

The Link

Published by *Americans for
Middle East Understanding, Inc.*

Volume 48, Issue 4

Link Archives: www.ameu.org

September-October 2015

A Special Kind of Exile

By Alice Rothchild, M.D.

I once heard a speaker refer to those Jews who engage in critical activism on Israel/Palestine as entering a "special kind of exile."

I started my life in a very traditional American Jewish place, but faced with the activism of the 1960s, Israel's increasingly belligerent occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, multiple hard-to-defend wars, and a growing awareness of "cross sectional" issues around racism, police brutality, militarism, and U.S. foreign policy, I was forced to re-examine much that my family once held dear and to face the consequences of my actions.

As an increasingly secular person, I also began to scrutinize the meaning of my Jewishness, the uncomfortable consequences of Zionism, and my personal responsibilities in a world rife with contradiction, fear, and conflict.

So how did that all happen and where am I now?



(Continued on Page 2)

AMEU Board of Directors

Jane Adas (*Vice President*)
Elizabeth D. Barlow
Edward Dillon
Rod Driver
John Goelet
David Grimland
Richard Hobson (*Treasurer*)
Anne R. Joyce
Kendall Landis
Robert L. Norberg (*President*)
Hon. Edward L. Peck
Donald L. Snook
James M. Wall

AMEU National Council

William R. Chandler
Kathleen Christison
Paul Findley
Moorhead Kennedy
Ann Kerr
Nancy Lapp
George E. Mendenhall
Mary Norton
Don W. Wagner

Executive Director

John F. Mahoney

AMEU (ISSN 0024-4007) grants permission to reproduce material from *The Link* in part or in whole. AMEU must be credited and one copy forwarded to our office:

475 Riverside Drive, Room
245, New York, New York
10115-0245.

Other Contact Information:

Tel.: 212-870-2053
Fax: 212-870-2050
E-mail: AMEU@ameu.org

Website at www.ameu.org.

About This Issue

I first heard Dr. Rothchild speak earlier this year at a conference in Washington D.C. co-sponsored by the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (WRMEA) and the Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy (IRmep).

The subject of the conference was "The Israel Lobby: Is it Good for the U.S.? Is it Good for Israel?" The day-long event was well attended and offered an impressive list of speakers, including the Israeli columnist Gideon Levy.

But the speaker I was moved to invite to write for *The Link* was Alice Rothchild, a physician from Boston. At a time of growing distrust and racial divisions in the Middle East, and elsewhere, hers is a personal journey of outreach and of healing.

All of the photographs in the article are courtesy of the author.

On page 13, we note the passing of Hugh D. Auchincloss, Jr., a former AMEU Board member and, at the time of his death, a member of our National Council.

On pages 14 and 15, we offer a select list of books and videos, available through AMEU, that complement our feature article. A full listing of our books and videos is available on our website: www.ameu.org.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director

(Continued from Page 1)

A Special Kind of Exile

By Alice Rothchild

The Jewish Story

I was once on track to be a nice Jewish girl, growing up in the small New England town of Sharon, Massachusetts, with liberal minded parents who fled the narrow confines of shetl Brooklyn for the dreams of 1950s exurbia, a sparkling lake, and a moderately out-of-tune though touchingly aspirational civic orchestra. I played the cymbals, perhaps a warning of crashes to come. When I look back at that pre-Betty Friedan life, we were living the immigrant-assimilationist American dream in all its glory and contradiction. We cheered at the Fourth of July parade with its shiny red fire trucks and balding World War II veterans marching in step down Main Street, and at the same time we were an intensely insular family.

I had a solid dosing of Hebrew school three days a week and services at Temple Israel Saturday mornings, ate my share of gefilte fish and flanken in my grandparents' tiny Brooklyn apartment, and pushed countless quarters into blue and white tsadakah boxes, buying a small forest of trees in Israel by the time every friend and cousin had completed his Bar Mitzvah. There were lots of relations, but we were one of the few families who escaped New York City. My mother, Sylvia Rosner Rothchild, was one of twenty grandchildren of Josef Neuberger, an orthodox Jew with a bushy red beard and a reputation as the family's loving but fierce patriarch. He hailed from a shetl in the sometimes Austrian, sometimes Romanian, lately Ukranian area of Vizhnitsa and, like many immigrants, made his way to a hardscrabble life in the tenements of Wil-

liamsburg.

My parents grew up a few blocks from each other, met at night school at Brooklyn College (Rosner sat next to Rothchild), and were both rebels in their outward rejection of speaking Yiddish as our mamaloshen and maintaining an Orthodox kosher home, and in their eagerness to embrace a modern American life with mowed lawns, a love of Mahler, and occasional goyishe friends. My mother read *Women's Day*, a guide to being a good housewife, and along with chicken and challah on Shabbos, made orange jello molds with grated carrots layered at the top, a distinctly post-war dessert, the bland happy taste of the 50s.

At the same time, my parents managed to let me know that we were different, that we were from a distinct and endangered tribe. I marvel at that inherited sense of being at odds with American culture and society, of feeling so Jewish in a non-Jewish world despite rising economics and acceptability. I learned early that I was an outsider in the dominant American culture, that stories keep our history and culture alive and also create the learned truths about that history. I have also come to understand in my own journey that people survive by telling their stories and that the victors in history most often create the prevailing and accepted narrative.

And I was deeply enmeshed in that Jewish story; there was my unlikely love of gefilte fish and my real talent for making matzoh balls, as well as the level of guilt and responsibility I felt for the world's disasters. In sixth grade each student was asked to draw a picture of what he or she really wanted. I do not recall what my fellow classmates yearned for, but I do recall that my desire for "World Peace" was considered to be moderately peculiar. In college I

met upper class, private school girls who wanted to touch me, gushing, "I've never met a Jew before."

