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Permission to Narrate

Edward Said

As a direct consequence of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon an international commission of six jurists headed by Sean MacBride undertook a mission to investigate reported Israeli violations of international law during the invasion. The commission's conclusions were published in *Israel in Lebanon*[1] by a British publisher: it is reasonably clear that no publisher could or ever will be found for the book in the US. Anyone inclined to doubt the Israeli claim that "purity of arms" dictated the military campaign will find support for that doubt in the report, even to the extent of finding Israel also guilty of attempted "ethnocide" and "genocide" of the Palestinian people (two members of the commission demurred at that particular conclusion, but accepted all the others). The findings are horrifying—and almost as much because they are forgotten or routinely denied in press reports as because they occurred. The commission says that Israel was indeed guilty of acts of aggression contrary to international law; it made use of forbidden weapons and methods; it deliberately, indiscriminately and recklessly bombed civilian targets—"for example, schools, hospitals and other non-military targets"; it systematically bombed towns, cities, villages and refugee camps; it deported, dispersed and ill-treated civilian populations; it had no really valid reasons "under international law for its invasion of Lebanon, for the manner in which it conducted hostilites, or for its actions as an occupying force"; it was directly responsible for the Sabra and Shatila massacres.

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As a record of the invasion, the MacBride Commission report is therefore a document of importance. But it has had no appreciable effect on the one outside force—America—whose indulgent support for Israel has made possible continued turbulence in Lebanon. The political question of moment is why, rather than fundamentally altering the Western view of Israel, the events of the summer of 1982 have been accommodated in all but a few places in the public realm to the view that prevailed before those events: that since Israel is in effect a civilized, democratic country constitutively incapable of barbaric practices against Palestinians and other non-Jews, its invasion of Lebanon was ipso facto justified.

Naturally, I refer here to official or policy-effective views and not the inchoate, unfocused feelings of the citizenry, which, to judge from several polls, is unhappy about Israeli actions. US aid levels to Israel since the siege of Beirut have gone up to a point where Israel receives roughly half of the entire American foreign aid budget, most of it in outright gifts and in subsidies to Israeli industries directly competitive with American counterparts. Presidential candidates, with the exception of George McGovern and Jesse Jackson, outbid each other in paeans of praise for Israel. The Administration has refurbished the strategic "understanding" it made with Israel during Alexander Haig's time as Secretary of State, as if the invasion had never happened, the theory being that, given unlimited aid, Israel will be assured of its security and prove a little more flexible. This has not happened. And, of course, Israel now sits on even greater amounts of Arab land, with occupation policies that are more brutally and blatantly repressive than those of most other 20th-century occupation regimes.

Gideon Spiro, an Israeli, testified to the MacBride Commission:

> We don't pay the price of anything that we are doing, not in the occupied territories, because Israel is in this a unique miracle. There is no country in the world which has over 100 per cent inflation, which is occupying the West Bank, occupying another people, and building all those settlements with billions of dollars, and spending 30 per cent of the GNP on defence—and still we can live here. I mean, somebody is paying for everything, so if everybody can live well and go abroad and buy cars, why not be for the occupation? So they are all luxury wars and people are very proud of the way we are fighting, the quick victories, the self-image of the brave Israeli—very flattering!

Yes, Israelis have fought well, and for the most part the Arabs haven't: but how is it that, as has been the case for much of this century, the premises

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on which Western support for Israel is based are still maintained, even though the reality, the facts, cannot possibly bear these premises out?

Look at the summer of 1982 more closely. A handful of poorly armed Palestinians and Lebanese held off a very large Israeli army, air force and navy from June 5 till the middle of August. This was a major political achievement for the Palestinians. Something else was at stake in the invasion, however, to judge by its results a year and a half later—results which include Arab inaction, Syrian complicity in the unsuccessful PLO mutiny, and a virulent American hostility to Palestinian nationalism. That something was, I think, the inadmissible existence of the Palestinian people whose history, actuality and aspirations, as possessed of a coherent narrative direction pointed towards self-determination, were the object of this violence. Israel's war was designed to reduce Palestinian existence as much as possible. Most Israeli leaders and newspapers admitted the war's *political* motive. In Rafael Eitan's words, to destroy Palestinian nationalism and institutions in Lebanon would make it easier to destroy them on the West Bank and in Gaza: Palestinians were to be turned into "drugged roaches in a bottle." Meanwhile the clichés advocating Israel's right to do what it wants grind on: Palestinians are rejectionists and terrorists, Israel wants peace and security, the Arabs won't accept Israel and want to destroy it, Israel is a democracy, Zionism is (or can be made consonant with) humanism, socialism, liberalism, Western civilization, the Palestinian Arabs ran away in 1948 because the other Arabs told them to, the PLO destroyed Lebanon, Israel's campaign was a model of decorum greeted warmly by "the Lebanese" and was only about the protection of the Galilee villagers.

Despite the MacBride Commission's view that "the facts speak for themselves" in the case of Zionism's war against the Palestinians, the facts have never done so, especially in America, where Israeli propaganda seems to lead a life of its own. Whereas, in 1975, Michael Adams and Christopher Mayhew were able to write about a coherent but unstated policy of unofficial British press censorship, according to which unpleasant truths about Zionism were systematically suppressed, the situation is not nearly as obvious so far as the British media today are concerned. It still obtains in America, however, for reasons to do with a seemingly absolute refusal on the part of policy-makers, the media and the liberal intelligentsia to make connections, draw conclusions, state the simple facts, most of which contradict the premises of declared US policy. Paradoxically, never has so much been written and shown of the

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Palestinians, who were scarcely mentioned fifteen years ago. They are there all right, but the narrative of their present actuality—which stems directly from the story of their existence in and displacement from Palestine, later Israel—that narrative is not.

