



THE
ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN
PEACE MOVEMENT

COMBATANTS FOR PEACE

DONNA J. PERRY



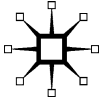
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To Abir and Smadar

May we open our ears
to hear your gentle voices
calling us to peace
on the wind of a thousand dreams



Abir Aramin 1997–2007



Smadar Elhanan 1983–1997

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A Preface in Two Parts

Part One

Change. The word's in the air. Scholars and experts around the world are puzzled: How could that be? What happened? What changed? Well something did. Through the accumulation of experience the realization presents itself: change is necessary. The events around us, this lifting of the human spirit that is taking place right now in the Arab world shows that change might also be possible. Only Israel is dormant. Comatose. Maybe brain dead. We have no Tahrir Square on our horizon, we view even the prospect of change with horror, as if change is always for the worst. "We," that is the Israelis, that collective body we belong to, that is best defined by its atavistic approach to life, by its insistence on holding on to its seat, even though the train is heading to the abyss. The "We" that defined us and formed us. Or, it did until not too long ago. Something fundamental has changed in Israel-Palestine, and this change goes by and large unnoticed. This change is the birth of a joint Israeli-Palestinian nonviolent solidarity movement of which Combatants for Peace (CFP) is only a part. A new "WE" is coming to be.

It is very hard to localize that moment, when one moves from resignation to determination, from fatalism to engagement. When I reexamine my own personal journey from mainstream Israeliness to the engaged position I hold now, I can point out some possible incidents, several experiences that made me realize that another world is possible.

The first was, well, my encounter with reality. I was born in Jerusalem in 1977, grew up during the first Intifada and Oslo, and joined the army in 1995, when I was 18 years old. Having been raised on Zionist values of service and contribution to the greater good, I joined gladly. I believed that in going to the army I was doing something important and right; that I was protecting my family and defending my country. I volunteered and did my service in the Israeli Defence Forces' special forces.

However, it didn't take long for me to see that there is a certain discrepancy between the state discourse and the reality as I was experiencing it. The experiences I had, the things I saw and did led me to the conclusion that as a soldier in that army I was not protecting anybody or defending anything. I was a fig leaf for the cowardice of politicians and a tool in the perpetuation of a political project that I found objectionable, not to say criminal.

This realization had not translated itself to action right away. On September 4, 1997, my sister Smadar was killed by a suicide bomber in Jerusalem. She was 14 years old and died several hundred feet from my house, which I was supposed to be protecting. After the tragedy, all I heard around me was either the very dark silence of resignation to fate or the cry for revenge. I refused to accept either of the two options and decided to leave this game altogether. Not to kill for them and not die for them. To find another way.

But that in itself was not enough. Finding that other way was not easy. In Israel, insanely privatized and neoliberal, opportunities for alternative political expression, or any political expression, are not readily available. For a while I thought that by washing my hands and not participating, I was doing enough. The outbreak of the second Intifada showed me in signs, fire and smoke that this was not the case.

After the failure of the Camp David talks the public in Israel, just like the media at home and abroad and the international community, all overwhelmingly accepted Prime Minister Barak's claim of "no partner." Yet some voices were raised against the onslaught of violence. I found my place in an initiative called "Courage to Refuse." In February 2002, a group of 52 combat reserve soldiers and officers published a letter in *Ha'aretz* newspaper, saying that they would not serve anymore in the occupied territories because this service is illegal, immoral, and is not protecting the citizens of Israel, but quite on the contrary, it puts them in harm's way. In a matter of weeks the 52 became hundreds. During operation "Defense Shield" in April 2002, nearly 200 reserve soldiers were imprisoned for refusing to serve. In the months that followed the numbers kept rising.

The publication of the letter was a historical moment. The late philosopher Yesha'yahu Leibowitch once said that when 500 of Israel's finest would openly refuse, the earth would move. Well, we were over 600 but it's hard to say that the earth moved. The way historical moments go, this one too turned out to be much more a whimper than a bang and the refusers' group lost momentum. We thought that we understood what was wrong with Courage to Refuse: the debate had been limited and remained confined to Israeli discourse and society. And peace cannot be made on one side only.

The next step seemed evident: to cross “enemy” lines again and try to set up some sort of partnership with Palestinian combatants, who had taken part in the violence but are now opposed to it, while still being engaged actively in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Through an activist friend we got in touch with a group of ex-prisoners who were interested in contacting Israeli refuseniks.