As the good, oldest daughter, I followed my mother's lead when it came to politics. The founding of Israel was a precious miracle, a haven for Jews after the Holocaust, a country that was to be "a light unto the nations." As a teenager I was in love with the kibbutz movement and Israeli dancing. I prayed unambivalently at my Bat Mitzvah, singing of my love of Zion, and reveled in a family pilgrimage to the magical land of Israel when I was fourteen. My teenage diary packed with graying postcards spoke of a "young hopeful...promised land" where "everyone has the right of way and maintains it." I described "former Arab homes" in Jaffa, and took note of Bedouins and backward Arab villages, wrote of "Arabs, dressed in long black robes and dirty head-dresses....," and lumped my descriptions of Arabs and Oriental Jews as "fat, unsanitary looking women." That was the narrative of my youth.

I had a little taste of anti-Semitism around a Christmas tree crisis that erupted in my public school where the growing numbers of upwardly mobile Jews moving into the town from Jewish ghettos in Dorchester and Brooklyn were accused of destroying Christmas at a very public and very appalling town meeting. Because my mother wrote an early book on the Shoa, *Voices from the Holocaust*, and the wife of our rabbi and my Hebrew school principal were both slightly damaged (but we gently forgave them) survivors, I also developed a youthful obsession with the Nazi Holocaust in particular and injustice in general.

While my mother was eager to break out of her Orthodox familial prohibitions, her short stories of



Bat Mitzvah party with my sister Judith, 1963.

suburban life in the 1950s and 1960s often struggled with the hard edge of anti-Semitism and the insensitivities of her Christian neighbors who could not distinguish a Rosenthal from a Schwartz. I suspect these life experiences, coming on the heels of the depression, World War II, and the Nazi Holocaust, marked her for life. I also inherited and bore the imprint of those difficult times. This same mother supported the METCO programs, (Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity), bringing African-American children to our very white educational system, and offered her expertise to teach in Boston's largely segregated schools.

As a teenager, I was lulled into the liberalism of Adlai Stevenson and John F. Kennedy, but I discovered there were harsh limits. When I came home with an African-American boyfriend, my modern, liberal, pro-civil rights, tolerant mother warned me that if I married a non-Jew, then "Hitler's dream would come true." She begged me to understand what I would lose, never considering what he also might lose should he marry me. She cried and threatened to sit shiva, mourning my "death," banishing me from the family forever. This was a powerful message to a budding 19-year-old exploring her own identities and passions; the threat of permanent expulsion from the enfolding arms of my childhood. In a painful and tumultuous evening, my mother morphed from ally to threat and I saw excommunication as a real possibility. Little did I know what lay ahead.

This is quite a heritage, a potent mix of trauma, memory, tribalism, and assimilation. As a family, we prided ourselves on our differentness and our ability to survive against the odds of anti-Semitism, pogroms, near annihilation, and the sweatshops and poverty of the lower East Side of New York City. At the same time we were thriving in multicultural, upwardly mobile suburbia. Simultaneously, in a strange, unconscious way, I knew, like Jews everywhere, that we were potentially all victims, we were in some way all survivors, and the world was an unforgiving place; the threat of another Holocaust lurked behind every international crisis, every unkind word.

I think that sense of our "specialness," where the fear of extermination intersected with religious belief

and the perceived mark of permanent victimhood, is where my Jewishness merged with my mother's personal terrors. Our particular place in the world, our role as the "chosen people," meant that not only were we singled out for persecution, but we had special responsibilities, that the admonition to make the world a better place was actually a very personal call to action necessary for our very survival. Needless to say, the Arab/Israeli War in 1967 was a time of communal apprehension and understood to be an existential threat to a country we loved without much in the way of the critical thinking we reserved for the rest of the world.

I think back to my mother's stubborn insistence that the Jewish pioneers in the early 20th century bought much of the land in historic Palestine from the local Arabs; she fervently believed that Jews are inherently decent, we do not massacre or steal or rape; we do not take what is not rightfully ours; we do not share our victimhood. This is a painful mythology to give up. As I discovered later, introspection involves a searingly honest evaluation of history in all its voices, a recognition of the behavior and policies of the pioneers and fighters who created the State of Israel, and an examination of the foundations of modern political Zionism; and ultimately a willingness to express regret and apology. This is not an easy journey.

As a solid member of the tribe, I went off to college in the late 1960s and found myself at Bryn Mawr, an elite, upper-class, waspy women's college, where Jews (and blacks) were exotic and rare at that time. Despite the occasional high holidays and a meandering Jewish discussion group with mostly long-haired, left-wing men from Haverford, my relationship to my Jewish identity sank to the bottom of my list of adolescent priorities. I threw myself into academics and near-death premed courses; opposition to the Vietnam War was the main topic of political conversation. I began to examine feminism and a host of other "isms" swirling on campus and to bus down to marches on the Mall and parks of Washington, DC. During college and then medical school, my sense of who I was began to unravel, and I became increasingly aware of my internal boundaries; I began to understand that I didn't even know what I didn't know.

The Other

The grandfather of one of my college friends had been an Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and as she shared her family inheritance with me, I still remember my indignant arguments with her, my utter disdain for Abdul Nasser, and my dismissal of pan-Arab nationalism. Gradually I realized that I had never actually met an Arab, a shocking admission for someone with such firmly held liberal beliefs. I recognized that I had grown up distrusting and hating an entire group of people and I really knew nothing about them.