A disciplinary communications appartus exists in the West both for overlooking most of the basic things that might present Israel in a bad light, and for punishing those who try to tell the truth. How many people know the kind of thing suggested by the following incident—namely, the maintenance in Israel of a rigid distinction between privileged Jew and underprivileged Palestinian? The example is recent, and its very triviality indicates the by now unconscious adherence to racial classification which pervades official Israeli policy and discourse. I have this instance from Professor Israel Shahak, Chairman of the Israeli League of Human Rights, who transcribed it from the Israeli journal *Kol Ha'ir*. The journal reports, with some effect of irony:

> The society of sheep raisers in Israel [an entirely Jewish body from which Arabs are totally excluded] has agreed with the Ministry of Agriculture that a special sheepfold will be built in order to check the various immunisations on sheep. Which sheep? Jewish sheep in Israel, writes Baruch Bar Shalev, secretary of the sheep raiser's society in a circular letter to all sheep raisers. In the letter they are asked to pay, towards the cost of the sheepfold, twenty shekels for Jewish sheep. This demand was also received by Semadar Kramer of the secretariat of 'Neven Shalom' near Latron.
>
> Semadar Kramer sent the society of sheep raisers only half of the sum requested for building the Jewish sheepfold because 'Neven Shalom' is a Jewish-Arab village, and therefore its sheep are also Jewish-Arab. They also claim that they have no certain knowledge about mixed marriages among the sheep, and that lately some difficulties about the conversion to Judaism were encountered in their sheepfold.

This, one might think, is either insanity or some comic fantasy produced in the imagination of a Swift or Kafka. Jewish sheep? The conversion of Arab sheep to Judaism? Surely these things cannot be real. Such distinctions, however, are part of the system of possessive exclusivism which has been imposed upon reality by central forces in Israeli society. The system is rarely discussed at all in the West, certainly not with anything resembling the intensity with which Palestinian terrorism is discussed. When an attempt is made to speak critically of Israel, the result is frightening—if the attempt succeeds in getting any diffusion at all. One small index is the fact that the Anti-Defamation League in America and the America-Israel Public Affairs Committee have

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each published books identifying Israel's "enemies" and implying tactics for police or vigilante action. In addition, there is the deep media compliance I have referred to—so that effective, and especially narrative, renderings of the Palestine-Israel contest are either attacked with near-unanimous force or ignored. The fortunes of Le Carré's novel *The Little Drummer Girl* and Costa-Gavras' film *Hanna K* illustrate these alternatives.

Having made a strong impression regionally and internationally during the years 1970 to 1982, the Palestinian narrative, as we shall see in a moment, is now barely in evidence. This is not an aesthetic judgment. Like Zionism itself, post-1948 Palestinian nationalism has had to achieve formal and ideological prominence well before any actual land has been gained. Strange nationalisms these, conducted for years in exile and alienation, for years projective, stubborn, passionately believed in. The major difference is that Zionism was a hothouse flower grown from European nationalism, anti-Semitism and colonialism, while Palestinian nationalism, derived from the great wave of Arab and Islamic anti-colonial sentiment, has since 1967, though tinged with retrogressive religious sentiment, been located within the mainstream of secular post-imperialist thought. Even more important, Zionism is essentially a dispossessing movement so far as non-Jews are concerned. Palestinianism since 1967 has generally been inclusive, trying (satisfactorily or not) to deal with the problem created by the presence of more than one national community in historical Palestine. And for the years between 1974 and 1982, there was a genuine international consensus underwriting the Palestinian communal narrative and restoring it as a historical story to its place of origin and future resolution in Palestine. I speak here of the idea that Israel should return the occupied territories and that a Palestinian state be created alongside Israel. That this went against the grain of Zionism, despite its many internal differences, was obvious: nevertheless, there were many people in the world both willing and able to contest Golda Meir's 1969 fiat that the Palestinians did not exist historically, had no communal identity, and no national rights. But when the whole force of the Palestinian national movement proposed a political resolution in Palestine based on the narrative shape of alienation, return and partition, in order to make room for two people, one Jewish and the other Arab, neither Israel nor the West accepted it. Hence the bitter Arab and Palestinian infighting, which has been caused by Arafat's—i.e the mainstream PLO's—failure to get any real response to the notion of

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partition from those Western nations most associated with the fate of Palestine. Bruno Kreisky puts the case forcefully in "L'échec d'Arafat, c'est notre faute" (*Les Nouvelles*, December 1983). The symbolism of Palestinians fighting each other in the forlorn outskirts of Tripoli in North Lebanon is too stark to be misinterpreted. The course taking Palestinians, in Rosemary Sayigh's phrase, from peasants and refugees to the revolutionaries of a nation in exile has for the time being come to an abrupt stop, curling about itself violently. What was once a radical alternative to Zionism's master code of Jewish exclusivism seems reduced to mere points on the map miles away from Palestine. Lebanon, the Soviet build-up, Syria, Druze and Shia militancy, the new American-Israeli quasi-treaty—these dominate the landscape, absorb political energies.