The first meeting we had, in February 2005, was, in all honesty, the scariest experience I have ever had. Going back as civilians to a place where many of us served as soldiers; going to the former battlefield unarmed, with no backup, we sensed a real fear. However, no one was kidnapped or killed. We met and talked. It was a very hard meeting but we went home feeling that we accomplished something. While talking politics we were all inflexible, each side barricaded in their most defensive positions, but when we started exchanging out personal stories a wall came down. In spite of our incomparable situations we could see many converging lines: One such line was the idealism and naiveté that allowed us to believe that the violence and sacrifice were justified. Another was the feeling of betrayal that we experienced once we realized what shape the things we fought for had assumed. We decided to meet again.

After a year of meeting, planning, and debating secretly we were sufficiently assured that we had the support needed to launch this movement. We did so in a public ceremony on April 10, 2006, in the village of Anata just north of Jerusalem. With the participation of over 500 people, Palestinian dignitaries and politicians as well as a delegation from the European parliament, we declared in broad daylight our commitment to struggle together for just peace, for the establishment of a Palestinian state, and a noncompromising, nonviolent joint struggle to end the occupation.

All these moments, meaningful as they may be, cannot account for the belief in the possibility of change. I can't really say that our struggle against the occupation is a successful one, since it still persists, stronger than ever. Like many other organizations of the kind, the greatest success we can pride ourselves on is that we still exist. The existence of this joint movement was questioned many times. Reality provides daily reasons to give it all up and to give in to the difficulties. Not only the violence and daily hardships of the situation, but also and maybe more than all, the seemingly insurmountable difficulty of working together, of finding a joint political language, of breaking the molds of past behavior, of establishing equal grounds for dialogue between us.

However, it is in that, more than in any achievement on the ground, that I see the political importance of CFP and the source of our preposterous belief in change. This belief stems not from a moment. There was no epiphany. It stems from the commitment to a critical, dialectical

examination of the world and of one's place in it. It seems to me that in political action, like in any other action, one needs to distinguish between two modalities: the perfective and the imperfective. Refusing is a perfective action, you do it and it's done. It is a necessary but in itself insufficient act, if we have politics of change in mind. CFP presents an imperfect kind of action: flawed, for sure, but also continuous, simultaneous, still in progress. Thus, in the context of CFP there are Israelis and Palestinians who live their daily lives while actively engaging the question of living together, working together, struggling together. A preposterous utopia that for some actually came to be. Like all utopias this one is also hard to believe and impossible to maintain. But as it happened the effort it took to create this unworking community also created personal connections and ties that make the mere existence of the group a personal priority for many of us.

This commitment came to light during one of the hardest trials in the history of the group: the murder of Bassam Aramin's daughter by Israeli police. Abir Aramin, age ten, was shot in the head by a rubber-coated bullet outside her school in Anata, across the street from the place where we held our launching event. That incident blew the wind out of many of us and made a lot of the Israeli members wonder if peace with us was possible. Luckily our Palestinian friends did not lose their conviction and pulled us through the crisis.

With these words I'd like to finish. I'd like to mention here my sister Smadar and Abir Aramin to whom this book is dedicated. Their memory is a driving force behind our work. Our debt to the dead who will never see change is so much greater now since we know it is possible. But it pales in comparison to the debt we owe now to the living dead. Those who are still among us but will die in the violence of the occupation. And as long as we fail to organize and bring about the real change we need—personal, local, national, and global change, we will never be able to pay any of it back.

Elik Elhanan
Columbia University, New York, 2011.

Part Two

The significance of Dr. Donna Perry's book stems from it being a source of inspiration and a light that illuminates the path of peacemakers, wherever they are. Whoever reads it completely can reach the objective, which is to blaze the trail toward spiritual self-reconciliation and overcoming wounds and suffering, going as far as tolerance and empathy toward others.

Dr. Perry's book, with its in-depth academic and professional research style, reflects the life experience of the members of CFP. It answers many theoretical academic questions that are of interest and are useful to researchers and students in the science of resolving conflict and peace making in areas of armed conflict. At all times, this book stresses that this is possible.