Between delivering babies and raising two children, I read everything I could find on colonialism, imperialism, U.S. history, and gradually developed an uncomfortable disconnect between my childhood love of a magical, mythical Israel and my adult analysis of how the world actually works. Things got even more complicated after 1967 as I became increasingly though vaguely aware of the Israeli occupation.

But I did what many Jews did; why ruin a family dinner or a longtime friendship by bringing up something that only ends with everyone yelling at each other?

In the mid 1990s, fortified with a growing understanding of colonialism, racism, immigration, Islamophobia, and increasingly disenchanted with the version of Israeli history I had learned in Hebrew school, I began an active search for the stories that I had missed. I began to listen to dissenting Israeli Jews, Palestinians, and other Arabs in the Boston area. I began to make invisible people visible to me, to confront the trauma and fear that I had inherited, and to hear and feel our enormous human common-

alities; the common language of denial, despair, endurance, and recovery. I started to realize that the “troubles” in Israel did not start in 1967 with the Six Day War and the occupation of East Jerusalem, the Golan, West Bank and Gaza. I began to recognize the importance of revisiting the events of 1948, the year I was born and the State of Israel was founded; to hold both the story of my own people and the stories of the people who were killed, dispossessed, and displaced partly as a consequence of my own people’s tragedy, in my head and in my heart simultaneously. My mother told me once that she was proud of my activism, but I was taking it further than she could bear to go, but I think that is what daughters are for. Each generation has a task and this one seemed increasingly mine.



Author at Women’s Center in Rafah Refugee Camp.

When the cognitive dissonance was no longer tolerable, I sought out a group of similarly agonized, politically left Jews of various stripes from the Boston Workmen’s Circle, New Jewish Agenda, and Kahal Braira. We started a Jewish/Palestinian dialogue group that provided us with a powerful education on the realities in the region.

This led to the formation of a number of activist grassroots organizations (Visions of Peace with Justice in Israel/Palestine, American Jews for a Just Peace, Jewish Voice for Peace) and a desire to develop educational events to share what we had learned. As we organized speakers and events, we were fairly immediately blacklisted in our own Jewish communities.

We soon realized that a number of us were physicians (this being a group of Jews after all), and based on the experience of medical support work in El Salvador a few decades earlier, we developed the idea of examining the conflict through the lens of health care and human rights. Someone might not

be able to deal with the politics, but everyone would agree that a pregnant woman should not deliver at a checkpoint and a child should have enough to eat.

That led to a health and human rights project, taking annual delegations to Israel and the occupied territories, working with Physicians for Human Rights - Israel, Palestinian Medical Relief Society, Gaza Community Mental Health Program, and a growing number of civil society and activist organizations on both sides of the Green Line. We saw patients in clinics, lectured at Al Quds medical school, stayed in refugee camps, marched in solidarity with nonviolent activists in Bil'in, visited destroyed and unrecognized villages in Israel, and developed powerful human relationships with Jewish Israelis and Palestinians.

Our last delegation was June 2014, and my most recent visit to the region was in March/April 2015 with Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility. As a Jewish person with a country "speaking in my name" and as a U.S. citizen paying taxes that funded the occupation and siege, I felt my most compelling responsibility was to bring these stories home.

I worked with U.S. activists and members of the Israeli left who were focused on civil, human, and political rights for Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories as the fundamental basis for a viable, secure Israeli state. I watched the "left" in post-Oslo Israel shrink to desperately small numbers and I observed Palestinian civil society coalescing around a commitment to nonviolent resistance to oppression.

I began to understand as the Jewish settlements exploded in the West Bank and East Jerusalem with increasingly restrictive bypass roads, checkpoints, permits, and the snaking separation wall, and as the Israeli government declared the Jordan Valley a closed military zone, that the government of Israel (like all governments) was not going to give up power voluntarily.

I watched with growing horror the racist, right-wing swing of successive Israeli governments and the unleashed racism and aggression of Jewish settlers towards their Palestinian neighbors. It became increasingly clear to me that the expulsion, dispossession, and war against the indigenous Palestinians that started long before 1948 was actually continuing

unabated, disguised in the language of the endless, stillborn "peace process," Jewish exceptionalism, water, security, and the racist demonization of Palestinians.

This growing understanding led me to fully embrace the international call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israeli policies as the most creative, powerful, nonviolent work that I could support.

Although Palestinians have a little known history of non-military resistance tactics dating back to the 1920s, in 2005 more than 170 Palestinian civil society institutions issued a call to end the occupation of land seized by Israel in 1967 and dismantle the separation wall, to recognize the fundamental rights of the Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality, and to respect, protect, and promote the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

This call is based on international law and principles of human rights and is explicitly against all forms of racism, including specifically anti-Semitism. Many BDS activists are Jewish; several small Israeli organizations support the call (for instance Boycott from Within, Who Profits, and Anarchists Against the Wall), but the movement is universal. The issue is about resolving longstanding, intractable injustices. In April 2010, Americans for Peace now came out against BDS, but supported socially responsible investing, the avoidance of companies involved with the settlements and settlement products. Liberal Zionist Israeli groups have also supported the boycott of settlement products, and major governmental institutions and multinational companies have seen fit to pull out of the occupied territories without actually mentioning the word "boycott."

In 2010, more than 50 Israeli performers refused to perform in a new theatre in the Jewish settlement of Ariel. They were supported by artists like Theodore Bikel and Pete Seeger. BDS can be targeted at Israel's occupation or at institutions/corporations that profit from oppression Palestinians. The cultural boycott has also been incredibly successful. It challenges Israeli performers, who are funded by the government and act as goodwill ambassadors, as well as international performers to acknowledge that Israel is practicing (according to luminaries from Jimmy Carter to Bishop Tutu), a form of apartheid.