Two anecdotes give a sense of the pol.tical and ideological problem I am trying to describe. Between August 29 and September 7, 1983, the United Nations held an international conference, mandated by the General Assembly, on the Question of Palestine. The conference was to be held in Paris, but worried by the threat of demonstrations and incidents from French Zionist organizations, the Mitterrand government requested that it be held elsewhere: France's *quid pro quo* to the UN, which was actually entitled to hold the conference in Paris at Unesco's extraterritorial headquarters, was to be full participation by France. The conference was duly moved to Geneva and France, just as duly, reneged on its promise and participated only as an "observer." One hundred and thirty-seven nations showed up, a fact repeatedly changed to 75 nations by the US press. The central document of the conference was to be a "Profile of the Palestinian People"—the title and the study's focus were specified by the General Assembly. With a small group of other "experts" I was engaged to produce the Profile. It went to the Secretary-General's office for three months, and was returned for discussion to the Preparatory Committee of twenty-odd nations. There it sat until the beginning of June, at which point I was told that the Profile could not, and would never, be approved for use at the conference. The reasons given were, as usual, diplomatic and diverse. But, as an apologetic ambassador from a friendly Arab country made clear to me, by positing the existence—and historical narrative—of a Palestinian people, the Profile had "created" a dual-nationality problem for the Arab countries in which Palestinians had been dispersed since 1948. The same strictures and fears applied to the proposal I made to conduct the first-ever census of Palestinians, most of whom live in the Arab world. There is an Arab context and an Israeli context, I was told: to

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speak of Palestinians outside the occupied territories was to challenge the collective Arab narrative and, in the words of a young Arab Third Secretary, to view history in too "liberal and Western" a way. Thus no Palestinian narrative, no Profile, no census: Palestine yes, Palestinians no.

The second anecdote is taken from the other side of the aisle, where, as we have seen, things are no less peculiar. The Israeli commentator Yoav Karni wrote in 1983:

> Last week I was invited to the Israeli Army Radio programme *Correct Till Now* to speak about the historical backgrounds of Armenian terrorism. Against their usual custom, the editors insisted on taping the talk beforehand. Afterwards, I understood why. I was asked if the Armenian holocaust really occurred. I answered: "There is no doubt that genocide occurred. For thousands of years a people lived on its land, and suddenly it was no more. This is genocide," or words to that effect. The Israeli Army Radio refused to broadcast the talk. They were ready to do it only on condition that I should change the text, and say: "There was a massacre, which perhaps approaches genocide."

He concludes that "perhaps, it was the great mistake of the last Jewish generation which caused it. It should have been forbidden to Jews to treat the concept of 'genocide' as applying to them alone. It should be told in every Israeli school that many other peoples were, and still are, expelled and massacred." Conversely, Israelis are told by Chaim Herzog that when Israel fosters good relations with right-wing regimes which practice racial discrimination and kill their own people, the only criterion ought to be: "Is it good for the Jews?" A related sentiment was expressed by a Jewish-Israeli resident of Upper Nazareth about his Israeli-Arab neighbors: "Love is more dangerous than hate. It's dangerous to our existence."

The Palestinian narrative has never been officially admitted to Israeli history, except as that of "non-Jews," whose inert presence in Palestine was a nuisance to be ignored or expelled. With the exception of a small and marginal group of Israelis, most of Israel has as a result not found it difficult to get over the story of the Lebanese war and its subsequent horrors. Take Abba Eban—liberal, humane, judicious. In his introduction to the Israeli Kahan Commission Report, published as a book in the West, he praises the "meticulous" analysis that, in a sense, exonerates Israel: yet in so doing he nowhere mentions such things as the explicitly fascist nature of Israel's chief allies, the Lebanese Phalanges, or the fact—which doesn't speak for itself—that the Palestinians in Lebanon were not *ipso facto* "terrorists," as the Report has it, but were there because they had

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been driven out of Palestine in pursuit of an admitted policy of expulsion.

Thus, as much as Begin and Sharon, Eban refused to consider the PLO as more than a gang of terrorists. Indeed, he makes it seem that the PLO and the Phalangists, both of whom are "the chief agents of the tragedy," are equally culpable for killing the Palestinians at Sabra and Shatila. As to whether "terrorism" is adequately defined simply by ascribing it to Palestinians because of Israeli deaths (the figures are interesting—between 1967 and 1982, 290 Israelis were killed in Palestinian attacks, whereas Lebanese police, UN and Red Cross figures put Israeli-caused Arab casualties at 20,000 deaths for July and August 1982 alone), or whether any act of Palestinian resistance is terrorism, Eban does not say. Yet the *other* Israeli report on Sabra and Shatila is perfectly clear on Israeli responsibility for, and even complicity with, what took place: I refer here to the Israeli journalist Amnon Kapeliouk's powerfully concise and brilliant book, *Sabra et Chatila: Enquête sur un Massacre*,[2] which has still found no established British or American publisher.

Facts do not at all speak for themselves, but require a socially acceptable narrative to absorb, sustain and circulate them. Such a narrative has to have a beginning and end: in the Palestinian case, a homeland for the resolution of its exile since 1948. But, as Hayden White has noted in a seminal article, "narrative in general, from the folk tale to the novel, from annals to the fully realized 'history,' has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, *authority*."[3] Now there are numerous UN Resolutions certifying the Palestinians as a people, their struggle as a legitimate one, their right to have an independent state as "inalienable." Such Resolutions, however, do not have the authority of which White speaks. None has drawn any acknowledgment from Israel or the United States, which have restricted themselves to such non-narrative and indefinite formulae as—in the language of the lackadaisical US pronouncements—"resolution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects."[4]

No television watcher could have had any doubts that the Israelis were savage and ruthless during the siege of Beirut. Yet a campaign has been waged in the media attacking the media for a pro-PLO slant. Well before the Israeli invasion it got started in pro-Zionist publications like the *New Republic*, and it continues long after in *Encounter*, *Commentary* and *Policy Studies*, as well as on college campuses where lectures entitled "NBC in Lebanon: A Study in Misrepresentation" are regularly given. The basic line is that the media have taken liberties with language, that analogies

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between Warsaw and Beirut are wrong, that any images showing Israeli troops engaged in bombing plainly civilian targets are anti-Semitic, that the millions of feet of newsreel are less trustworthy than the impressions of a supporter of Israel who spent a day in Lebanon touring the place as a guest of the Israeli Army. Underlying all attacks on the media is the allegation that the PLO has intimidated or seduced journalists into partisan, anti-Semitic and anti-Western attacks on Israel, a charge grandiloquently pronounced by Norman Podhoretz in his imitation of Zola, "J'Accuse" (*Commentary*, September 1982).