The launching of CFP created a historical precedent and a beacon of light and hope in the ranks of both peoples. These youth proved that there is always another way to work. For the first time in history, enemy combatants meet and come together on one front, during, rather than in the middle of battle. Yes, the Palestinian fighters who have spent years of their lives in the prison of Israeli occupation and suffered the indescribable adversity of hatred and years of torture have been able to express their desires and humanity by meeting with their enemy, occupier, and prison guard to triumph on behalf of their humanity and the justice of their cause.

The Israeli soldiers, as well, who joined the ranks of the Israeli Occupation Army and carried out the occupation and violence against the Palestinian people, triumphed over themselves and on behalf of their humanity by refusing to continue to carry out illegal and inhumane criminal orders. They rejected military service in Palestinian areas and were subject to arrest, humiliation, and harassment. Some were fired from their work, but they said no to the occupation.

The historical meeting at the beginning of 2005 was between a handful of men from both sides who believed from the beginning that the mutual enemy of both peoples is the Israeli occupation, as it is the source of violence and terrorism in the region. Thus, violence in all its forms serves the interest of continuing the occupation and deepening the conflict between both peoples through the losses of innocent civilian victims.

The result of almost 100 years of conflict is that Palestine is still sinking under Israeli occupation. One hundred years and Israel, despite its military strength and its racist Wall of Shame, which wraps around it and cuts off contact with the Palestinian territories, is not secure.

Therefore, it was necessary to rise out of this situation toward the creation of a new path and use of a weapon that has never been used before to end the occupation and end the continuing violence, attaining the peace, freedom, dignity, and security that the Israeli and Palestinian people seek.

The new path that the CFP follow is the path of discussion, a discussion based on mutual respect and recognition of the right of all to exist, a discussion based on equality between both sides.

The new weapon is the weapon of nonviolence as an effective, humanitarian, and civilized course of action. They aspire to realize humanitarian

and political goals against the instrument of repression, tyranny, and hate.

In my personal opinion, the creation of CFP was always tantamount to a dream. In view of the bloody nature of the struggle, it is not possible for enemies to be united and unified against occupation and oppression in a single framework. Therefore, with all humility, I am always proud and honored to be one of the founders of this unique organization that has shaken the walls of silence and knocked down the pillar of misguidance based on the saying, "There is no partner."

The most important thing that distinguishes the movement of CFP as individuals and as a group is that they have been able to overcome the mentality of the victim that controls Palestinians and Israelis equally, and have expressed their readiness to reach a settlement based on tolerance and orienting oneself toward the future. They have refused to remain in the prison of the tortures and sufferings of the past.

The personal stories of the members of CFP have formed a cornerstone in spreading the message of the organization and in attracting new members from both sides to join the ranks of the organization, whose members after five years number more than 600, with thousands of advocates and supporters.

Therefore, I will summarize with great brevity my personal story that I hope may be a source of inspiration. It has humanitarian elements that affirm the strength of man whenever reason and logic hold sway and whenever the paths that lead him to the piety of faith are followed.

It is not easy to be a Palestinian. You do not have a safe place.

You are always wanted and always subject to arrest, torture, being killed, or restrained by barriers, forbidden freedom of movement, even forbidden freedom of thought. Thus, as a 13-year-old child, it occurred to me to fight the strangers who came to take over and control my village without knowing the reason. Thus, as you investigate the context of my struggle, it is very easy to find yourself drawn into it or initiating the struggle spontaneously. On this basis, I began my struggle with a group of boys by raising the Palestinian flag over the trees surrounding our school, which was a symbol to provoke the occupation soldiers. At that time, the raising of a flag was a crime that the law of Israeli occupation punished with imprisonment for a period that ranged between six and twelve months.

In addition to throwing stones at night at Israeli patrols in our village, the greatest concern was always to get a weapon. We actually got hold of a cache of weapons with hand grenades that we found hidden in one of the caves. Although we were a bunch of 16-year-olds, my companions had already used weapons and thrown grenades at military patrols. However, no one was harmed because they did not know how to use them.

In 1985, I was arrested with the other members of the group and sentenced to seven years in prison, which ended in 1992. I was at that time 17 years old. I was born on June 23, 1968, and the day that the sentence was passed was June 23, 1986. Seven years is a long time, full of indescribable horrors and torments. It is not possible to enumerate them here.

It suffices to say that the policy of the Israeli occupation authorities, through the administration of the department of prisons, shaped a basic component of the steadfastness of the Palestinian in the prisons. It would always push us toward greater faith and greater determination to continue the armed struggle against this criminal enemy that tries to kill the fighting spirit, even to kill us physically.