Why Israel?

Many critics state that BDS is anti-Semitic and say to me, "Why Israel?" First it is important to distinguish criticism of Jews as Jews, which is anti-Semitism, from criticism of the policies of the Israeli government. In the world of terrible oppressive countries, there are obviously lots of worse offenders, but I would suggest that there is no other injustice so critically supported by our tax dollars. Twenty percent of all U.S. foreign aid goes to Israel, plus we provide tremendous political and military support, accord Israel special status, and insist that the international community treat Israel as if were a normal, progressive Western democracy. This makes the operations of the Israeli state far more accountable to the international community that supports it.

If you don't believe me, a nonprofit organization, If Americans Knew, examined the Israel/Palestine conflict and foreign policy reports. According to the Congressional Research Service:

- ▲ The amount of official U.S. aid to Israel since its founding in 1948 exceeds \$115 billion and in the past few decades it has been on the order of \$3 billion per year, in 2013, this amounted to over \$8.5 million every single day for a country with a population of 8.2 million people.
- ▲ Unlike other countries, Israel receives all of its aid money at the start of each year, rather than in quarterly installments, thus they start earning interest on the money immediately, interest paid by the U.S. since Israel invests these funds in U.S. Treasury notes. The U.S. borrows money to give to Israel and to pay the interest; this costs U.S. taxpayers more than \$100 million every year.
- ▲ Unlike other countries, Israel is allowed to use U.S. military aid to purchase material made by Israeli rather than U.S. companies. The U.S. government also gives approximately \$1.6 billion per year to Egypt and Jordan in aid packages that are dependent on maintaining peace treaties

with Israel and have no stipulations regarding justice for Palestinians.

- ▲ The U.S. also provides more than \$400 million to the Palestinian Authority each year which largely goes to rebuild infrastructure destroyed by Israeli attacks and to support a floundering economy that is constricted by occupation.

Thus Israel receives more U.S. aid than any other country, although Israelis make up only 0.1% of the world's population. This computes to 7,000 times more U.S. foreign aid per capita than other folks, although Israel falls under the more affluent nations of the world.

When I look at history of the Israel/Palestine conflict, it is clear that politicians on all sides have failed us, the conflict is getting worse and many argue that we need a dramatic reframing of what it means to work for a just and peaceful resolution. Like any powerful government, the Israeli government will not give up dominance voluntarily and the U.S. government has been unwilling to contain Israeli military aggression and suppression of the Palestinian population.

If we look at this struggle in its broadest sense, the billions we spend on military aid could have had such a positive impact at home if money were available for our failing schools, inequitable health care system, inadequate housing, crumbling roads, bridges, and infrastructure, etc. The politics of racism and police aggression goes way beyond East Jerusalem or the occupied territories. Activists are drawing parallels from Palestine to Ferguson, the lost young men in East Jerusalem to inner city youth in our major cities. Our police are being trained in Israel, crowd control has been militarized, local police departments now have the excess tanks the Pentagon can no longer use and the training and weaponry that has been used against a militarily occupied population thousands of miles away. Civil liberties experts document massive spying on civilian populations, not just in the West Bank and Gaza but on every citizen in the US. The drones have come home. Additionally, repeated military incursions have led to environmental devastation and contamination not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but also in Iraq and Afghanistan where there are reports of rising cancer

deaths and birth defects. This is a global issue.

If we fast forward to today, my understanding of Israel is very different from my early upbringing. I am not only concerned with the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the siege of Gaza, the second class citizenship of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, and the longstanding unresolved issue of Palestinian refugees. I also have a much deeper understanding of Zionism as a political movement, the realities of Zionism for Jews and Palestinians, the war in 1948, and the consequences of establishing a state where Jews are privileged over everyone else and where there has been a steady expansion of borders and increasing militarization of Israeli society.

I worry about the cost of all this to Jewish Israelis and Jews in the Diaspora as well as Palestinians. I have come to the painful conclusion that Zionism itself is the foundation of this more than century-old struggle. Zionism as a political movement evolved with much controversy and full awareness that creating a Jewish state with a Jewish majority and Jewish privilege involved removing the indigenous Palestinians one way or another.

And that is the crux of the issue for activist Jews: do we align ourselves, even after the centuries of anti-Semitism and the Nazi Holocaust, with what has basically been one of the last settler colonial states established in the twentieth century? Can we support Zionism as a national movement when it is grounded in racism and ongoing subjugation and ethnic cleansing? And if you are not worried about Palestinians, is behaving in this manner good for Jews or has it been deeply corruptive to the values and political stands that we value and want to de-

fend for the next generation? Like I said, not an easy journey.

In the Jewish community, there are enormous conflicts over Israel, many family fights and friendships destroyed, as well as enormous underlying contradictions. In my own family, the educated, liberal wife of a cousin sent a Jewish New Years email that said: "Peace will come when Palestinian mothers love their children as much as Jewish mothers." Where do I begin? Jews are traditionally progressive

and have had a leadership role in labor struggles, civil rights, women's rights, gay rights, but many of us (particularly when you talk to people under 35) feel that we are being asked to suspend our love of justice, democracy, tolerance, fighting for the oppressed, etc. when it comes to Israel/Palestine.

