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This review exists through the voices it gives expression to, in their variety. All contributions are welcome. Please write to **Here - notes from the present, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy, phone-fax 0039-02-57406574, email: massimoparizzi@alice.it**

Diary: September to December 2005

Here

notes from the present

Waco, Texas, September 3

As the tragedy in New Orleans continues to unfold, I think back to the time I spent working there in the 1970s. I worked at Hope House in New Orleans with a group of Catholic nuns who lived in the St. Thomas Projects near the famous and wealthy Garden District. My job - barely paid! - was to teach Black history to the women of the project, all of whom were African-American. These women were mostly illiterate and ignorant of the history of their own people. I spoke to them about their history and often read to them the works of famous African-American writers. For many of the women, history was limited to their own experience of share-cropping, discrimination, welfare, police and physical and psychological abuse. To see a broader arc to their own experience was liberating. It spoke to them of a future different than the present.

New Orleans was beautiful and I used to walk for miles enjoying the housing and landscapes that changed street by street. The variety of neighborhoods seemed endless. But working with the poor, I realized that the tourist veneer was just that - a veneer. New Orleans was poor, very poor and it

Marc Ellis

August 29. Hurricane Katrina strikes the South of the United States, destroying New Orleans. As of August 30, hundreds of deaths and over a million refugees are reported: because the levees protecting the city have given way, 80% of it is under six meters of water.

August 31, Baghdad. Unfounded rumours about the presence of suicide attackers spread panic among Shi'ite pilgrims crowding a bridge. The bearing walls give way and hundreds of people fall into the Tigris, while others are trodden on: over eight hundred die.

September 2, from "La Repubblica": "The federal agency involved in rescuing the victims has suspended operations for

veneer. New Orleans was poor, very poor and it was difficult for me to see the possibility of change in the near future.

I was right and the scenes from New Orleans this week simply reinforce the impression that three decades later the situation has changed little. As New Orleans disappeared under water, the world saw what I had witnessed years earlier.

Is it only New Orleans? When I worked in Atlanta at Emmaus House, I witnessed more or less the same poverty, again primarily among African-Americans. When I was asked to organize people from the newly-built projects on the outskirts of Atlanta to protest injustice, I felt like I was in a series of concentration camps, where the poor were housed, schooled and left to fend for themselves. They were to disappear from society. The affluent did not have to see or interact with them in any way.

The world changes. The world doesn't change.

New Orleans is a challenge to the conscience of contemporary America but also to our history. Can we deal with the now if we don't also deal with the past?

When I came to New Orleans I was young and shared the energy of my youth with the women of St. Thomas Projects. Were they betrayed by America? Did I betray them?

the moment since the situation in New Orleans has been judged 'too dangerous'. Over 5,000 agents have been diverted from rescue operations and are being used against looters. Since yesterday they have been shooting on sight."

Paris, September 3

Maddalena Chatagnier

It must have been last June: one fine day, on the covered porch at the entrance to the local library, first an old mattress appeared, then a quilt with

During the night between September 3 and 4,

first an old mattress appeared, then a quilt with slightly faded colours, and stretched out between the two a man who, probably feeling inspired by the place he had chosen as his residence, attracted the attention of passers-by reading poetry aloud. A paper cup, placed discreetly in a corner next to the door, was a reminder that a donation would be welcome - an invitation to the local reading population to leave a coin as they came to exchange their books or read the newspaper. Little by little the installation proceeded to take shape: an old office armchair, then another, quite useful for converting the first to a chaise longue; a small table, a second small table. Placed on the tables were various bottles, necessary basic items such as cutlery, plates, a cup and even a vase filled with fresh flowers. And the height of luxury: a large soft toy dog slipped under the quilt: ornament and caretaker of the site during the day, replacing the owner of the jumble of objects, who would disappear after enjoying the first rays of the sun and exchanging morning greetings with passers-by.

A few weeks ago an “open letter to residents and users” appeared on the counter of the library where readers return their books. It was the Mayor himself, alarmed by the complaints, observing that “the presence of a growing number of SDFs [*sans domicile fixe*’, people of no fixed address] in the streets of Paris and our *banlieues* is worrying...”. He emphasised the “careful monitoring in the community, which however in the current economic circumstances cannot perform miracles”. He added that “the street cleaners find themselves having to take away from people the little they possess”, “disputes often arise” and “cleaning operations are difficult from a human point of view”. And he

*another building
inhabited by poor people
and immigrants burns
down in the banlieues
south of Paris - the third
in a few days. Seventeen
people die.*

concluded by saying that “arrangements are in place to escort the man in question” and “to prevent any occupation of this kind in future, we are working on a plan to fix the entrance to the library”.

The furniture disappeared and the man has gone to take the sun somewhere else. Another bank branch has just opened for business on the corner of my street.

Camisano Vicentino, Italy, September 4

Mariela De Marchi

It's been a month since we moved from the industrial area to the residential neighbourhood of Camisano. It wasn't all that far: just over a kilometre. The first night in our new home was almost magical: we woke up to the sound of singing birds, with the sunlight filtering through the window. It didn't seem real, after all that time we spent with the noise of the ventilators of the ice-cream factory and sun only in the afternoon.

Two days later we left for a holiday. We returned a couple of weeks ago, and the magic had already disappeared. Of course, it's also because of the return to routine; but what about the gloomy atmosphere of the new neighbourhood? Instead of industrial sheds, parallelepipeds of houses with windows closed and shutters down, so that neither light nor warmth can enter. No matter what time you go out, you rarely meet a soul on the streets. By 10pm - our neighbours are mostly retired people - it is deadly silent. You can sense a calmness that borders on apathy in this premature cemetery, with hardly anyone around. Where we were before, at least we saw the truckers, the sales reps, and the workers. And since there were only three families living among the sheds, we would get together

outside whenever we could. Weather permitting, out we went; our neighbour with his son, then us with ours, followed by the girl opposite with her dog; not always in that order, of course.

But let's not be doomsters: time will tell if we are making a mistake. Maybe when it won't be as hot, when the mosquitoes aren't raging, when the spring...

Waco, Texas, September 5

Marc Ellis

Back to New Orleans or rather within New Orleans we see a generally agreed-upon collapse. But what kind of collapse is this? The physical infra-structure to be sure, the immediate aid effort that was needed also. Still something else is collapsing. Is it the perceived difference between America and the rest of the world? The gap between First World and Third World?

Each year when I teach my Holocaust class the most contentious issue is one of reparations for past crimes against a people. Though the question of reparations in the Holocaust relates to Jews, when we begin this discussion it always moves - and immediately - to the question closer to home: whether African-Americans deserve reparations for slavery. Though the class is split on many issues that we raise in the class related to contemporary life in America, on this one the overwhelming majority of the class is clearly against the possibility of reparations for slavery. People can differ on these issues but I have noticed that the discussion is impassioned with quite a bit of anger expressed. Why this anger?