The repetition and accumulation of these claims amount to a virtual orthodoxy, setting limits, defining areas, asserting pressures, and the Chancellor incident of July 1982 stands as something of a monument to the process. John Chancellor is a leading American television commentator who arrived in Beirut during the siege and witnessed the destruction brought about by the indiscriminate bombing that was taking place all around him. The report he produced in full view of a vast national audience included references to "savage Israel," "an imperialist state that we never knew existed before." Yet a week later he reappeared in Jerusalem more or less retracting his remarks from Beirut: what he had seen there, he now said, was a "mistake," Israel did not intend the city's siege but had "bumbled into it." Commenting on this volte-face, Richard Poirier wrote in *Raritan Review* that "the feelings aroused in Chancellor (and in millions of viewers presumably) by the television footage simply had no place to go outside the programme." Far from just changing his mind from one week to the next, Chancellor "unwittingly exposed the degree to which the structure of the evening news depends on ideas of reality determined by the political and social discourse already empowered outside the newsroom. Feelings about the victims of the siege could not, for example, be attached to an idea for the creation of a Palestinian homeland since, despite the commitments, muffled as they are, of the Camp David accords, no such idea has as yet managed to find an enabling vocabulary within what is considered 'reasonable' political discourse in this country." What needs to be added to Poirier's astute comments is that the "idea" of a Palestinian homeland would have to be enabled by the prior acceptance of a narrative entailing a homeland. And this has been resisted as strenuously on the imaginative and ideological level as it has been politically.

While it is true that the ideological dimension is always important in political contests, the oddity here is that the physical distance from the

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territory aspired to, and the heavily saturated significance of that territory, make crucial the need for antecedent ideological projection in narrative form in the West. For Palestine is a privileged site of origin and return for both Judaism and Christianity—all the more so given the fact that Palestine for one and a half millennia had been in non-Jewish and non-Christian hands. It figures prominently in such momentous events as the Crusades, the 19th-century imperial conflicts, in Zionism, and in a whole congerie of major cultural texts from Augustine's autobiography, to Dante's vision, to Shakespeare's dramatic geography and Blake's apocalypse. In more material and mundane terms, Palestine has also been important to the Arab and Muslim experience: a comparative study of that experience with the Judaic and Christian would be of extraordinary interest. The point I am trying to make is that insofar as the West has complementarily endowed Zionism with a role to play in Palestine along with its own, it has stood against the perhaps humble narrative of native Palestinians once resident there and now reconstituting themselves in exile in the occupied territories.

With this background in mind, the current disapproval of terrorism can more easily be understood. As first articulated during the late months of the Carter administration, and amplified in such books as *The Terrorist Network* and *The Spike*, as unrestrainedly used by Israeli—and now by American—officials to describe "enemies," terrorism is the vaguest and yet for that reason the most precise of concepts. This is not at all to say that terrorism does not exist, but rather to suggest that its existence has occasioned a whole new signifying system as well. Terrorism signifies first, in relation to "us," the alien and gratuitously hostile force. It is destructive, systematic and controlled. It is a web, a network, a conspiracy run from Moscow, via Bulgaria, Beirut, Libya, Teheran and Cuba. It is capable of anything. One fervent anti-Communist Israeli has written a book revealing the Sabra and Shatila massacres to be a plot engineered by Moscow and the PLO to kill Palestinians (using Germans) in order to frame democratic Israel. Most of all, terrorism has come to signify "our" view of everything in the world that seems inimical to our interests, army, policy or values.

As such, it can be used retrospectively (as in the cases of Iran and Lebanon), or prospectively (Grenada, Honduras, Nicaragua) to justify everything "we" do and to delegitimize as well as dehumanize everything "they" do. The very indiscriminateness of terrorism, actual and described, its tautological and circular character, is anti-narrative. Sequence, the

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logic of cause and effect as between oppressors and victims, opposing pressures—all these vanish inside an enveloping cloud called "terrorism." Israeli commentators have remarked that the systematic use by Begin, Sharon, Eitan and Arens of the rubric "terrorist" to describe Palestinians made it possible for them to use phrases like "terrorist nests," "cancerous growth" and "two-legged beasts" in order to bomb refugee camps. An Israeli paratrooper said that "every Palestinian is automatically a suspected terrorist and by our definition of the term it is actually true." One should add that Likud's anti-terrorist language and methods represent only an increase in intensity over previous Israeli policies, which were no less callous about Palestinians as real people with a real history.

No wonder, then that "facts" and the truth of a consecutive historical experience stand very little chance of wide acceptance or distribution in this wilderness of mirrors. To know, for example, that Shamir's Stern Gang treated with the Nazis,[5] or that everything the Israelis now do to Palestinians constitutes brutality and oppression easily rivaling the deeds of the Polish or South African regimes, is also sadly to know that anti-apartheid activists regularly avoid discussion of Israel when they criticize one of its chief allies, South Africa, or that American journalists do not report the details of daily life on the West Bank with the tenacity they bring to reports about daily life behind the Iron Curtain, or that leaders of the anti-nuclear movement have nothing to say about the Israeli nuclear threat. Worse yet, there is every chance that ignorance about Israel's attitude towards Palestinians will keep pace with sustained encomia on Israel's pioneering spirit, democracy and humanism. On the uprooting of Palestinian orchards in Gaza in 1972 to make way for settlements, Chomsky notes here: this is "what is called in technical terms 'making the desert bloom'."[6]

There have been refugees before. There have been new states built on the ruins of old. The unique thing about this situation is Palestine's unusual centrality, which privileges a Western master narrative, highlighting Jewish alienation and redemption—with all of it taking place as a modern spectacle before the world's eyes. So that when Palestinians are told to stop complaining and to settle elsewhere like other refugees before them, they are entitled to respond that no other refugees have been required systematically to watch an unending ceremony of public approbation for the political movement, army or country that made them refugees and occupies their territory. Occupying armies, as Chomsky observes, do not as a rule "bask in the admiration of American

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intellectuals for their unique and remarkable commitment to 'purity of arms'." To top it all, Palestinians are expected to participate in the dismantling of their own history at the same time.