Additionally, we see very right wing forces such as Campus Watch, StandWithUs, CAMERA (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting), AI-PAC (American Israel Public

Affairs Committee), the David Project, and others aligned with the Christian Right, lobbying congress to support the most right-wing governments in Israel, (our own little U.S. branches of Likud), and muzzling dissent and tolerance in our communities.

As a person who deeply values democracy, tolerance, standing up for the oppressed, I see Jewish power in the twenty-first century is mostly about the misuse of power and nothing about being Jewish.

In the Trenches

So what is it like in the trenches for me and how has the muzzling and the right-wing dominant paradigm affected my work?



Visiting with family of Palestinian physician, 2015, in Sarta, West Bank.

As a physician since 1978, I have been on the staff of Beth Israel Hospital which morphed into Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, and from 2004 to 2013 held the academic position of Assistant Professor of Obstetrics, Gynecology and Reproductive Biology, Faculty of Medicine, Harvard University. I gave grand rounds and other lectures at a number of Harvard medical institutions on a host of topics ranging from quality improvement to sexual education for adolescents. I consider myself a respected member of the faculty and worked as an obstetrician-gynecologist in a group practice for several decades. My patients ranged from pregnant teenagers to ardent menopausal feminists, orthodox Jewish women and modest Muslims ladies all searching for a female physician.

After returning from my first health and human rights delegation to Israel/Palestine in 2004, I was invited to give a grand rounds presentation to the internal medicine department on the health impacts of occupation at a sister hospital in Cambridge. This was my maiden voyage into the academic world and Middle East politics. I arrived, Power Point, notes, and anxiety in hand and found that a colleague of mine who was not from this hospital was busy placing a leaflet on every seat in the auditorium with gory pictures of dead Israelis killed by Palestinian terrorists. To the arriving physicians, it appeared that this was my leaflet. Who sent him? Who made the flyer? Undeterred, but also unclear how to handle this, I gave my presentation. During the Q&A my colleague immediately took the floor, harangued me for ten minutes on my facts and on my "lack of compassion" for Jews. The head of medicine was as intimidated as I, but this was only the beginning of my introduction to the wild world of silencing and bullying. My colleague then repeatedly called me, asking to have a cup of coffee so that we could "talk about what happened in 1948."

That same year, I asked to give a similar presentation to my own department, other faculty gave talks on their various medical missions and experiences around the world, I wanted my time as well. In an earlier discussion with my department chief about visiting colleagues in Israel, he (an ardent Zionist who led delegations to Israel, especially focused on their emergency medicine and response to terrorist attacks), had said to me, "You are a danger

to the Jewish people." (Who knew?) Needless to say, my efforts to give a departmental presentation were unsuccessful until five years later when he left the department. I applied to the new acting chief, was accepted, and when my impending grand rounds was announced, the department received 100 emails protesting my appearance. I was asked to remove the word "occupation" from the title (ultimately the presentation was titled: "Healthcare in the West Bank and Gaza: Examining the impact of war on a civilian population, a personal journey"), and warned to stay away from politics. The room was packed, I talked, and we all successfully lived through the experience.

Fast forward, I published *Broken Promises, Broken Dreams* in 2007, second edition in 2010, *On the Brink* in 2014, and released a documentary film, *Voices Across the Divide*, in 2013. With my increasing involvement in the issues and with books and film to share, I began a second career, traveling the country, doing book readings, film screenings and analytic presentations. This gave me a unique opportunity to experience what is happening "out there" and how an activist type like me is received in a variety of different communities.

All of these anecdotes cover 2013-2015; I will start with a few academic settings:

As part of a week of Human Rights Awareness and Activism programming, the U.S. Foreign Policy Activist Cooperative and the Society for Ethics, Peace, and Global Affairs of American University in D.C. organized a screening of *Voices Across the Divide*. At the film showing, a particularly interesting conversation focused around the issue of campus control of Israel messaging; there is apparently a strong Israel studies program that includes student trips to Israel. The views of the program are very mainstream and not particularly controversial. However, students who focus on human rights issues, opposition to the Israeli occupation, or support of the boycott, divestment, sanction movement, find themselves marginalized and accused of bias. Students described a polarization on campus with little civil discourse between "the sides." Two professors at American University were included on the recently publicized list of professors "dangerous to Israel" (despite their lack of outspoken behavior on the

topic) and one untenured faculty member talked about being warned to limit his critical comments about Israel as it could endanger his future career. We discussed this new McCarthyism where critical analysis of Israel and occupation/siege can threaten the careers, tenure, and free speech rights of faculty and students who do not “stand with Israel.”

At a John Carroll University political science class in Ohio, "Peacemaking in the Palestine Israel Conflict," there were complaints from the local Hillel stating that Jewish students did not “feel safe” having me on campus and some major faculty meeting was held to discuss my upcoming event. Fortunately, the professor was supported by the university administration. Nonetheless, 100 students packed the class, including many from Hillel. The Hillel contingent was mostly silent during my talk, although some approached me individually afterwards. The most disturbing interaction was with the Israeli shalicha, (ambassador, hired by Jewish institutions to represent Israel and to shape the conversation about Israel in temples, Hillels, community groups, etc.). She aggressively attacked me as a “liar,” chastised me for “doing a great disservice,” and refused to “agree to disagree.” Loud bullying seemed to be her main strategy and the students watched closely.