When the tsunami hit last year the internet and newspapers were filled with discussions about God.

September 8. Presidential elections in Egypt. Mubarak, who has been in power for 24 years already and will stay there for six more years, takes 88.5% of the votes. Twenty-three percent of Egyptians took part in the elections, fewer than one out of four.

Where was God in the tsunami? Our Center sponsored an event on this subject and we had an overflowing crowd. Again in the Holocaust, the question of God's presence is asked over and over again. Yet in the New Orleans tragedy, I have seen little reflection on this subject. Is this because it is closer to home? It could be that we are looking more at the failures of the infrastructure? [...] Though it is true that the tsunami was impossible to stop, investment in early warning devices could have saved many lives. Still the question of God dominated. Here there is only silence.

Are the refugees from New Orleans, at least the last to get out, any different than the refugees around the world? Does American citizenship elevate their experience so that is fundamentally different than the experience of refugees in Asia, the Middle East and elsewhere?

We are approaching the fourth anniversary of September 11, a day where many commentators thought everything changed. I don't think this is the case, then or now. For those commentators who think that everything will change after New Orleans, proceed with caution.

The Crack-Up

by Bruno De Maria

Here

notes from the present

I couldn't forgive him or like him but I saw that what he had done was, to him, entirely justified. It was all very careless and confused. They were careless people, Tom and Daisy - they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated

back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made. I shook hands with him; it seemed silly not to, for I felt suddenly as though I were talking to a child.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

The more we are surrounded by adversity, the more foolish we become. It invites ostentation, stifling the true self and awakening the *character* within us. Cioran said it was doing man great injustice to think he needs any help from fate in order to destroy himself. Hasn't he already done his best to liquidate his own legend? In this refusal to endure, this self-aversion, lies his excuse, or, as they used to say, his grandeur.

Scott Fitzgerald went to pieces many years before recognizing, in *The Crack-Up* (which dates from 1936), that never again would he be the capable, energetic man he once was. The capable, energetic man he once was, at least in Scott's idealized vision of himself, got his start in the 1920s with the end of World War One and the huge success of his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, which marked the beginning of the 'Jazz Age'. Scott became rich and famous overnight, and this allowed him to marry Zelda Sayre, who had rejected him up to then because he wasn't wealthy enough.

America was heading into the greatest, wildest saturnalia of all time. The golden boom was in the air: the prodigality, the sordid corruption, and the clandestine struggle for survival of the old America under Prohibition. Scott and Zelda were almost millionaires, and the attractive, charming couple threw themselves headfirst into an endless drunken

spree with hundreds of guests who would linger until dawn in the gardens of their luxurious villas. But to keep up such a flashily extravagant lifestyle, Scott had to resign himself to writing overpaid stories for magazines, feeling at times that he was compromising his talent, which was above all as a novelist. Scott and Zelda were the idols of a world where it was always “either tea-time or late at night”.

Edmund Wilson, a friend who went to all the big soirées but looked at things with greater detachment, remarked that Fitzgerald’s guests were like fireworks, out of control and at risk of flying to pieces. And Fitzgerald himself, though he considered himself the troubadour of carefree frivolity, later wrote (in 1936): “All the stories that came into my head had a touch of disaster in them - the lovely young creatures in my novels went to ruin, the diamond mountains of my short stories blew up, my millionaires were as doomed as Thomas Hardy’s peasants”. He was so obsessed with youth that in one of his novels, *The Beautiful and the Damned*, he described a heroine as “a faded but still lovely woman of twenty-seven”. These lines may contain a note of slightly snobbish cruelty, but also a dim awareness that the Jazz Age was about to come to an end with the economic and moral crisis of ‘29, and that it was no longer possible to keep acting like children in a dazzlingly huge, unexplored larder.

What is troubling in Fitzgerald’s early career is that he aspires to success and achieves it. His ‘soul-making’ is compromised by his fear of the ‘sacrifice’ that allows one to move from one order of things to the next. I am referring to entry into the symbolic order as an act of destruction, sacrificing

From *The Crack-Up*, edited by Edmund Wilson, New Directions, New York 1993. All further citations of Fitzgerald, if not otherwise indicated, are from this collection.

the order that ego and its logic have historically imposed on the world. The order chosen by Fitzgerald's ego and its logic, before his bitter disillusionment, is that of happiness and success. The happiness that Scott speaks of almost feverishly: "My own happiness in the past often approached such an ecstasy that I could not share it with the person dearest to me but had to walk it away in quiet streets and lanes with only fragments of it to distill into little lines in books - and I think that my happiness, or talent for self-delusion or what you will, was an exception. It was not the natural thing but the unnatural - unnatural as the Boom; and my recent experience parallels the wave of despair that swept the nation when the Boom was over".

So, what was Fitzgerald's experience after the arrival of his inebriating success, and with it, his aspiration to become a first-class writer? It was what he analyzes with heroic lucidity in *The Crack-Up*: the realization that he had been living asleep. But then sleep fled. He began to lie awake, and what he discovered in his sleepless nights filled him with horror. We know it from our work with patients: insomnia sheds a light on us which we do not desire, but to which, unconsciously, we tend. We demand it in spite of ourselves, against ourselves. It is the voice of the soul that allows no deceptions or distractions. Through it - to the detriment of our health - we seek other perilous, pernicious truths, all that sleep has kept us from glimpsing. You could call it the experience of the night, or of death, which Fitzgerald tries in vain to flee.

It would appear that Fitzgerald made two suicide attempts during his life, concrete suicide attempts, to escape the suffering of a symbolic death. Up to

this point, sealed off in a pleasant opacity, he had subscribed to the evidence indicating that his life was happy, without weighing it or suspecting it to be hollow. But then at all once, undesired, came the moment of awakening, and Fitzgerald had to observe that “in a real dark night of the soul it is always three o’clock in the morning, day after day. At that hour the tendency is to refuse to face things as long as possible by retiring into an infantile dream - but one is continually startled out of this by various contacts with the world”.

“One meets these occasions,” Fitzgerald continues, “as quickly and carelessly as possible and retires once more back into the dream, hoping that things will adjust themselves by some great material or spiritual bonanza [...]. Unless madness or drugs or drink come into it, this phase comes to a dead-end, eventually, and is succeeded by a vacuous quiet.” But it is the quiet of disillusionment that makes Fitzgerald unwillingly undertake the path of knowledge. And there he stumbles, writes Emil Cioran, “among irrespirable truths, for which nothing had prepared him”.