As long as discussions of Palestine and Israel are conducted on this level, the superior force of the ideological consensus I have been describing will prevail. Palestinians will initially have to play the major role in changing the consensus and, alas characteristically, they have not been very successful. I recall during the siege of Beirut obsessively telling friends and family there, over the phone, that they ought to record, write down their experiences; it seemed crucial as a starting-point to furnish the world some narrative evidence, over and above atomized and reified TV clips, of what it was like to be at the receiving end of Israeli "anti-terrorism," also known as "Peace for Galilee." Naturally, they were all far too busy surviving to take seriously the unclear theoretical imperatives being urged on them intermittently by a distant son, brother or friend. As a result, most of the easily available written material produced since the fall of Beirut has in fact not been Palestinian and, just as significant, it has been of a fairly narrow range of types[7]: a small archive to be discussed in terms of absences and gaps—in terms either pre-narrative or, in a sense, anti-narrative. The archive speaks of the depressed condition of the Palestinian narrative at present.

This does not, however, make any of the works in question less valiant, less indicative of a new moral isolation enveloping Israel—for all the absence of a Palestinian narrative. Each functions on some inevitably primitive level as valuable testimonial, as raw information for a setting, Europe and America, where definitions of the Middle East serve to screen the reality of Israeli actions. Jonathan Randal—a senior American foreign correspondent, veteran of Vietnam, Cuba and Algeria—like John Bulloch of the *Daily Telegraph*, like Kapeliouk, like Salim Nassib and Caroline Tisdall, like Tony Clifton, is a journalist writing what is in effect surplus reportage, as if the constraints of newspaper columns could not contain what was seen.[8] This is an interesting phenomenon, perhaps a new journalistic mode. Each of these writers, except Chomsky, tells a story sympathetic to the Palestinians, if not always in political agreement with them; there is also a solidarity with those Lebanese who have suffered for decades the unmitigated stupidity of their leaders and foreign friends. All of these writers chronicle the relentless brutality of the siege, the outrage felt at the unctuous language of military communiqués glossing over massacres and heroism. Although their works overlap in many ways, each

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contributes a piece to the larger picture attempted in his redoubtably encyclopedic way by Chomsky.

As straight narrative of the battle culminating in Beirut between Israel and the PLO, Bulloch's book is difficult to better, though it is dotted with careless errors (Said Aql for Basil Aql). Its economy of line and unsparingly harsh perspective allow a clear but circumscribed picture to emerge of what forces were engaged together: his conclusion is that Israel lost the war. But even though he makes an effort at describing the momentum of Palestinian nationalism, its lopsided anomalous achievements in Lebanon, its inevitably messy involvement in Lebanese and Syrian politics, its better than expected efforts to cope with circumstances too complex for anyone to overcome, he writes as an outsider, and there is little in his narrative to prepare one for the continuing drama of the PLO, or for the bloody Israeli occupation of South Lebanon, or for the unfolding national catastrophe that has been Lebanon since August 1982.

Bulloch is of the school which thinks of Lebanon's history as the time-honored story of *zaims* (or semi-feudal patrons), factions and loyalties. He follows Lebanon's leading historian, Kamal Salibi, in this,[9] although unlike Elie Salem (Lebanon's current foreign minister), Bulloch hasn't concluded that Lebanon's sudden modern prosperity was ever, or could ever be, maintained without disastrous upheaval—Salem's prediction, as recently as 12 years ago.[10] It would be hard to be more unfortunately wrong. Not that anyone was more correct in predicting the two-decade cataclysm, first of wealth, then of civil war, which is tearing Lebanon apart.

David Gilmour's first chapter[11] exposes the jungle that was "the old Lebanon" with merciless precision, and his last chapter presciently lays forth the scenario now being enacted. His account of the overwhelming mess unleashed by piratical commerce, governmental incompetence, regional and ideological confusions, tremendous demographic change and utter cynicism is unique. It gives one a compelling rationale for the emergence of the PLO inside (rather than its "invasion" of) Lebanon, where among a largely destitute and confined refugee population no one could survive at all without some form of political organization for protection. One senses in Gilmour's book, however, some frustration at the recalcitrant, non-narrative character of Lebanon's problems. No other modern society has torn itself apart with that crazy mixture of brutality and style. Few countries have concentrated within their borders so impossibly heterogeneous a collection of interests, most of them having

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coarse domination, profit and manipulation as their goal. Some adumbration of this is conveyed in the American title of Randal's book—*Going All the Way*—and much of its substance similarly delivers the irrationality of Lebanon: the relentless Lebanese willingness to set yet another car-bomb (surely at this "post-political" stage, an art form), the stupid, opportunistic ideological fantasies constructed by different factions. There are cultural and intellectual roots to the things that move Maronites, Sunni and Shia Muslims, Greek Orthodox Christians and Druze in Lebanon, and these Randal does not explore. A pity, since, as he notes, for a corps of Western journalists afflicted with too rapid and frequent a turnover in complicated places like Lebanon, there is by now a specialist literature that ought not to be ignored: the pioneering studies of Lebanon and Syria by Albert Hourani and Dominique Chevallier have been elaborated in the work of younger colleagues and students. Instead Randal relies on his instinct for relevant observation. His sketches of the checkmating, of the multiple "negations," between communities on which modern Lebanon has rested are good, as is his portrait of US ignorance, bumbling, and mistimed and misplaced pressures.