At the University of Maryland, in an Arab media class, one Jewish student who was unhappy with my presentation spoke of being “very disappointed” with the professor, accused me of “hate speech,” and stated that if students only heard me speak they would have a very one-sided view of the conflict. He talked about how Hamas is “really the problem” and felt offended “as a member of Hillel.” The professor talked about the difference between hate speech and free speech, her openness to “dual narratives,” and her willingness to bring in a “pro-Israel” speaker. I reflected on my discomfort with that definition of “pro-Israel,” i.e., being in agreement with the Israeli government. I pointed out that millions of dollars are being spent

on Israeli messaging and propaganda, and I noted that I was sharing the realities on the ground as I saw them. I also noted that the issue of “balance” is only brought up if someone doesn’t like the message; the occupation is really oppressive, Gazans are actually living in the midst of a massive humanitarian catastrophe largely caused by three Israeli assaults and a brutal siege; Israeli society is moving to the right and becoming increasingly racist and militarized. Did anyone ask for the voice of a Palestinian dispossessed from Haifa when telling the heroic story of the founding of the Israeli state? As I reflected on this interchange, I realized that while the dual narrative approach can be very powerful, it is also important to avoid confusing an honest examination of history and narrative with bowing to a nationalistic mythos, as if both are equivalent serious historical research.

At Suffolk University in Boston, in a class on Diversity and Human Need, one Jewish student in the class spoke about how she was sympathetic to Nakba history, but felt “threatened” by my film. We discussed why hearing another narrative that challenges our own provokes fear rather than curiosity or perhaps reflection and shame.

At the University of Virginia alumni book club, several alumni complained about my book reading, went all the way to the president in protest, and threatened to withhold funds if I was allowed to speak.

At Evergreen College in Olympia, WA, students talked about feeling “unsafe” on campus, being afraid to identify publically as Jews, feeling hostility from other students at this liberal, social-justice focused college. I explained that on campuses in the U.S. there are well-funded groups focused on controlling “Israel messaging,” and often provoking this sense of insecurity. I noted the frequent use of the word “unsafe” which is part of StandWithUs language and AIPAC’s claim of rampant anti-Semitism [read criticism of Israel



Author speaking at the Washington, D.C. Press Conference on the Israeli lobby.

and Zionism] on campus, derived from a misuse of the federal statute Title IX language on creating "safe" environments for women and prohibiting sex discrimination in educational institutions. I wondered if students are confusing anti-Semitism with criticism of Israel and questioned whether Muslim or Arab students feel "safe" on campus.

I found similar issues in churches and temples. At a church in the D.C. suburbs, which shares a building with a temple with which it has a longstanding positive relationship, I was told by the rabbi that if the church showed my film in their shared building, the rabbi would dissolve their relationship. The church rented a hall and the documentary was shown.

At a Congregational church in Burlington, VT, the local progressive-on-other-things rabbi pressured the pastor who is sympathetic to Palestinians. While they also have a longstanding relationship working on many social justice issues, the rabbi's main message was one of profound disappointment (of the we have worked together on so many issues, I thought I could trust you, and now you are showing this anti-Semitic, one-sided Israel-hating film of this self-hating Jew variety). He complained that I am biased, have no understanding of the existential threat to Israel; he talked about BDS as delegitimizing, hindering dialogue, etc. The pastor shared his feelings with me and his pain at this very troubled response from a friend and fellow religious leader.

As expected, temples are the most challenging venue for me to get in to and present. This is where I feel I am up against the widespread "McCarthyism" in the mainstream Jewish community.

At a reform temple in Ithaca, NY, I found that when announcements were placed in the temple newsletter, if the speaker was left-leaning on Israel/Palestine, there was a disclaimer that stated that the speaker does not represent the temple community, thus setting the normative opinion.

In an Erez Israel class at a Bethesda Maryland reconstructionist synagogue, I noted that all the maps for the course and in the temple labeled "Israel" were actually the one state "Greater Israel." When one of the older men took issue with my comment, "the victors write history," he said "We are not the victors, we lost six million times." I could feel

this sense that many in the class could not move beyond living in the Holocaust, living with a permanent victimhood as well as a lack of understanding and sympathy for "Arabs," thus the dominant narrative became a blinder to seeing a co-victim's reality.

In an orthodox synagogue in the D.C. area, my film screening for a men's club, which was organized by an orthodox human rights lawyer and Hebrew school teacher, was summarily cancelled by the rabbi.

Moving out into the Jewish community, the Sacramento California Jewish Federation newspaper, *The Jewish Voice*, refused to post an announcement for my film as they deemed it an "anti-Israel event." A few years earlier they had refused to announce my book reading, also claiming it was "anti-Israel."

In a vibrant Jewish community at the Beachwood Library in Ohio, I encountered a very conflicted audience, many unaware of the millions of dollars being spent on Israeli hasbara, the very aggressive control of "Israel messaging," and the intense muzzling in the Jewish community and on campuses. One woman noted that we can have this kind of open conversation "anywhere in the U.S." but in Arab countries we would be censored, arrested, "sold into sex slavery." I pointed out that actually I cannot have this conversation in most temples, Hillels, and Jewish community centers and that rabbis routinely cancel my appearances. She pointed out that the poster for my talk earlier in the day was offensive: it had the word "CONFLICT" in large letters and a picture of the separation wall, so "it says what side you are on." I pointed out to her that, problematically, there is an actual conflict and the separation wall is an issue and an important symbol of the occupation. There was clearly a low bar for feeling threatened. The most disturbing moment for me came at the end when an older woman walked up to the women selling my books, and announced these "should be burned." A gentleman behind her retorted, "That's what they did in Nazi Germany."

I will never forget leaving New York City after a book tour and spotting a large billboard plastered across a building: New York Times Against Israel, All rant, All slant, Stop the Bias. This was sponsored by the ferociously well funded and ironically

misnamed Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America.