That is why Fitzgerald perceives his new condition as a crack-up: a crack-up from within, for which nothing can be done. “You realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man again.” Falling into depression means waking out of a preceding dream: in Scott Fitzgerald’s case, a mother who wanted her son to be rich and famous. The idea that never again will you be as you were elicits dismay and a feeling of death, since the ego is pulled away from its familiar world and thrown into the unknown, into the nothingness of a non-ego-logical space where you no longer know who

In *Anathemas and Admirations*, Arcade Publishing, New York 1991, trans. Richard Howard.

you are, and the only overriding feeling is that of failure.

What Scott experiences is horror and waste. "The horror has come now like a storm - what if this night prefigured the night after death - what if all the thereafter was an eternal quivering on the edge of an abyss, with everything base and vicious in oneself urging one forward and the baseness and viciousness of the world just ahead. No choice, no road, no hope - only the endless repetition of the sordid and the semi-tragic. Or to stand forever, perhaps, on the threshold of life unable to pass it and return to it."

Daytime truths no longer apply in the "real dark night of the soul". And rather than blessing this night as a wellspring of revelations, Fitzgerald curses it, identifying it with his own decline, and denying the value of the knowledge it brings. Like all frivolous people, he is afraid to explore his own depths. Yet fate seems to push him to it. Stretching his being to its utmost limits is a thing that repulses him, but he reaches them in spite of himself.

Perhaps this is what constitutes his heroism; the fact that he managed, in "Esquire", to publicly express his own view of the fate that had befallen him adds to his dignity rather than diminishing it - in part because he blames no one but himself. These texts are from 1936. Starting in '29, his wife Zelda, the muse who inspired his writing and the quintessential model for all the gay flappers in his stories, moves from one mental institution to another in Switzerland and America, until she finds herself pinned down by the diagnosis of none other than Bleuler; he identifies her as "schizophrenic", while she considers him "a great imbecile".

After *The Great Gatsby*, published in '25, Fitzgerald writes no more novels for some ten years, then in '34, he manages to complete what is, to my mind, his greatest book, *Tender is the Night*, the product of genius but also of endless benders. In the meantime, to get by and to pay for his wife's clinics and their daughter Scottie's studies, he writes short stories and prostitutes himself as a Hollywood screenwriter, well aware that he has made poor use of his gift. "I had been only a mediocre caretaker [...] of my talent" he writes. Fitzgerald dies young, aged 44, in 1940. His wife Zelda dies in a mental hospital eight years later, burned alive in a fire. It is the end of a legend: *Tender is the Night* gets a lukewarm reception. Fitzgerald, the hero of the Jazz Age, is forgotten, just as America would like to forget its ten years of reckless extravagance. "The most expensive orgy in history was over" he wrote. It ended in '29, "because the utter confidence which was its essential prop received an enormous jolt, and it didn't take long for the flimsy structure to settle earthward". There was a string of suicides among the abruptly impoverished rich, and the elite sphere of a nation that lived "with the insouciance of grand ducs and the casualness of chorus girls" came to an end with the Jazz Age. But, writes Fitzgerald, it was pleasant to be twenty-five in such a "certain and unworried" time. "Charm, notoriety, mere good manners, weighed more than money as a social asset." Yet even as Fitzgerald longs for the days when he was twenty-five and crowned with early success, he broods over them as a wasted youth, though he does this many years later, at the time of his 'crack-up'. "Now once more the belt is tight and we sum-

mon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth” he writes. “Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better and better, and there was a first abortive shortening of the skirts, and girls all looked alike in sweater dresses [...] and it seemed only a question of a few years before the older people would step aside and let the world be run by those who saw things as they were - and it all seems rosy and romantic to us who were young then, because we will never feel quite so intensely about our surroundings any more.”

This Fitzgerald who sees some sort of aristocratic revolution in the consumption of wood alcohol and the shortening of flappers’ skirts is very same Fitzgerald who sleeps in a dream from which he cannot wake. There was something splendid in him that we find in one of his characters, the Great Gatsby: “Some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, [...] an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again”.

But the very nobility of Gatsby’s sentiments, as Fitzgerald’s alter-ego, only serves to heighten our feeling that his struggle is disproportionate to the value of the prize at stake. And this is the true tragedy: that the person to whom he so utterly devotes himself, his illusion, and his affection, is unworthy of such devotion and is only a gaudy, vulgar, whorish beauty. The woman he wants to win back, Daisy, who lives near the green light he contemplates,

The Great Gatsby, Scribner, New York 1995, p. 6.

trembling, every evening from across the bay, cannot live up to his dream. Not through any fault of her own, but due to the tremendous vitality of his illusion. And it is this dream, focused on a past which cannot be repeated, that Fitzgerald is unable to shake off.

Elemire Zolla, in his preface to the Italian edition of *The Jazz Age*, compares Fitzgerald's story to that of the handsome Ruggiero in *Orlando Furioso*, bewitched by the sorceress Alcina until Bradamante sends him a ring that breaks the spell. It makes him despise her, much as he loved her before, and he sees how ugly and old she truly was. The story of the young Fitzgerald is one of gradual disenchantment; despite the lucidity of his more mature years, he continues to see his youth as something "rosy and romantic", reluctant to acknowledge that those years were spent under the charm of an enchantress, the culture industry.

"He reveals nothing but the conventional sentiments drilled in by society. He offers no asylum. What seduces him are the sleazy dances, the rustle of women's dresses, the endless boozing; to him the city lights outshine the stars, and to him the grinning cookie-cutter faces are lit with joy, the commercial ditties he lists in his notebooks are the songs of poets. What Bradamante's ring woke Fitzgerald from a dream so costly it had robbed him of his soul? In part, it was the collapse of Zelda, who to him seemed cloaked in that lustre, that glimmering effervescence that is actually the phantasmagoric nature of the Supreme Commodity." Zelda will prove to be ill, disoriented, schizophrenic. And everything that is associated with her, everything that is part of her being, crumbles along with her.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald,
L'età del jazz e altri scritti,
trans. Domenico Tarizzo,
Il Saggiatore, Milan 1960.

Fitzgerald, though heroic in his desperate lucidity, is not a hero, because he does not know how to live in the place where his soul has dragged him: the edge of a desert, where he will be alone and where there is no point in repeating to himself, in the grip of nostalgia, “never again will I be as I was”. The *soul* is the very thing that kills what we were before, since it yearns for metamorphosis and truth. “Soul-making”, Keats’s expression from 1819, is a necessary part of the experience of life, the ability to bear the feeling that the world is full of destitution and heartbreak, pain, illness, and anguish. Soul-making necessarily draws a distinction between those who are truly capable of exploring the inner recesses and murky corridors of human life, and those who have ceased to think, or at any rate, do not think about the human heart. New symbols must be created; otherwise, one will be working with the handed-down symbols that are used as a mark of adaptation.