I do not believe that history will forgive the policy of barbaric torture that the occupation has carried out against the detainees in Israeli prisons. It is certainly a mark of disgrace on the face of the occupation.

There is no discussion in Israeli prisons between the prisoner and the prison guard. There is a language of giving orders and looks of mutual disgust and hatred.

The prison guard, as one of the elements of the police, is prohibited from starting a discussion with prisoners. The instructions issued to them are a result of these prisoners being terrorists, saboteurs, and their hands being stained with blood. Therefore, they are always a source of danger.

One of the prison guards broke the rule and started to talk to me with the aim of convincing me of the truth of the State of Israel. He thought that I was misguided and that it was not appropriate for me, a quiet adolescent, to be a terrorist. He asked me what I had done to be detained. This prison guard, Hertzl Shimon, believed that, as a Palestinian, I was a naturalized resident, and that, after Palestine was liberated and Israel established, the Jewish people permitted us Arabs to continue to live and have rights. However, he saw us as murderers and criminals; he doesn't understand why we continue to kill Jews.

In short, we opened a channel of discussion and I asked him to convince me of this. After some months passed, the man stated his support for the Palestinian people, who were "fighting at least for the sake of their honor", as Hertzl said on one occasion.

Hertzl, nevertheless, is the one who transformed his hostile attitude to another one, a positive attitude that resulted from a quiet discussion far removed from callousness. He is the one who adopted a personal and human posture, that discussion is a clear and strong path, and a civilized course of action. Look, it is Hertzl who changes his opinion and starts to open his eyes before the truth that dozens of Palestinian prisoners are boys between 12 and 19 years old, that they are children and not murderers. He started to change his manner of speaking when dealing with the prisoners,

and his behavior became more balanced and respectful toward the prisoners (For many years, I tried to meet with Hertzl until we met in his house at the beginning of 2010 where he was sick. He died a few months ago.).

During the first period of my imprisonment, I watched a film by the director Steven Spielberg about the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews in Germany. I always remember that I had wanted to see this film as a kind of personal revenge. I was in an Israeli prison and subject along with the other members of the prison movement to diverse kinds of humiliation and torture. It was an opportunity to watch a film where the Jews were subjected to harm and torture. However, the result was the complete opposite, as I tried to hide my tears shed out of solidarity and sympathy with those weak and naked people who were subjected to death because of their Jewish identity. I found myself going to extremes of anger, because I did not see them resisting those Nazi murderers. They were dying in horrible silence and with indescribable resignation to an inevitable fate.

The Nazis did not hide their murder of them, rather they carried out various sorts of torture and mistreatment before the killing. It was unspeakable sadism.

I was unable to convince myself that what I was watching was simply a film and actors. The scenes were stronger than that and the smell of death lingered in my mind. I found myself in a position of sympathy and understanding about the oppression and racism that was carried out against the Jews in Europe.

I tried to comprehend the character of the Jews among the occupation's soldiers in Palestine. I tried to comprehend their barbaric behavior against Palestinian citizens. It is an offensive occupation without mercy. They see no difference between the big and the small, the woman, the old, the laborer, or the teacher. All of them are Palestinians, meaning that all of them are possible targets. I say to myself that this behavior is a result of the murder and incineration that happened to them in Europe.

However, as a Palestinian, an Arab, and a Muslim, I am absolutely not responsible for this crime whose victims number in the millions of human beings. Rather, as I learned at a research exhibition about the true nature of the events of the Holocaust, the Arabs and Muslims, especially in the countries of the Arab west and Spain, saved Islamic identity cards to give to their Jewish brethren with the goal of rescuing them from the Nazi claws. They also rejected a request by the Nazis to pursue the Jews and turn them over.

I knew that the greatest victims of that oppressive period of history were the Jews, and that the Jews quickly found victims, who were the Palestinians. We became the victim of the victim. As my friend Yaniv Reshef, a member of the organization and coordinator of the group on

the Israeli side, used to say, “The Palestinians have become the Jews of the Jews.” In spite of all of my solidarity, however, I do not ever believe that they have the right in any way to occupy and oppress another people.

