

**November 13, 2002**

**Presentation “Should Columbia Invest in Arms for Israel?: A Discussion of Social Responsibility, Human Rights, and the New Divestment Campaign”**

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I wanted to speak here because though I’ve lived with Palestine all my life, through my father who was born in grew up in Jaffa but who, like hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, was forced to flee in 1948, I only saw with my own eyes what military occupation meant when I first went there in 1993. And it was only a year and a half ago when I spent many weeks there, nursing my dying father, that I got some small taste of what people are living with today. Mercifully, my father died before the onslaught last spring when Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, Bethlehem, Dheisha Refugee Camp and so many other Palestinian towns were bombarded and reoccupied by the Israeli army. I want to talk about what I saw to explain why I think we need the pressure of the international community to persuade Israel to seek a different solution than occupation of the Palestinian territories and the inhuman treatment of civilians that has accompanied this.

I first went to Israel and Palestine because my father, after 40 years in the U.S. and with the license given him by his American passport, not his Palestinian birthright, had wanted to go “home.” Not home to Jaffa, where there was no place for him, but home to the West Bank town of Ramallah where he thought he could use his experience as a university professor, scholar and organizer to contribute to the development of his society. He went to Birzeit University, a liberal arts college dedicated to teaching and research in the same spirit as U.S. colleges; once there he also got involved in setting up Citizens’ Rights groups to hold the fledgling quasi-government of the PA accountable, he supported a cultural center to encourage the arts, and he helped set up foundations dedicated to improving higher education.

I will never forget my first visit in 1993. I was doing research in Egypt at the time and so I came by land. After a week’s visit, my husband and I, with our 6 month old twins, headed back towards Cairo. When we got as far as Gaza, I realized I’d forgotten our passports in back in Ramallah. We spent the night in Gaza while my father went back to get the passports. Meanwhile, there was an incident somewhere and the Israelis imposed a curfew. The next morning, when we got our passports and headed off toward the border, the streets were eerie and empty. Our taxi crawled along, careful to keep its distance from the military jeep moving deliberately slowly ahead of us. I could see the soldiers hanging out the back, their guns prominent, their arrogance palpable. At a checkpoint the guards barked out orders. I had never experienced anything like this tension, fear, and militarism, mild as it was compared to now.

It was much worse when I went back in 2001. My father was very ill, which of course colors my memories. But let me just talk about the practical impossibilities of everyday life then, before the real reoccupation that now has the civilian population in collective imprisonment, living under continuous curfews with no freedom of movement, no economic livelihood, and no political future. Even then the roads in and out of West Bank towns were blocked with huge concrete slabs and manned by Israeli soldiers. There was only one way in and out. They could say no. When they said yes, people and cars had to wait for hours. To get to the hospital for tests we had to take my father in an ambulance for fear that if the checkpoint was blocked, the portable

oxygen tanks he needed to survive could run out. He was jostled and uncomfortable, clinging to the side of the cot, sweating and pale, but it was too risky any other way. During the reoccupation later, even ambulances were shot at.

My father was privileged compared to most Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. He had a comfortable place to live, he had a good retirement income. He had his books and his classical music. He had well-connected, highly educated, competent, and devoted friends who helped him, and us, through his illness. When we went to every pharmacy in Ramallah to get the drug prescribed for him by the physician at Hadassah, we discovered that no pharmacy in the West Bank was authorized by the Israeli state to dispense it. Luckily his friends who were Israeli citizens managed to get him the drug in Haifa and Tel Aviv. But we counted the pills carefully, fearful about where we would get another batch. In his last days, a doctor prescribed morphine patches for the pain. These too could not be had in the West Bank. With faxes and medical connections, we finally found someone who could get them in Jerusalem for us, but she didn't manage it in time. Nowadays, there are many days when no one from Jerusalem can enter Ramallah.

When I was there, we heard helicopters overhead, we heard explosions in the distance. One day Israeli planes bombed a building in my father's quiet residential neighborhood—destroying a hotel. Before the explosions could be heard, my father knew something was up because his oxygen machine alarm went off. The electricity had been cut and my sisters ran to get him onto the portable oxygen tanks.

The control of everyday life by the Israeli military is thorough. The Israeli army has dug trenches to block roads, like the one to Birzeit University; now there are soldiers at the gates. Students and faculty can only sometimes get to class; those who live on campus are trapped. Even the college president, a cultured and lovely man, was sometimes unable to visit us, just a few miles away. The night before my father's funeral, we had a call from Israeli intelligence asking about our plans. The officer insisted that we were not authorized to hold the funeral as planned and that they would block it. It was only the intervention of the American Ambassador that allowed my father to be peacefully carried to the cemetery in Jaffa, to be buried next to his father. I remember thinking at the time that at least we were protected in our grief—they could only telephone us; nowadays they would be at the door.

What I couldn't have imagined was that less than a year later tanks would be rolling through the street in front of my father's house, continuous curfews would be imposed on the residents—those who had been so kind bringing us food, flowers, and doing favors for us, like getting us medicines—and that apartments of professors would be ransacked by soldiers, food and water made unavailable, and parts of downtown reduced to rubble.

It is this terrible world that I saw over there, and I include in this terrible world ALL those I saw living in fear and horror in Palestine AND Israel, that makes me want to find ways-- like the divestment campaign-- to raise the issues of Palestinian rights that are so quickly dismissed in this country, and to join with all those who are seeking change. I include here the moral and clear-sighted Israelis who refuse to serve in the army while it occupies the West Bank and Gaza. As a now imprisoned colleague in Asian Studies at Tel Aviv University, Yigal Bronner, says in

his letter to the Brigadier General who called him for service: “I can see where you are leading me. I understand that we will kill, destroy, get hurt and die, and that there is no end in sight. I know that the ‘ongoing war’ of which you speak, will go on and on. I can see that if the ‘military needs’ lead us to lay siege to, hunt down, and starve a whole people, then something about these ‘needs’ is terribly wrong.” I am also haunted by the pained words of philosopher and literary critic George Steiner who wrote, in a beautiful essay called “My Homeland the Text”: “The notion that the appalling road of Jewish life and the ever-renewed miracle of survival should have as their end, as their justification, the setting up of a small nation-state in the Middle East, crushed by military burdens, petty and even corrupt in its politics, shrill in its parochialism, is implausible.” Surely we can ask for something better for all of us.