In John Keats, *Selected Letters*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002, p. 232.

This would risk imposing preconceived notions that would steer the world - the world of the mind - towards conformity, rather than allowing ideas to change the mind itself. A balanced being is always able to slip through its own depths. Health, in some sense, entails a desertion of ourselves. Fitzgerald, as he admits, experiences his various states in and of themselves, taking a sad attitude towards sadness, a melancholy one towards melancholy, and living out every tragedy tragically. To be sick is “to coincide totally with oneself” (Cioran).

Fitzgerald survives his crisis without ever completely overcoming it. Nevertheless, there is a certain heroism in his effort. Excessive self-pity essentially derives from an energetic reaction of alarm

sounded by our own life force, and at the same time, it is an elegiac disguise for our own instinct of self-preservation. Fitzgerald is unquestionably the poet of his own defeat.

The young Fitzgerald inhabits the Imaginary, but this detracts nothing from his poetry. Actually, I would venture to say that there can be no poetry without the Imaginary. The *autos* which creates the self, as opposed to the findings of imagination and of alienation, does not 'cure us' of the imaginary; if anything, it may point to it, but listening and deciphering are the task of the soul, which may go ignored.

Scott, having left his enchanted castle, finds himself in the desert. Perhaps he could become 'a writer only', but on one tragic condition: an agonizing loneliness, with no restorative breath of hope. Illness and alcohol are really his weapons for suicide. For by now he has realized that society as a whole is the witch's castle; that the diamond as big as the Ritz is only a heap of rhinestones amassed by the rich, and that the beautiful flappers and tomboys were only the thin gilt ornamenting a monstrous economic system.

Baghdad, September 11

R.

"R., come in here! *You have to see this!*" It was September 11, 2001 and I was in the kitchen rinsing some dishes from lunch. I paused at the urgency in my brother's voice but continued rinsing, thinking there was some vaguely important news item on Iraq's state controlled channel. "I'm coming, a moment." I called back. The phone began to ring

September 10. A US military operation is underway against Tel Afar, north of Baghdad. Water and electricity to the city, under siege for weeks and targeted from the air, has been cut. Its

moment.” I called back. The phone began to ring and I stopped to answer it on my way out of the kitchen. “Alloo?” I answered. “Are you watching tv???” L., my best friend, cried out with no preliminaries. “Uh... no, but...”. “GO WATCH TV!” The line went dead and I put down the phone, my heart beating wildly. I made my way to the living room, curious and nervous, wondering what it could be. Had someone died? Were they going to bomb us again? That was always a possibility. It never surprised anyone when the US decided on an air strike. I wondered if, this time around, Bush had been caught with a presidential aide in the Oval Office. I walked into the living room and E. was standing in the middle of it, eyes glued to the television, mouth slightly open, remote control clutched in his hand, and directed towards the television set. “What is it?” I asked, looking at the screen. The images were chaotic. It was a big city, there was smoke or dust and people running across the screen, some screaming, others crying and the rest with astounded looks on their faces. They looked slightly like E., my brother, as he stood staring at the television, gaping. There was someone speaking in the background - in English - and there was a voiceover in Arabic. I can’t remember what was being said; the images on the tv screen are all I remember. Confusion. Havoc. And then they showed it again. The Twin Towers, New York... a small something came flying out of the side of the screen and it crashed into one of them. I gasped audibly and E. just shook his head, “That’s nothing... wait...”. I made my way towards the couch while keeping my eyes locked on the television. There was some more chaos, shocked ex-

200,000 inhabitants are heading towards the desert, where a tent camp is being set up. Leaflets with the order to leave are being dropped by air.

pressions, another plane and the towers... they began to crumble. They began to fall. They disappeared into an enormous fog of smoke and dust. I sucked in my breath and I couldn't exhale that moment. I just sat there - paralyzed - watching the screen. A part of me was saying, "It's a joke. It's Hollywood." But it was just too real. The fear was too genuine. The incoherent voices in the background were too tinged with confusion and terror. The silence in the living room was broken with the clatter of the remote control on the floor. It had slipped out of E.'s fingers and I jumped nervously, watching the batteries from the remote roll away on the ground. "But... who? How? What was it? A plane? How???" E. shook his head and looked at me in awe. We continued watching the television, looking for answers to dozens of questions. Within the hour we had learned that it wasn't some horrid mistake or miscalculation. It was intentional. It was a major act of terror. Al-Qaeda was just a vague name back then. Iraqis were concerned with their own problems and fears. We were coping with the sanctions and the fact that life seemed to stand still every few years for an American air raid. We didn't have the problem of Muslim fundamentalists; that was a concern for neighbors like Saudi Arabia and Iran. I remember almost immediately, Western media began conjecturing on which Islamic group it could have been. I remember hoping it wasn't Muslims or Arabs. I remember feeling that way not just because of the thousands of victims, but because I sensed that we'd suffer in Iraq. We'd be made to suffer for something we weren't responsible for. E. looked at me wide-eyed that day and asked the inevitable question, "How long do you

think before they bomb us?”. “But it wasn’t us. It can’t be us...” I rationalized. “It doesn’t matter. It’s all they need.” And it was true. It began with Afghanistan and then it was Iraq. We began preparing for it almost immediately. The price of the dollar rose as people began stocking up on flour, rice, sugar and other commodities. For several weeks it was all anyone could talk about. We discussed it in schools and universities. We talked about it in work places and restaurants. The attitudes differed. There was never joy or happiness, but in several cases there was a sort of grim satisfaction. Some Iraqis believed that America had brought this upon itself. This is what you get when you meddle in world affairs. This is what you get when starve populations. This is what you get when you give unabashed support to occupying countries like Israel, and corrupt tyrants like the Saudi royals. Most Iraqis, though, felt pity. The images for the next weeks of Americans running in terror, of the frantic searches under the rubble for relatives and friends left us shaking our heads in empathy. The destruction was all too familiar. The reports of Americans fearing the sound of airplanes had us nodding our heads with understanding and a sort of familiarity - you’d want to reach out to one of them and say: “It’s ok; the fear eventually subsides. We know how it is: your government does this every few years”. It has been four years today. How does it feel four years later? For the 3,000 victims in America, more than 100,000 have died in Iraq. Tens of thousands of others are being detained for interrogation and torture. Our homes have been raided, our cities are constantly being bombed and Iraq has fallen back decades, and for

several years to come we will suffer under the influence of the extremism we didn't know prior to the war. As I write this, Tel Afar, a small place north of Mosul, is being bombed. Dozens of people are going to be buried under their homes in the dead of the night. Their water and electricity have been cut off for days. It doesn't seem to matter much though because they don't live in a wonderful skyscraper in a glamorous city. They are, quite simply, farmers and herders not worth a second thought. Four years later and the War on Terror (or is it the War of Terror?) has been won. Score: Al-Qaeda 3,000 - America 100,000+. Congratulations.