In short, for ten years of my life after I was released and liberated from prison at the end of October, 1992 until 2002, not much happened to me other than getting married and having six children. However, the most important thing that happened in 1994 in the aftermath of the Oslo Agreement and the arrival of the Palestinian Authority was the hope that I perceived in the ranks of the Palestinians and Israelis who desired to live with freedom and security. I saw young men in Jenin giving flowers to Israeli soldiers before their departure and withdrawal from the city on behalf of the Palestinian National Security Forces. I was deeply touched by this scene that showed that the people were ready to forgive. It was as though the message conveyed was, “Get off our land, leave us alone and depart in peace.” Unfortunately, this hope didn’t last very long. The second Palestinian Intifada broke out and we entered into a new wave of bloodshed characterized by barbaric Israeli excesses in the use of force against Palestinian civilians. These were accompanied by Palestinian “martyrdom operations,” which I consider to be one of the biggest political, strategic, and moral mistakes of the Palestinians.

In 2003, there appeared in the Israeli media what was known as objectors to military service in the Palestinian territories for reasons of politics and conscience such as “The Courage to Refuse,” “Breaking the Silence,” the “Pilots Group,” and the “Commando Group.” I wished at that moment to meet with them to understand the reason for their objection to service.

The first meeting happened in January of 2005 and established the movement CFP. I found myself dedicating all of my time toward working to realize the goals of this group. By virtue of the sacrifice of the first group and the founders together with their time and their vigilance, the beginning was strong and continues until today.

Two years after the foundation of the movement, and specifically on January 16, 2007, on the morning of Black Tuesday, at 9:30 a.m., an Israeli soldier from the Border Guard Forces opened fire in front of the Anata Girls School and killed my daughter, Abir, who was ten years old, at a distance of not more than 20 meters in the head from behind, in front of her sister Areen and in view of people. It was a quiet day. There was absolutely no kind of protests. Abir passed away as a martyr after struggling in pain for two days in the Israeli Hadassah Hospital. This true tragedy was the equivalent to an earthquake. My personal life and my life as a prisoner have been turned head over heels, and continue to be so until this moment.

The solidarity of my Israeli friends among the leaders and members of CFP, and the Israeli-Palestinian Association of Bereaved Families for

Peace and Equality, and many others had a most agreeable impact on me. From the first instant, my brother and friend Rami Elhanan and his wife Nurit called for us to meet together in front of Abir's bed as tears of sadness filled the room. Rami and Nurit were connected with me in a special relationship through my close relationship with their son Elik Elhanan, who was one of the founders of CFP. I had always looked at him in a sort of amazement due to his bravery in refusing military service, and due to the killing of his sister, Smadar, on September 4, 1997, who was 14 years old, in the explosion of an Israeli bus in West Jerusalem that two Palestinians carried out. I was amazed at his strength at overcoming the pain. In spite of the ability to take revenge, however, he refused this request by one of the army's officers in the aftermath of Smadar's killing.

Rami said at that time, "I feel like I am losing Smadar a second time." In turn, I explained that what happened is a true test for us and how we conduct ourselves. In short, there was not and will not be any place in my mind for revenge. I don't see a solution with the killing of an Israeli child, and I do not want to add another victim and more innocent blood because that will simply not bring my daughter back to life.

In conclusion, I wish to express my warm gratitude to the efforts of Dr. Perry with the publication of this wonderful book. It is something that will help all Combatants for Peace continue and not go back until peace, freedom, and security are achieved for all.

Bassam Aramin
Bradford University
Bradford, UK, March 14, 2011.
Translated from the Arabic by Eriksen Translations

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Part I

Background



Checkpoint at Bethlehem

Photo by Donna Perry

Introduction

Saturday, May 5, 2007

Tel Aviv, Israel

After a lovely dinner by the Mediterranean with Israeli friends I now lay in my hotel room, unable to sleep and filled with fear. What had I gotten myself into? I looked through some family photos for comfort. But the images could not ease my anxiety as I thought about the next day's journey to the West Bank where I would begin field interviews with members of the Israeli-Palestinian group, Combatants for Peace (CFP). I tried to calm myself by remembering the words of a peacemaker friend who had worked in Iraq. She told me that the chances of something happening to me were very small and that walking through fear was a powerful force to bring peace. I knew in my head that she was right. But somehow, rational thoughts would not make my worries subside.

