point, none-

theless, is this: in times of furious disagreeable encounters, a recidivist gene is likely to encourage a blanket reviling of Jews to an astonishing degree.

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Beside the contumaciousness of earlier histories between communities so intimately intertwined, the current time among the Israelis and the Palestinians is characterized by a number of key and difficult issues that lie at the heart of the impasse. Some are primarily Palestinian responsibility; others are to be placed at the doorstep of Israelis. Each community's ability to own up to its share is unavoidable if a transformative dialogue is to replace the prevailing violent hatred. Below are examples of some key and combustible items associated, in the eyes of the other, with each side.

A. Against Palestinians:

- Terror. Most expressed through suicide bombing, Israelis and many in the rest of the world see these as acts of cruel savagery that maim and kill indiscriminately. It is one thing to engage military personnel and networks, the argument goes, but it is beyond the pale to deliberately target civilians going about their routines of daily life.
- Anti-Semitism. Partly as a selective reading of the otherwise complex earlier history of the relationship between the two communities and partly reinforced by twentieth-century Nazi and fascist doctrines, the Palestinian popular culture, particularly the militant flanks, has appropriated elements of crude anti-Semitism that are in wide circulation in parts of the Arab world.
- Destruction of Israel. The deepest of all the Israeli existential anguishes, many Palestinians and their staunchest supporters are believed to hold on to their ultimate purpose—the total elimination of the state of Israel.
- Absence of effective leadership. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has been proven to be inept to such an extent that it has failed to establish its authority among its own population. This major shortcoming has made it nearly impossible to have a strong partner with whom to negotiate the difficult issues and, most importantly, implement any agreements toward a lasting peace. More worrisome, the

PA's feebleness has created a void taken up by the extremely radical Islamists led by Hamas.

B. Against Israel:

- Dispossession. From 1948, the establishment of Israel has been synonymous with the expulsion of Palestinians as well as the expropriation of their land and properties. This treatment continues to this day by way of a violently aggressive expansion of settlements (with more than 450,000 individuals, around 10% of Israeli Jews) in pursuit of an exclusive and greater Israel.[6] The pitiful status of Palestinian refugees, living in fifty-nine camps, fuels this concern.
- Occupation and Apartheid. Unlike differentiation, which manifests itself through sharp power difference but tolerates, if not pursues, integration, Apartheid as a deliberate social policy at once creates extremities of the distribution of power, conspicuous geographical separation, and a racist outlook on the part of the dominant.[7] The congested and deprived enclave of Gaza, the increasingly shrinking West Bank, and the deteriorating rights of the more than one million Arab citizens of Israel (contrasted to the outright privileges accorded to any Jew that decides to immigrate to Israel) underscore, so the argument stresses, the calculated design of an Israeli version of Apartheid.
- Politicide. The Israeli state and its overseas supporters are committed, so it is contended, to a strategy of discrediting/destroying any initiative among the Palestinians to organize themselves into a viable political community with an able leadership. The practice of targeted assassination by Israeli forces is brought forth as a brute example of such a policy.
- Arrogance of Power. The superiority of the Israeli state's military capacity and the willingness to use overwhelming force are the secrets to Israeli contempt for Palestinians and, thus, dismissal of the legitimacy of leaders elected in open electoral contests by the Palestinian population. Such a situation is preeminently sustained by the unquestioning support of the United States for Israeli policy towards the Palestinian people.

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Our Faculty Development International Seminar was at once intellectually and existentially an extraordinary experience. Intellectually because not only did we cover lots of diverse and fascinating scholarship and interact with major academic figures, from both communities, in fierce disagreement with each other over the nature, evolution, and trajectories of the realities that they shared, but, in addition, we as participants from Macalester College spent long and sometimes very tense hours every day comparing what we were reading and hearing. Existentially it was exhausting, as each one of us had to meditate (and continues to do so) upon the on-rushing contradictions of the quotidian life across visible and less obvious boundaries between hostile Jewish and Palestinian communities.