Waco, Texas, September 11

Marc Ellis

This fateful day. Just the mention of the date is a reminder, a touch stone. Yet the meaning of this day, especially as it continues to live four years later, is highly contested.

The debate surrounding September 11 is growing more rigorous and ominous even as the victims of that day begin to recede in memory. The heroes of that day continue to get their day in the media but the evidence of heroism is more and more contested as well. And now Hurricane Katrina fills the news and Americans see September 11 through the eyes of natural disaster and the human response, or lack thereof. Is it our fate as Americans, as human beings, to always be within or on the brink of disaster? And does one disaster always breed another, natural - the depleting ozone layer - and human-made - the war in Afghanistan and Iraq following September 11?

September 11. Today in Japan early elections are taking place. Among other new candidates, the party of the Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi, has put forward Yuriko Koike, a well-known television anchorwoman, Satsuki Katayama, former Miss Tokyo and a top model, and Makiko Fujino, a famous chef who, as reported by "La Repubblica", "has admitted she understands very little about politics and feels at ease only during cookery discussions". Koizumi's party will eventually obtain an absolute majority.

The disaster is variously defined. For the survivors of the victims of September 11 there is compensation, as if compensation can heal the wounds of sudden and violent loss of loved ones. The survivors of Hurricane Katrina will get little compensation, if any, and already we hear the call to regulate the sums given to simply buy necessary items for existence. The calls for solidarity are already accompanied by the assurance that the states that provide haven for the evacuees will be reimbursed by the federal government. And so it should be. But do we need to be bombarded by the call to selfless sacrifice when in fact few sacrifice anything but excesses from an affluence that most of those who remained in New Orleans could only dream about?

Our soldiers in Iraq, who are disproportionately poor and working class, remain on the frontlines. They arrive home in various conditions, some in caskets, others with injuries that cannot be healed, and most to loved ones who have spent months or years wondering if lives will be taken or gravely altered. A volunteer armed forces, or an armed forces filled with those in need of jobs and possibilities for the future - is it easier to go to war and sustain it if the middle class and wealthy do not have to place their sons and daughters in harm's way?

Again the question of God - asked and not asked in public. In private - for the soldiers and their families - the question must be there, shadowing the restless days and nights. We are assured by our leaders that, more or less, God is with us, and that we are fighting for the freedom that the Creator has bestowed on us. So it may be. Yet even our leaders are divided on the war. The casualties mount, American and Iraqi; there seems no end in sight.

In the end, the war will fail. Isn't that true with all wars - the broader objectives, including the hope that this or that war will be the end of strife and war, fail in the end? This doesn't mean that no war is justified, even the war in Iraq. It simply reminds us that the rhetoric that leads to and sustains war usually rings hollow in the long sweep of history.

September 11 has also been a touch stone for a broader religious conversation in America and in different parts of the world. Islam has been front and center, at least in the West. Is Islam a violent religion that embraces a violent God? Or is Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, a religion of peace now being 'hijacked' by zealots with political objectives in the guise of religion. The assertion that Judaism and Christianity are religions of peace is, for the most part, assumed, uncontested. Parts of the Islamic world do contest this and sometimes assume the opposite - that Islam alone among the world religions is for peace whereas the others are not. Wouldn't it be more accurate to say that Judaism, Islam and Christianity in their Constantinian phases are all violent and there are always forces within these religions that resist violence in the name of their religions? That there is no purely peaceful religion and no purely violent religion?

On September 11 I think of the fallen, including our religions and our holding fast to a God of violence. But I also ask for a sense of the way forward. Is history a cycle of violence and atrocity from which there is no respite? Or is there a way forward beyond that cycle? Can the cycle be broken in society, politics and economics - that is, within a broadly conceived history? Or can it only begin and end with the person, the individual choosing another way?

"Historians call the linking of the Christian Church to the state Constantinian Christianity. We must begin to consider that, in the State of Israel, we now have a Constantinian Judaism." Marc Ellis, *On the Jewish Civil War and the New Prophetic*, in "Here - notes from the present, 12, October 2005, pp. 40 ff.

There's a song by Silvio Rodríguez, the Cuban singer-songwriter, that I've liked a lot ever since I was a child. It's *Fábula de los tres hermanos* ("The story of the three brothers"). When I was little, I thought it was about me because we were three sisters at the time - my two brothers weren't born yet. The words of the song continued to puzzle me.

It's the story of three brothers who set off "to search and discover". The oldest is the first to leave, and, in order to avoid making a mistake, he decides to be very careful where he puts his feet. But, by maintaining that walking position, he can't straighten his neck any more and becomes a slave of precaution without going very far. As the refrain says, "If you don't look ahead, you won't get far". Then the second brother leaves and he decides to look towards the horizon to avoid making a mistake. But by doing so, he can't see the stones and holes. And he keeps rolling on the ground without going very far either. As the refrain warns, "If you don't look down, you won't get far either". Finally, the youngest brother leaves, and he decides to walk with one eye looking towards the horizon and the other to the ground. He does manage to go a short distance, but when it's time to tell the story he has a blank look between staying and walking. "If you look everywhere you no longer know what you are seeing, listen to this and let me know what you think", concludes the song.

Does this mean there's no way out? When I was a little girl, I took heart thinking that, in any case, all three failed. It was better to accept things the way they are. But now I don't think so.

You are seated on a wooden bench, in front of the big table. Sometimes there's wine on the table, sometimes not. You sit with your trunk leaning forward, one elbow propped on the tabletop, a hand supporting your chin. Your gaze is slightly distant, eyes resting on the green hollows of the hills. A general feeling of absence of tension rather than real relaxation: the calm required for listening means being attentive, alert, but not stiff or tense. The mind untangles itself, the thoughts stray, as if the brow were being massaged by a pair of soft hands smoothing it in a symmetrical movement from the centre outwards, distending and expanding the skin. You listen to the birdsong: choruses of sophisticated artistry, trills repeated in sequence, warbling solos with pauses, then a long choral melody, undulating, and finally an impromptu ensemble movement consisting of different tonalities and timbres. The orchestra attacking. It seems like a grand finale, but after an interval of silence it resumes; we begin again. The lyrics have changed; the ear is caught unawares by the new. New warbling modalities, more accelerated runs, rhythms beating out in rapid succession like waves chasing one another along the shoreline. Faster and faster. Sudden silence. Waiting. The performers don't show themselves - they're not on display for the audience. Just occasionally you can make out a songster among the leaves; for a while you try to follow its movements, but then you stop making the effort to connect vision with hearing. In short, you acknowledge that the ensemble must stay hidden, with no engagement of the vision, so that thoughts can continue to wander. And it is then that the mind

September 15. From the Sixties to the beginning of the Eighties - today's "La Repubblica" reports - almost 1,600 children from the French colony of Réunion Island were torn away from their often poor families and taken to France to work as labourers in the fields.

expands; it seems to be idling - but only seems so. Emotions settle, images flow. You slide from real, experienced images into the more blurred ones of the imagination, the warm ones of longing and the azure ones of becoming. You are astonished at the lightness of thoughts and how easy it is to think an infinite number of them in such a vague, unstructured period of time; the earthly occurrence of an ultramundane interval. Now the thoughts are linked in unusual syntheses, in bold symbolic connections and flights outside accepted meaning; the dawning of a plan, taking on shape and body. The listening body is the body that creates, capable of opening up to new life as to a new thought. Slowly you get to your feet, your eyes move beyond the hills, and you walk away.