There has never been an American policy on Lebanon, as anyone today can quite easily ascertain. Randal, however, takes the further step of characterizing American weakness in the face of Israeli strength as actively promoting Lebanon's destruction. At most, "Lebanon, for the United States, ended up a disposable place of unknown loyalties and complicated working, not to be entirely trusted." This by no means explains the presence of 2,000 Marines and a Navy flotilla, but it goes a long way towards telling us that no coherent mission for them will ever be found, and, unfortunately for those Lebanese who have put their trust in US military policy, that the Marines are almost certain to be pulled out ungracefully fairly soon. Randal's best moments come when he narrates Bashir Gemayel's rise to power—a chilling tale that lays to rest any illusions about the Maronite-Phalange claim to be defending the values of "Western civilization." It is difficult to understand the romance that lingers about Bashir's short life, in which he was just as capable of killing as of marshalling the members of his own community. Randal also helps one to grasp the basic premises of Israeli policy on Lebanon, and Israel's only recently challenged alliance with the fascist Phalange. (Interestingly, it was an inter-agency conflict that brought these matters into the open—between the Mossad, who promoted the Phalanges, and Israeli military intelligence, who felt that Mossad had lost "objectivity" by over-

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identifying with their Lebanese clients.) Randal's book goes back to the period just after World War One to show how Zionists envisaged incorporating South Lebanon into the future Jewish state, but the bulk of his evidence dates from the Fifties and after, when it became a matter of official Israeli policy—fascinatingly documented in Moshe Sharett's *Diaries*—to intervene directly in Lebanese affairs, sponsor militias, bribe officials, collaborate with Maronites to help maintain an imbalance between dramatic rises in the Muslim population and the increasingly unyielding Christian control which was handed to the Maronite oligarchs by French colonialism in 1943.

Two other journalists' books deserve mention. One is Tony Clifton's *God Cried*, which, with Catherine Leroy's graphic and painful photographs, narrates the agonies of conscience, sympathy and rage felt by an Australian correspondent reporting the Palestinian and Lebanese experience that culminated in the siege. Clifton pours it out—all the anger at Israel's detailed, almost fastidious effort to humiliate and pain the very refugees it had expelled in 1948, and has been stamping on ever since. As with Randal's work, we are obliged in the end to rely on one man's sensitive and informed testimony. There is some slight resemblance between Clifton and Jacobo Timerman, whose rambling but affecting account of an Israel's awakening of conscience has been critized by some for unfairness to Israel, by others for reducing the whole war to a problem for one Jewish witness. In both instances, nonetheless, there is an urgency in the author's conviction that what he writes is unfairly matched against a public narrative skewed very much in Israel's favor.

It may have been with some of these problems of subjectivity in mind that Salim Nassib and Caroline Tisdall shaped their book the way they did. *Beirut: Frontline Story* has the effect of a montage sequence: interviews with a wide spectrum of political figures interspersed with vignettes of daily life, of which the best is a lively "cross-section of the war—five stories of a Beirut apartment block" whose occupants are Greek Orthodox, Maronites, Sunni Muslims, Druzes and Shia Muslims. This is the Israeli invasion seen in vivid microcosm, daily life surgically rendered: but, as in a Zola novel, there is an active sympathy at work. Nassib's pieces were his dispatches for *Libération*, and they conclude with Arafat aboard the Greek freighter *Atlantis* on his way from Beirut to Athens, speaking about the war. Caroline Tisdall's pages of eye-witness description relive the Sabra and Shatila massacres, and end with this telling Palestinian comment: "Before the war they said we were terrorists and that we were

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training terrorists in our camps. Everyone who knows us knows we were fighters you could trust, and that we were trying to build a progressive mentality. Why didn't they write that every day? It's related to philosophy: when you are building something and the enemy comes and destroys this thing again and again, it means you are on the right road, however long it may be." This comment (and especially the image of repeated destruction followed by repeated efforts to rebuild) should be kept in mind as one proceeds through Chomsky's panorama of stupidity, immorality and corruption, *The Fateful Triangle*, which, for its documentation, may be the most ambitious book ever attempted on the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians viewed as centrally involving the United States. But this, too, is not the narrative that is missing.

For Chomsky's book is decidedly not written from the point of view of a Palestinian trying, as it were, to give national shape to a life now dissolving into many unrelated particles. *The Fateful Triangle* is instead a dogged exposé of human corruption, greed and intellectual dishonesty. It is also a great and important book, which must be read by anyone concerned with public affairs. The facts for Chomsky are there to be recognized, although no one else has ever recognized them so systematically. His mainly Israeli and US sources are staggeringly complete, and he is capable of registering contradictions, distinctions and lapses which occur between them. But, as we shall see, his work is not only deeply and unacceptably pessimistic: it is also a work not critical and reflective enough about its own premises, and this is partly because he does not, in a narrative way, look back to the beginning of the conflict between Zionism and the Palestinians.

These criticisms cannot be made at all lightly, or without acknowledging the unparalleled energy and honesty of his achievement. There is something deeply moving about a mind of such noble ideals repeatedly stirred on behalf of human suffering and injustice. One thinks here of Voltaire, of Benda, or Russell, although more than any of them Chomsky commands what he calls "reality"—facts—over a breathtaking range. He has two aims. One is an account of the origins of Israel's attack upon the Palestinians during its invasion of Lebanon in 1982; out of that account comes a survey of diplomatic, intellectual, economic and political history that connects these disparate realms with each other. His major claim is that Israel and the US—especially the latter, seen by Chomsky as the arch-villain of the piece—are rejectionists opposed to peace, whereas the Arabs, including the PLO, have for years been trying to accommodate

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themselves to the reality of Israel.