That the Israeli-Palestinian intimate entanglement is in one sense highly complicated is undeniable—particularly when it comes to issues pertaining to claims and counterclaims based on particular interpretations of history and identity. Yet this *problematique* is also not so uncommon. It betrays enough of the attributes that accompany charged struggles over power and resources that are familiar from earlier times in human interactions and the contemporary world. The challenge for the seminar participants, then, has been how to deepen our openness towards difference and, simultaneously, identify the most salient of the issues that, as it were, separate the wheat from the chaff in this highly charged environment. Finally, we were fortunate to come into contact with some Israelis and Palestinians still committed to working towards and betting on, over the long haul, the cultivation of an intersubjectivity that will seek justice and peace through shared vision and legitimate institutions.

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The eighth Macalester Faculty Development International Seminar will convene in the summer of 2010 in The Hague, The Netherlands. The theme will be *Global Citizenship: From Human Rights to Urban Diversity*.

Notes

1. Arno J. Mayer, *Plowshares into Swords: From Zionism to Israel* (London: Verso, 2008), pp. 6–7. Another formidable intellectual force that belongs to this company is that of Hannah Arendt. See particularly her 1944 essay, "Zionism Reconsidered," in *The Jewish Writings*, edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

2. Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Benny Morris, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); David Shulman, *Dark Hope: Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Anne Karpf, Brian Klug, Jacqueline Rose, and Barbara Rosenbaum, *A Time to Speak Out* (London: Verso, 2008); and David Grossman, *Death as a Way of Life: Israel Ten Years after Oslo* (Newark: Farar, Strauss and Giroux, 2003).

3. Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); and Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) and *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

4. David Levering Lewis, *God's Crucible: Islam and the Making of Empire, 570–1215* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), p. 46.

5. Lewis tells of a vivid moment that captures such solidarity-cum-sympathy in the midst of war with Christians during the leadership of 'Umar ibn Al Khatab.

> To be compelled to open the Gate of Repentance to 'Umar was tantamount in Sophronius's mind to spreading a red carpet for the Antichrist. They rode side by side through the narrow, cobbled streets from the Garden of Gethsemane up to the deserted, dung-covered hill known as the Temple Mount, above the Church of the Resurrection. It was there that what 'Umar called the 'Mosque of David' had once stood, the Second Temple destroyed by Titus. To offend the Jews, the Christians were using the Temple Mount as a garbage depot… . 'Umar is said to have become enraged by the profanation of the Temple Mount and ordered Christian peasants rounded up to clear the place (pp. 77–78).
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> See also, Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

6. Edward W. Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

7. The activities of disinheriting Palestinians are now taking even more alarming form. This is what Ethan Bronner of *The New York Times* reported recently:

> Boulders the size of compact cars are carved out here at a vast quarry near Bethlehem and pushed noisily through grinders, producing gravel and sand that go into apartment buildings in this rapidly growing Israeli settlement and all across Israel itself. The Land of the West Bank is, of course, disputed, Israel occupies it, and the Palestinians want it for a future state. But more and more of it is gone—quarried by Israeli companies and sold for building materials, a practice that is the focus of a new legal challenge… . So the 10 or so expanding West Bank quarries that are the focus of the legal challenge now account for nearly a quarter of the sand and gravel Israel uses, 10 million tons out of 44 million yearly. Palestinians are

> incensed and say that if there is ever to be a prospering Palestinian economy, control over their natural resources is essential.
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> Ethan Bronner, "Desert's Sand and Rocks Become Precious Resources in West Bank Dispute," *The New York Times* (7 March 2009): A5.

8. Perhaps no other item captures the intention of unequal separation of the two peoples than The Wall, an extensive and imposing structure still in progress. One distinguished Israeli scholar and peace activist's sober lamentations are worth noting:

> How can we, the children or grandchildren of utopian idealists and dreamers, have done this to another people?…I don't think the trauma of terrorism, real and devastating as it has been, is enough to explain what has happened here—the demonic amalgam of greed, myopic hyper-nationalism, and an infatuation with brute coercion that develops only among those who feel vulnerable to the point of impotence. All of these are endemic to ethnic conflict, which inevitably narrows the collective vision and deadens the human heart. The first thing to go is the ability to imagine the world through the eyes of the other, the enemy, the victim-to-be. But the Jews have, perhaps, added something very much their own in this towering gray wall, standing on stolen ground, something that embodies very specific and altogether recent memories. You build—for others—the wall you have known.
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> David Shulman, *Dark Hope: Working for Peace in Israel and Palestine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 172–173.