Baghdad, September 17

R.

I've been reading and re-reading the Iraqi draft constitution since the beginning of September. I decided to ignore the nagging voice in my head that kept repeating, "a new constitution cannot be legitimate under an occupation!", and also the one that was saying, "it isn't legitimate because the government writing it up isn't legitimate." I put those thoughts away and decided to try to view the whole situation as dispassionately as possible. [...]

September 14. A series of car bombs in and around Baghdad: 170 dead.

September 17. Another car bomb in Baghdad: 30 die.

Beginning with the first chapter, *Basic Principles*, there are several interesting articles. Article 2 seems to be the biggest concern for journalists and analysts abroad. It states: 1. "Islam is the official religion of the state and is a basic source of legislation, and no law that contradicts its fixed principles and rules may be passed. 2. No law can be passed

that contradicts the principles of democracy, or the rights and basic freedoms outlined in this constitution. 3. The constitution respects the Islamic identity of the majority of the Iraqi people, and guarantees the full religious rights for all individuals and the freedom of creed and religious practices”.

Now, I'm a practicing Muslim female. I believe in the principles and rules of Islam that I practice - otherwise I wouldn't be practicing them. The problem is not with Islam, the problem is with the dozens of interpretations of Islamic rules and principles. Islam is like any other religion in that its holy book and various teachings may be interpreted in different ways. In Iraq we see this firsthand because we have ample example of varying Islamic interpretations from two neighbors, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Who will decide which religious rules and principles are the ones that shouldn't be contradicted by the constitution?

In the old constitution that was being used up until the war, the 'Temporary Constitution' of 1970 which came into implementation on 16 July, 1970, the only reference to Islam is in Article 4, which simply states: "Islam is the religion of the state". There is nothing about its role in the constitution. [...]

Waco, Texas, September 22

Marc Ellis

[...] I think about loss often and now I understand that much of my writing and thinking has revolved around mourning - mourning for a lost innocence. As a Jew I was brought up with a sense of Jewish innocence - Jews have suffered throughout history - and the assertion that Jews are unlike Christians. This differentiation was always assumed - as Jews

September 19, from "La Repubblica": Shi Tao, chief editor of a newspaper in Changsha (China), has been sentenced to 10 years in prison "for having emailed a friend in the USA the announcement that

we are for justice and openness and questioning whereas Christians are for domination, bigotry and one-answer solutions to society and salvation. Of course I now know better. At least in our time Jews are more like Christians than some Christians are like themselves - at least they were historically. Sometimes I think that Jews and Christians - at least those who practice Constantinian Judaism and Constantinian Christianity [see Marc Ellis, *September 11, note*] - have the same religion. Perhaps this is the contemporary definition of Judeo-Christian civilization. Whereas before this joint classification was progressive, bringing Jews and Christian together in a joint enterprise where before we were separated by ugly barriers, now it is retrogressive, symbolizing another front in the clash of civilizations. Is this “clash of civilizations” religion a new religion? [...]

Chinese authorities send every year to the media in order to forbid any commemorations of the Tiananmen massacre”. It was Yahoo that passed Shi Tao’s email on to the police. As far as they are concerned, Google and Microsoft “have created a specific programme to prevent the users of Chinese blogs from using words such as ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’ or expressions concerning civil rights, sex, and individual freedom”. At the beginning of August Yahoo paid a billion dollars to acquire 35% of Alibaba.com, the largest Chinese e-commerce portal.

Waco, Texas, September 23

Marc Ellis

Hurricane Rita is now upon us, heading toward the coast of Texas. More rain for New Orleans and flooding for New Orleans. One day it may be renamed the City of Floods. We now know that Hurricane Katrina was much more than a natural disaster; it was a human-made catastrophe of neglect, under-funding and engineering malpractice. In short, the water-control systems were not overwhelmed by the force of water and winds. Rather, they were poorly designed and deprived of funds. Nature is a force to contend with. In New Orleans the human factor was also a force. Then the re-

sponse, too little and too late. It is now a familiar story.

Where else is this neglect and why are some neglected and others protected? Are the protected really protected or is affluence and power simply a protective disguise? My own sense is that if many are vulnerable the few are also. Where some are unsafe, all are. This is another argument for a society where the gap between the haves and have-nots is minimal.

Of course American society can embark on a plan to make all of us safe. Yet most of the time when our safety is asserted, others become less secure. Hurricanes are one thing; missiles are another. In providing for our security often innocent civilians become 'collateral' damage. [...]

Milan, Italy, September 24

Gianni Meazza

"The Mole". It's a television program, and I've watched only about ten minutes, out of curiosity after I got an email saying it should be boycotted and swamped with letters of protest. It's a reality show set in Africa: Kenya, to be precise. Our 'stars' are in it, and their presence there to put on a show is offensive in itself. But the contest they are involved in makes it even more repugnant: gulping down sixty litres of water in the shortest possible time. In Africa. Where millions of people die because they don't have access to drinking water. While the north of the world can drink till it vomits - isn't this what "The Mole" is saying? Who could possibly have had such an idea?

*From "La Repubblica":
1.1 billion people (about
one sixth of the whole
world population) have
no access to clean water.
Thirty-four thousand
people die from lack of
water every day.*

Orange, Connecticut, September 25

Mazin Qumsiyeh

The huge antiwar rallies in Washington and many other cities attracted hundreds of thousands. For us riding overnight on the buses down from Connecticut and arriving early before the subways opened at 7 AM allowed for ample opportunities for networking. Two buses parked behind us were from Boston and New Hampshire. I know at least 11 buses came from Wisconsin. The success of these rallies in spreading the word and exposing the truth is evidenced at so many levels. Even extreme right-wing (and racist) commentators like Limbaugh and Savage have been ranting about these rallies and trashing the rally organizers and speakers (including Cindy Sheehan and Cynthia McKinney). Cindy was later arrested at the White House. But this will only backfire on this administration. The movement for peace continues to grow. Many of the great speakers at the huge rallies, including McKinney, did not shy away from connecting the struggles at home and in Iraq and in Palestine. Among those attending the links were most evident in the signs and flags carried. Literally a sea of Palestinian flags (the most dominant flag at this demonstration). Activists also distributed thousands of flyers directly linking the wars and occupations in Iraq and Palestine.