The other purpose of Chomsky's book is to compare the history—so profoundly inhuman, cynical and deliberately cruel to the Palestinian people—with its systematically rewritten record as kept by those whom Chomsky calls "the supporters of Israel." As with other books of his, it is Chomsky's contention that the liberal intelligentsia (Irving Howe, Arthur Goldberg, Alan Dershowitz, Michael Walzer, Amos Oz, Jane Fonda, Tom Hayden, Shlomo Avineri, Martin Peretz) and even segments of the organized Left are more culpable, more given to lying, than conservatives are. The Western media come off badly in comparison with their Israeli counterparts, although Chomsky notes, shrewdly, that media accuracy is rarely a matter of good will or of unhypocritical journalists: it is just that "the totalitarian mentality" ruling the West since Vietnam can't always keep up with the swarming life of fact in the Western democracies.

So the book can be read as a protracted war between fact and a series of myths—Israeli democracy, Israeli purity of arms, the benign occupation, no racism against Arabs in Israel, Palestinian terrorism, Peace for Galilee. Although Chomsky's model for these myths is Orwellian newspeak and doublethink (aspects, he says, of a revision of history in the post-Vietnam era), the process of dismantling to which he submits the myths is actually a form of deconstruction, since all of the material he uses against texts like the *New Republic*, the *New York Times*, the *Jerusalem Post* is itself textual. Nearly everywhere he looks, he finds either suppression or outright apologies for gangsterism (as when the *New Republic* on July 27, 1977 prints "the first explicit defence of torture to have appeared in the West apart from the ravings of the ultra-right in France during the Algerian war"), all done in the interest of sustaining Israeli and US hegemony. Having rehearsed the "official" narrative, he then blows it away with vast amounts of counter-evidence, leading us to the conclusion that the Middle East, along with the rest of the world, is on the road to Armageddon.

I can give only a hint of his tremendously effective methods and recourses—his thousands of footnotes, his frequently angry irony, his compassion for the weak, the forgotten and calumniated. Thus as he tells us of older Israeli soldiers testifying that even in European service during World War Two they saw nothing to compare to the destruction of Ain al-Hilweh Camp, or that "long and repeated interrogations were accompanied by constant beatings, or attacks by dogs on leashes," or that Israeli Border Guards force people to crawl, bark, laud Begin, or that

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during collective punishment in the West Bank village of Halhul "people were ordered to urinate on one another, sing 'Hatikva' . . . lick the ground," or that the Director-General of the Israel Broadcasting Authority in 1974 wrote an article expressing his preference for South Africa over Black Africa, complete "with citations of research proving the genetic inferiority of blacks"—as he gives these and literally thousands more such horrifying details, he notes the silence of the *New Republic*, the praise for Israeli purity of arms, the defense of Israel's occupation (collective detention, torture and murder) policy, the high praise for Israel's moral values, the testimony of cultural authorities such as Saul Bellow, who sees in Israel a land "where almost everyone is reasonable and tolerant, and rancour against the Arabs is rare." Worse yet, there are the many cases where apologists for Zionism and socialism like Irving Howe ignore the killing of Jews by the Irgun, speak about the evils of Begin (although much of Chomsky's evidence is that Labor was at least as bad as Likud), and then go on to pronounce on the "habitual violence" of Arab politics. Chomsky gives much attention to the organized racial persecution of Arabs and of "Oriental" Jews, usually abetted by learned or religious authorities, or by figures like Elie Wiesel who use the Holocaust to legitimate excesses: he also notes that none of Israel's liberal supporters has anything to say about this.

Chomsky is not especially gentle to the PLO, whose "self-destructiveness" and "suicidal character" he likes no more than he approves of its program of armed struggle and erratic violence. The Arab regimes, he says, are not "decent," and, he might have added, not popular either. But this—and not incidentally—is one of the gaps in this almost preposterously complete book. I am referring to its relative inattention to the Arab world. He is certainly right to say that there exists a standard Western practice, racist in orgin, of dismissing Arab sources as unreliable, and he suggest that the unavailability of written Arab work in the West is in part due to the same "democratic" censorship that promotes the image of Israel. Yes, but the dynamic of "a fateful triangle" would make more sense if, included in it, there could be some account of political, social and economic trends in the Arab world—or if it were changed to the figure of a square or circle. Among such trends one would have to place the economic dependence of the Arab states on the US (amounting, in some instances, to objective collaboration with Israel); the almost total absence of democratic freedoms in the Arab world; the peculiar relationships that obtain between Palestinians, or for that matter the PLO, and various Arab

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countries; Western cultural penetration of the Arab world and the Islamic reactions this has bred; the role of the Arab Left and the Soviet Union. Despite their stated willingness to have peace, the Arab regimes have not been able to make peace, or to mobilize their societies for war: such facts—which are not entirely a consequence of Israeli-American rejection—Chomsky does not fully consider.

There is also some confusion in the book, some inconsistency at the level of principle. The normative picture proposed by Chomsky—with which I am in agreement—is that Palestine should be partitioned into two states, and that the PLO, plus most of the Arab states, have had this end in mind at least since the early Seventies. I think he is absolutely right to say that because, in the words of Israeli commentators like Yehoshua Porath and Danny Rubenstein, Israel feared moderate and responsible Palestinians more than terrorists, it was Israel, aided by the US, which prevented any realization of this reasonable if imperfect plan. But it isn't clear to me how you can recognize that Zionism has always excluded and discriminated against Arabs—which you oppose—and yet maintain that Jews do have a communual right to settlement from abroad in Palestine. My point is that here you must more explicitly define what those rights are, and in what way your definition of those rights is not like that of those Zionists who simply disregarded the fact of Arab inhabitants already in Palestine. How can you formulate the right to move people into Palestine despite the wishes of all the already present native Palestinians, without at the same time implying and repeating the tragic cycle of violence and counter-violence between Palestinians and Jews? How do you avoid what has happened if you do not more precisely reconcile *allowable* claims.