When I had told some Israeli friends about my plans to do research in the West Bank, they expressed alarm. One of them told me that it was very dangerous. That I was naïve and didn't understand the conflict. He told me about a woman who, prior to boarding a plane, was given a package by her Palestinian boyfriend that turned out to be a bomb. He talked about kidnappings and the BBC reporter who had recently been abducted in Gaza. As he spoke I became more and more afraid. Prior to our conversation I had been a little nervous about how the research would go. But I hadn't been fully *fearful* until I spoke with Uri and Gila.* Their fears gripped hold of me, and I wondered if I should abandon my plans. What had I been thinking after all?

* All names used in this book other than those depicting public figures or events are pseudonyms

Sunday, May 6, 2007

Bethlehem, Palestine

We came through the checkpoint at night, after completing our first set of interviews. Two Israeli soldiers stood there talking to each other, as we waited. Fadi had turned off the lights of the car in accordance with the rules. We waited silently in the darkness and watched for the soldier to motion us through. But no motion came. Was there some problem? Or was the soldier just focused on the conversation that he was having with his companion? I felt a tension inside of me. A slight flicker of his arm—was that the motion? The soldier held all the power. The minutes dragged. My colleague slowly inched the car forward, watching the soldier carefully for a gesture. What if we moved forward mistakenly, I wondered. Would they open fire? Eventually the soldier gestured casually with his flashlight and we passed through. An interaction that made every difference to us, as to whether or not we could pass safely, was just a meaningless interruption in a soldier's casual conversation.

Here in the West Bank, every travel plan involves calculating how much time will be needed at the checkpoints. Israel uses multiple measures to limit Palestinian movement within the West Bank itself. These include a strict permit system, limited access roads, and a system of checkpoints. The West Bank has been effectively divided into six areas with travel both within and between areas difficult and complicated (B'Tselem, 2010). The road out of Bethlehem was now bordered by the "barrier," a giant wall that actually cut into the road. The wall's encroachment into the town had made the street into a narrow ally with the stark barricade running along beside it. An observation tower stood menacingly overhead.

Going through the checkpoint on foot is even more intimidating than by car. There is a long narrow entrance way that is fenced in on the sides with bars on the top, like a cattle chute. The constricted passageway leads to an initial-screening point where Israeli soldiers examine our papers. We then pass through a series of fenced areas, like cages, with turnstiles at the entrance. The entrances are operated by a mysterious person who watches us but remains unseen. One minute the turnstiles are locked and then suddenly they are opened. Only one or two people are let through before it locks again. Fadi talked about how demeaning it was to go through this treatment constantly, "despite that you are a normal person."

My experiences at the checkpoint could have been a lot worse. Most of our trips through were relatively uneventful with just a few delays while young soldiers drank coffee and chatted, oblivious to the lives in limbo as

a long line of cars and trucks sat waiting, powerless to reach their destination on time. We were lucky. I couldn't help but notice that my navy blue American passport afforded me preferential treatment at nearly every juncture. As an American, it was much easier for me to pass through the checkpoints than the Palestinians, despite the fact that this was their homeland and I was the foreigner.

Reports indicate that the checkpoint system has had grave health impacts on Palestinians both for health professionals who face challenges in reaching their jobs and for the sick and injured who experience delays in access to treatment. Women have delivered babies at the checkpoints. People have died there waiting to get to a hospital (B'Tselem, 2010). I did not witness any of these occurrences during my visit.

But sometimes the mundane can be telling.

One day as I stood in the line of people waiting to get through the Bethlehem checkpoint, there was an elderly Palestinian man in front of me. He was a slightly built man, face worn by the sun, and shoulders slumped forward from a lifetime of labor. A female Israeli soldier came through, young enough to be the old man's granddaughter. Her backpack made her a wide and solid figure. She walked past the old man as though he were not even standing there, her pack knocking into him. She continued on without a word or gesture. Not even a moment of hesitation. She might have just bumped into a wall instead of a human being. After the jolting impact, the man stood there, silent and resigned.

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

Sderot, Israel

The fears of my Israeli friends were rooted in their own experiences. On a subsequent trip to Israel for additional research interviews, I had the opportunity to visit Sderot. Sderot is a southern Israeli town near the border with Gaza. It has been subjected to repeated rocket attacks from Palestinian militants in Gaza, since the beginning of the second Intifada in 2000.

Rockets fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel are typically followed by retaliatory strikes on Gaza by Israel. In December of 2008, Israel launched a military invasion into Gaza called Operation Cast Lead that lasted until mid-January, 2009. During this operation of widespread destruction, 1,389 Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip were killed. The number of civilian casualties has been under dispute, but B'Tselem puts the number