September 24. One hundred thousand people take part in the Washington march against the war in Iraq. Among them there is Cindy Sheehan, the mother of a soldier killed in Baghdad, who has become a symbol of the American peace movement, and Cynthia McKinney, the first black representative for Georgia in the Congress.

Waco, Texas, October 3

Marc Ellis

The Jewish New Year begins this evening. As with other New Year celebrations, Rosh Hashanah is festive. Families and friends gather around food and hope. Yet those of us in our middle years know

that newness can only be found in the middles of our lives. There can be a renewal of parts of our lives we thought left behind. There can be a renewed emphasis on aspects of our lives that seem to be fleeing from us. We can be renewed. We cannot begin as if we have no past.

With the individual, so too our communities. They too are in the middle of a journey with many detours and possibilities lost. Can that which is lost be regained? What would this regaining mean? Becoming new is a slogan. Starting again is likewise a slogan. Individually and communally. Still, the need for renewal is ever present. Or rather we are presented with another opportunity to move deeper, to embrace the deeper strata of our existence. To turn.

Our turning will not be complete, is never complete; we will also turn away. It is in the middle of the turning that is defining, the tug toward and away, the decision within the middle. [...]

The Cucumber and the Cactus

by Mazin Qumsiyeh

Here

notes from the present

There is something uniquely spiritual, yet uniquely primeval, in people connected to a land. Even for those of us who work in a sophisticated and mobile culture, simply to get our hands into the earth, or to walk around our gardens, is a pleasure. We biolo-

gists recognize this as an unbroken link to our pasts, the time when hunter-gatherers became farmers. A hundred thousand years of evolution are more powerful than a lifelong incubation in an industrialized society and in our rat race of work and more work.

For Palestinians, our connection to the land is part of our fabric. After all, for more than 90 percent of us, agriculture was our livelihood from time immemorial. Our culture is imbued with agrarian terminology and instinct, and fifty-five years of living as refugees has neither obliterated nor diminished this instinct. How else to explain that most of us try to grow at least some herbs on our window sills, trying to re-create some element of our lost village life. What we grow is hardly important, a few herbs such as thyme, mint, basil and parsley, and such vegetables as tomatoes and squash.

My brother, who lives in the warmer climate of Dallas, does even more, and has a few trees - figs, apples and loquats - to remind him of home. My own attempts are usually feeble. Every year, I carefully guard my few basil plants, bringing them inside during the winter, using electricity to keep them bathed in artificial light and heat. I know, of course, that I could buy a bunch of basil leaves for \$1.99 or a basil plant for \$1.69 at Home Depot whenever I want to. But the product is of secondary importance. My heart and soul, like so many of my fellow Palestinians, refuse to surrender this part of who I am.

One friend recently brought back a picture of a plant growing inside a container at a refugee camp in Lebanon. If you look carefully, you can see the container is actually an empty cannon shell. Taking

a piece of war, this Palestinian refugee turned it into a planter to connect him with his agrarian past.

Even when it is impossible to sustain the physical connection to the earth, a spiritual and linguistic one remains. Our conversations and proverbs are inundated with the language of agriculture. This is of course true for English, but it's so much more prevalent in Palestinian dialects of Arabic. It's hard not to be struck by the volume and intricate complexity of such terminology in Palestinian conversations. A friend telling me about what Israeli forces are doing to Palestinian civilians in the Occupied areas would describe in the course of a very short conversation: Palestinians not seeing the face of the sun (*wijh El Shams*); Israelis 'plowing' (*harathu*) people; children being cut down like grass (*hasaduhum*); Palestinian leadership as rotten and not good seeds (*ma fihum habba mniha*); we must go to the roots (*nirja la juthurna*); let us not make a hill out of a seed (*min El Habaa Qobba*, equivalent to making a 'mountain from a molehill'). And of course, when life gets too tough, we even exclaim, "Life is too complicated for a Fallah (villager) from... (village name)".

There are hundreds of these expressions. But for Palestinians, actual and physical contact with earth cannot be replaced by language. One Palestinian friend developed a hobby of collecting samples of soil and sand from his frequent travels all over the world. His favorite sample is labeled with the name of the village from which his grandparents were expelled by Israeli forces in 1948. He was able to collect this sample when he visited the village ruins for the first time in 1997. Each of us yearns for a simple life that was taken away from us, but more

importantly, each of us has a piece of that life that resides in us, in the deepest recess of our minds.

Roots

It was a sweltering summer day in 1994 when I sat down with my maternal grandparents and video-taped them for the last time. We sat on a balcony facing a beautiful forested hill called Jabal Abu Ghneim in Palestine. Behind those beautiful hills, we could see Jerusalem. My terminally ill grandmother was frail and able to get out of bed for only a few minutes at a time. After her treatment for cancer failed, it seemed her pain medicines had also become less effective. She died about a year later and shortly after, my grandfather followed.

I could tell that 'Sitto', as I called my grandmother, tried so hard not to show her pain, especially in front of my grandfather, or 'Sido'. Perhaps she knew that his feeling at seeing her in this condition was equally painful. He tried mostly to comfort her by a reassuring glance, a touch of the hand, and repeated questions. (Can I get you a glass of water? Can I get you something?) In both Sido and Sitto's wrinkled, round and pained faces, you could read so much with so few words. Their thoughts and frequent silent glances at each other were transparent. I had to step outside on occasion to collect myself. I have yet to meet a husband and wife who were more in love than these two.

My grandfather, eighty-eight at the time, had lived all his life in the conflict zone in Palestine and was thus no stranger to pain. His life actually encapsulated the modern Palestinian narrative in its entirety and cast a shadow that went far beyond his direct descendants, eight children and more than forty

grandchildren. It certainly shaped my own life. Like his ancestors and most of his descendants, my grandfather was born in our small village of Beit Sahour. *Beit* means house, and *Sahour* is an allusion to staying up by night. Located in the hills halfway between the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea, the name refers to the shepherds who some two thousand years ago saw a star and walked up the hill to Bethlehem where Jesus was born.

My grandparents' and my parents' homes are literally down the hill from the Church of the Nativity where tradition holds Jesus was born. On my way back from school in Bethlehem, I would often stop by and look at the candles in the grotto of the church. On tough days at work in the United States, I always yearn for those meditative moments.