As you can see, silencing is both active and also occurs through more subtle framing and language, so what are the assumptions and why does this happen? A leader in the Ithaca Jewish community challenged me on my maps of historic Palestine, especially who owned what/when. She said Arabs were "migrants" to the area and noted earnestly that the last independent indigenous nation in the area were Jews 2000 years ago with the implication, of course, that this conferred Jews special rights in the 21st century. She referred me to a right wing blog for more "accurate" information.

At World Fellowship, a progressive family summer retreat in New Hampshire, a woman in the audience told me of her child attending a public school in New York City where they were studying indigenous peoples and as an example the teacher stated that the Jews were the indigenous people in Israel and they were being treated badly by the Palestinians. Her daughter piped up that she thought it was really the other way around. The girl was sent out of class to the principal's office, her parents were called, and there was a stern warning about such talk. When the mother agreed with her daughter, the principal explained that that version of history was not allowed in New York City public schools.

When a peace group in a suburb of Boston offered me a Social Justice Award for "her resolute efforts to ease the tensions between Israel and Palestine..." local politicians found other events to go to, a fiscal sponsor pulled out, and I was advised by supporters not to mention BDS in my acceptance speech. Organizers were worried about protesters who thankfully did not materialize, but the anxiety was there.

Who Am I?

As an activist, I now relate to many communities: the more mainstream Jewish organizations look at me as the classic "self-hating Jew" because I value Palestinian life and aspirations as much as Jewish life and aspirations. Also because I see the increasing right wing, racist policies of the State of Israel backed by the U.S. as the fulcrum where real change must

come and this involves challenging the basic assumptions of political Zionism and Jewish majority rule.

The activist Jewish communities and younger Jews welcome my insights and join me in a call for democratic values and respect for international law, with the acknowledgement that Palestinians are now the oppressed people in this international equation (along with Mizrahi Jews and African asylum seekers, but that is another story).

The good liberal Jews in the middle, the ones who are holding on to the idea that Israel can be Jewish and democratic and are not yet willing to face the deep contradictions within Zionist society, continue to squirm and support the human and civil rights movements within the U.S. and Israel without facing what I see as the core issue, Jewish privilege and its consequences.

Christian groups and particularly African-Americans increasingly welcome "a Jew we can talk to" as many find themselves aggressively challenged by their Jewish friends and rabbis when they raise the kinds of serious and contradictory concerns outlined here.

Muslim friends are relieved to find a Jew post 9/11 who embraces people not as stereotypes, but as fellow human beings with complicated and often traumatic life stories trying to move forward in a world that is so violently Islamophobic.

I see world powers attempting to impose "our" version of "democracy" at the end of a gun, playing factions against each other with multiple proxy wars, dangerously arming an entire region which is spiraling into catastrophe. Think Syria, Yemen, Libya, Afghanistan, Iraq...it is a long list of failed policies. How different the world would be if the U.S. and other international players had called for a nuclear free Middle East that included Iran as well as Israel. Or for that matter, if post 9/11 the U.S. had gone to the International Court against Al Qaeda with the support of nations all over the world, and held a trial rather than plunging our young soldiers into wars that have only made us more enemies and created generations of young people with PTSD and brain injuries, not to mention the devastating impact on the people and environments we were supposedly saving.

Palestinians are often blamed for the current state of affairs. While they have historically been plagued by their own tribal issues and battles for power between various powerful families as well as political movements, they mostly suffer from the consequences of post-war imperial powers dividing up the Middle East, empowering minority groups to govern over majorities, and creating longstanding enmities. They also suffer from corrupt, oppressive dictators often funded by the U.S. and from proxy wars fought between major powers and paramilitary groups. And then of course there are the decades of Israeli occupation and siege and second class citizenship.

I believe that resolution of this conflict is central to the resolution of many of the tragedies that have engulfed the Middle East.

I would urge us to start with ourselves. I have come to understand that it is critical to separate Judaism the religion from Zionism the national political movement; Zionism has hijacked Judaism. I would advocate defining a Jew as someone grounded in religion or culture and history, a set of ethics, a sense of peoplehood; all definitions equally compelling.

While Jewish Israelis have long looked down upon the Diaspora as not “real Jews” with “no right to criticize, you don’t live here,” Diaspora Jews are reclaiming our legitimacy and our voices as Jews. We are distinguishing the racist ideology of anti-Semitism from thoughtful moral criticism of the policies of the country, Israel. Thus the treatment of and solidarity with Palestinians has now become the civil rights issue of the day for modern younger Jews who

will be here long after the older post-Holocaust generation has moved on and no longer shapes the boundaries of intelligent discourse and definitions of normalcy.

Mostly what I see is that Diaspora Jews are starting to own the Nakba as part of our story. I believe that after centuries of powerlessness, how we as a community handle our new position of power and privilege is critical to the survival of an ethical Jewish tradition as well as a just resolution to a more than century-old struggle in historic Palestine that is being fought in our name.

Perhaps that is what nice Jewish ladies are now called to do and that is certainly the example I want for my daughters.

In Appreciation: Hugh Auchincloss, 1927-2015

He was the stepbrother of Jacqueline Bouvier, and later a close confidant of John F. Kennedy. In 1961, President Kennedy appointed him a member of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

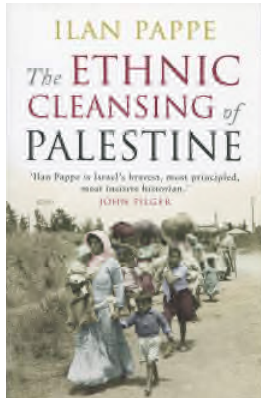
A graduate of Yale (1950) and the Naval War College (1996), Hugh Auchincloss served in the Marine Corps as a staff-sergeant in counter-intelligence. In the latter part of his life he supported environmental causes and fostered an abiding interest in the Middle East.