In leaving this problem unresolved, Chomsky is led to one of the chief difficulties of his book—namely, his pessimistic view that "it is too late" for any reasonable or acceptable settlement. The facts, of course, are with him: the rate of Jewish colonization on the West Bank has passed any easily retrievable mark, and as Meron Benvenisti and other anti-Likud Israelis have said, the fight for Palestinian self-determination in the occupied territories is now over—good and lost. Pessimism of the intellect, *and* pessimism of the will . . . But most Palestinians would say in response: if those are the facts, then so much the worse for the facts. The supervening reality is that the struggle between Zionism, in its present form, and the Palestinians is very far from over; Palestinian nationalism has had, and will continue to have, an integral reality of its own, which, in the view of many Palestinians who actually live the struggle, is not about to

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go away, or submit to the ravages of Zionism and its backers. And curiously this is what Chomsky does not or perhaps cannot see, although he is right to forecast a worsening of the situation, increasing levels of violence, more polarization, militarization, irrationality. In having accepted the Zionist first principle of a right to settle Jews in Palestine against the wishes of the native inhabitants, Chomsky almost unconsciously takes the next step of assuming that the Palestinian struggle is over, that the Palestinians have given up—maybe because their historical existence hasn't totally convinced him of its permanence. Perhaps given up is the rational thing to do, yet—and here Chomsky's own fighting energies contradict him—injustice is injustice, and no one should acquiesce in it. Chomsky himself, with this massive volume, is a case in point.

That raises another problem. His isolation from the actual arena of contest, his distance from power as a fiercely uncompromising intellectual, his ability to tell the dispassionate truth (while no longer able to write in previously hospitable places like the *New York Review of Books*) have made it possible for him to avoid the ideological traps and the dishonesty he perceives in Israeli and US apologists. There is of course no state-worship in Chomsky; nor is there any glossing over uncomfortable truths or indecent practices that exist within one's own camp. But are isolation, the concern for justice, the passion to record injustice, sufficient to ensure one's own freedom from ideology? When Chomsky claims to be dealing with facts, he does deal with more facts than his opponents. But where are facts if not embedded in history, and then reconstituted and recovered by human agents stirred by some perceived or desired or hoped-for historical narrative whose future aim is to restore justice to the dispossessed? In other words, the reporters of fact, like Chomsky, as well as the concealers of fact, like the "supporters of Israel," are acting within history, according to codifiable norms of representation, in a context of competing ideological and intellectual values. When he states the facts as widely, as clearly, as completely as any person alive, Chomsky is not merely performing a mechanical reporting chore, from some Archimedean point outside propaganda and cliché: he is doing something extremely sophisticated, underpinned by standards of argument, coherence and proof that are not derived from the merely "factual." But the irony is that Chomsky does not reflect theoretically on what he does: he just does it. So, on the one hand, he leaves us to suppose that telling the truth is a simple matter while, on the other hand, he compiles masses of evidence showing that no one really can deal with facts. How can we then suppose

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that one man can tell the truth? Does he believe that in writing this book he will lead others to tell the truth also? What makes it possible for us as human beings to face the facts, to manufacture new ones, or to ignore some and focus on others?

Answers to these questions must reside in a theory of perception, a theory of intellectual activity, and in an epistemological account of ideological structures as they pertain to specific problems as well as to concrete historical and geographical circumstances. None of these things is within the capacity of a solitary individual to produce; and none is possible without some sense of communal or collective commitment to assign them a more than personal validity. It is this commitment that national narratives authorize and represent, although Chomsky's understandable reluctance to hew to any national or state line prevents him from admitting it. But in a situation like that of the Palestinians and Israelis, hardly anyone can be expected to drop the quest for national identity and go straight to a history-transcending universal rationalism. Each of the two communities, misled though both may be, is interested in its origins, its history of suffering, its need to survive. To recognize these imperatives, as components of national identity, and to try to reconcile them, rather than dismiss them as so much non-factual ideology, strikes me as the task in hand.

1. Sean MacBride and others, *Israel in Lebanon: The Report of the International Commission* (London: Ithaca Press, 1982).
2. Amnon Kapeliouk, *Sabra et Chatila: Enquête sur un Massacre* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1982).
3. *Critical Inquiry,* Autumn 1980.
4. A persuasive study by Mark Heller, an Israeli political scientist at the Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, *A Palestinian State: The Implications for Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), represents an exception. Heller argues that a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza is in Israel's best interests, and is more desirable than either annexation or returning the territories to Jordan.
5. The background of collaboration between Zionist groups and individuals and various European fascists is studied in Lenni Brenner's *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators: A Reappraisal* (London: Croom Helm, 1983; Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill, 1983.)

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6. Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: Israel, the United States and the Palestinians* (London: Pluto Press, 1983; Boston: South End Press, 1983).
7. There is one exception to be noted: Lina Mikdadi, *Surviving the Siege of Beirut* (London: Onyx Press, 1983). This delivers a Lebanese-Palestinian's account of life in Beirut during the siege.
8. Jonathan Randal, *The Tragedy of Lebanon: Christian Warlords, Israeli Adventurers and American Bunglers* (London: Chatto, 1983; New York: Viking Press, 1983); John Bulloch, *Final Conflict: The War in Lebanon* (London: Century Publishing, 1983); Salim Nassib and Caroline Tisdall, *Beirut: Frontline Story* (London: Pluto Press, 1982); Tony Clifton and Catherine Leroy, *God Cried* (London: Quartet, 1983).
9. Kamal Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (New York: Praeger, 1965), and *Crossroads to Civil War: Lebanon 1958-1976* (Albany, NY: Delmar, 1976; London: Ithaca Press, 1976).
10. *Modernization Without Revolution: Lebanon's Experience* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973).
11. David Gilmour, *Lebanon: The Fractured Country* (Oxford: Robertson, 1983).

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