From 1978 to 2006, Hugh served as a member of A.M.E.U.’s Board of Directors, and from 2006 to the present, he was a member of our National Council. For 37 years he publicly – and proudly – supported our efforts to create here in our country a deeper understanding of the history, culture and current events in the Middle East.

Hugh Auchincloss died this past June at the age of 87. To his family we extend our condolences – and share their loss. – *John F. Mahoney*

Recommended Books for This Issue's Feature Article

AMEU Prices include postage. Check box and see Order Form on page 15



The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine

By Ilan Pappé

Groundbreaking research into the events of 1948.

Paper, 2007, 320 pp.
AMEU price: \$15.00



Against Our Better Judgment

By Alison Weir

How the U.S. was used to create Israel.

Paper, 2014, 240 pp.
AMEU price: \$15.00

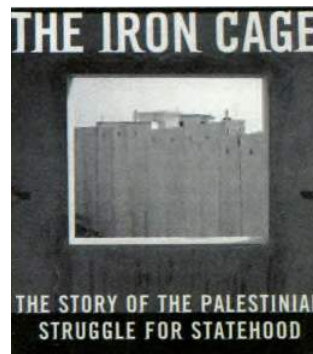


An Israeli in Palestine

By Jeff Halper

Author was nominated in 2006 for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Paper, 2008, 338 pp.
AMEU: \$17.00



The Iron Cage

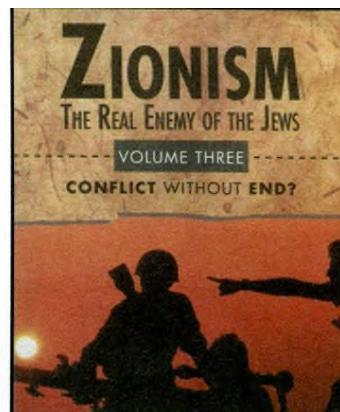
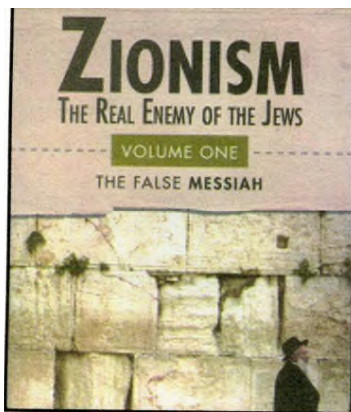
By Rashid Khalidi

History behind the maps of the British Mandate and today's Israel.

Cloth, 2006, 281 pp.
AMEU: \$24.95

Zionism: The Real Enemy of the Jews

3-volume work by British Foreign Correspondent Alan Hart



Vol. 1

Vol. 2

Vol. 3

All Three

Vol. 1: The dangers in the West's unconditional support of Zionism.

Vol. 2: What happened in 1948. Vol. 3: The 1967 war to the present.

AMEU Price: \$15.00 per volume; \$40 for the 3-volume set.

AMEU's Video Selections

All AMEU Prices include Postage & Handling

- Arna's Children**, 2004 DVD, 85 minutes. Story of the Jenin Freedom Theater. "A rare and poignant window into the lives and deaths of a lost generation of Palestinians." — Molly Moore, The Washington Post. **AMEU: \$20.00**
- 5 Broken Cameras**, 2008, DVD, 90-minutes, Peaceful resistance in the West Bank via video cameras. **AMEU: 20.00.**
- Trip'ol'ii Productions, **Occupation 101**, 2007, DVD, 90 minutes, Excellent history of the seizure of Palestinian lands from 1948 to the present. **AMEU: \$10.00.**
- Palestinian Costumes and Embroidery: A Precious Legacy**, 2008, 38 minutes. Rare collection of Palestinian dresses modeled against the background of Palestinian music, with commentary tracing the designs back to Canaanite times. **AMEU: \$25.00.**
- The Stones Cry Out: The Story of the Palestinian Christians**, 2013, DVD, 56 minutes, The Palestinian Catastrophe through the eyes of Palestinian Christians. **AMEU: \$15.00.**

RUSH ORDER FORM

Number of books/videos checked: _____

Total Amount Enclosed: \$_____

Make Checks Payable to "AMEU"

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

MAIL ORDER WITH CHECK TO:

**AMEU, Room 245, 475 Riverside Drive,
New York, NY 10115-0245
Telephone 212-870-2053, Fax 212-870-2050, or
E-Mail AMEU@aol.com**

**AMEU's Complete Book/Video Catalog
Available on website: www.ameu.org**

Non-Profit
 U.S. Postage
 PAID
 Permit #155
 Deep River, CT

Americans for Middle East Understanding, Inc.
 Room 245, 475 Riverside Drive
 New York, NY 10115-0245

To Support *The Link*

A \$40 voluntary annual subscription is requested to defray the cost of publishing and distributing *The Link* and AMEU's Public Affairs Series.

Your Contribution to AMEU Is Tax Deductible

A check or money order for \$_____ is enclosed, payable to AMEU.

Name _____

Address _____

Zip+4 _____

Please send recent *Link* issues

Please send a gift subscription* of *The Link* in my name to:

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Name _____ Address _____ City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

Mail with \$20 for each gift subscription to:
 AMEU, 475 Riverside Drive, Room 245,
 New York, New York 10115-0245.

*One yr. sub. + free copy of "Burning Issues,"
 AMEU's 440-page anthology of best *Links*.