At other times, a group of us would head to the nearby hills for adventure. We would eat wild roots, the fruits of the *za'roor* (a tree related to the apple family, but with fruit no bigger than an olive), and occasionally use slingshots to get a sparrow or a lark for meat. After these tiring trips, I could always count on a nice meal prepared by my grandmother, who somehow knew when I would be stopping by. These visits were more frequent in the season of loquats, figs, apricots, grapes and almonds that were so plentiful in the garden well-tended by my grandfather.

Sido also occasionally grew Beit Sahour's most famous agricultural product, *faqoos*, a diminutive sweet cucumber that seemed to thrive in the rich red soils of the hills around Bethlehem. The townsfolk prospered on agriculture for more than 3000 years growing - in addition to *faqoos* - wheat, olives, almonds, figs, grapes and assorted other fruits and vegetables.

September 28, from "La Repubblica": in the Henan region, China, they have started building a new city, New Zhengzhou. It will be ready by 2015 and will accommodate a million and a half inhabitants. It will include one-floor houses with a courtyard and inside garden, alleys, a network of canals, a 2000-acre artificial lake, skyscrapers, parks and gardens stretching as far as the nearby mountains, a technological park and three university campuses. "La Repubblica" defines it as "the first Chinese post-communism utopia", "the Venice of the third millennium, an environmental Arcadia". An 80-square-metre flat will cost you over 300,000 euros (363,800 USD). The farmers whose land has been expropriated by the government in order to build the city "are queuing at the employment bureau to be hired as manual labourers" on its building sites. Old Zhengzhou, which originally launched the project, is also the first municipality to have hired the new Chinese police special corps, the anti-riot shock troops.

Beit Sahour's inhabitants lived peacefully together but were not homogenous. The mosque and the church were and are right next to each other. There was at least one black family I knew of in Beit Sahour, an Ethiopian Christian family. There were occasionally issues, of course, though not between Muslims and Christians. Rather they were between the majority Greek Orthodox and the Protestant denominations, who were in the minority. These disagreements were more visible to us because my mother's family was Lutheran and my father's Greek Orthodox. The nearby town of Bethlehem was even more diverse, with Armenians, Sharkas, Coptics and other religions and nationalities intertwined. Any family disputes were easily dealt with by wise and elderly leaders whom only hot-headed teenagers like us dared to challenge. Other occasional serious disputes occurred between the villagers and the nearby nomadic Bedouins, whose goats ravaged our crops. It was thus not unusual to have *natoors* (unarmed guards) posted at fields for protection. Yet, we were also dependent on the Bedouin for milk, cheese and meat products, and they were dependent on us for agricultural products. Overall, a harmony of humans and nature persisted for millennia. Only in the past few decades did this village life change dramatically.

My grandfather did not have an easy childhood. He was five when his siblings and mother died in a cholera epidemic, and nine when his father died in the First World War. At that point, he had to fend for himself in a rather hostile world, shining and mending shoes while going to school. He said that in those early years during the war, food was so scarce that no domestic animal was safe, and scav-

enging in trash dumps was a full-time affair for many children like him. Perhaps what helped him survive was that he was bigger than average for his age. His will was strong, and adversity only made him a more determined and methodical human being.

After the death of his parents, he felt that other family members had abandoned him and so when old enough, he dropped his family name and assumed his father's first name as his last. Thus he became Issa Atallah Atallah. Issa is the Arabic name for Jesus, and Atallah refers to being given by/of God (Allah). However, my grandfather was never religious. In his writing and frequent talks, he occasionally referred to how religion is so easily used to oppress other people.

Issa finished not only high school but attended a prestigious college in Jerusalem and graduated to become one of the first teachers in our village. He was progressive in his thoughts and his teachings, instilling in his students a passion for reading and an intellectual curiosity about people, culture and society. He also developed an interest in language and in just a few years was writing textbooks on Arabic grammar, publishing articles and brochures on history, and collecting proverbs. His collection of Palestinian proverbs with commentary and explanation is the largest ever published.

He rose to become principal and later superintendent of all schools administered by UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency), the U.N. body created to help Palestinian refugees expelled by Israeli forces between 1947 and 1949.

His wife Emilia came from a respected family in Nazareth, and devoted her life to her large family of four sons and four daughters. Issa and Emilia had

a unique partnership. His books were all dedicated to her as “my life’s partner” (*Shareekat Hayati*). They shared all in life, good and bad, and he always said that he could not have made it without her. This included the bad economic depressions of the early 1930s, the brutal British oppression and Palestinian uprising in the late 1930s, the terrorism started by the Jewish colonialists in the early 1940s and the later Nakba (catastrophe) of expulsion of about two-thirds of the Palestinians to make way for establishment of the nascent ~~State of Israel~~ ~~State of Israel~~ taking me in 1963, when I was six, to one of the U.N. schools in the Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem. I felt so proud that my grandfather was helping such unfortunate people who had been forced from their villages and towns. However, I was ignorant of who did this to them and why. I do not recall my grandfather or my parents discussing Palestinian politics or history. Perhaps people in the West Bank (then under Jordanian control) were still in denial or perhaps they wanted to shield us from the pain.

Later I would find out that some relatives, even before I was born, had confrontations with the ruling Jordanian royal family. One of my uncles on my paternal side was jailed by the Jordanian government for advocating Palestinian nationalism. My mother delivered my older brother in 1956 during the riots in Bethlehem against Jordanian rule. Yet my grandfather Issa was a pacifist, believing in the might and power of only the pen. He never owned a gun, and his love and respect extended to all people and was usually reciprocated.

When I visited with him for that last time in 1994, he was more willing to explain to me what happened as Palestine succumbed to Zionism. He

talked about how Zionists slowly took over Palestine in his lifetime, using means ranging from rules and regulations to deceit, outright expulsion and land confiscation. But he made a point to also explain how Christians, Jews and Muslims had lived peacefully in Palestine for centuries. His best friend in high school in Jerusalem was Jewish. Zionism then came about with a racist and apartheid ideology and practice, which caused tremendous suffering to the natives of all religions.

He also had no kind words for governments ranging from Britain to the Arab world, kings, prime ministers and presidents. Yet he was certain that ultimately all are passing phenomena of corruption, dispossession and destruction. His faith was based on knowing that our people had lived through the oppressive rule of Romans, Persians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Ottomans and the British. Both sides of my family trace back to the ancient Nabateans. During the 3rd century B.C., the Nabateans built their first four cities in Al-Naqab (today known as the Negev Desert) along the path of the trade route that crossed the desert to what is today Gaza: Avdat, Shivta, Halutza and Nitzana. Their tribes of Saba were the ones who first settled in what later became Beer Saba' (in Arabic, or Beersheva in Hebrew; Beer means well in both languages). Their capital Petra (now in southern Jordan) is a marvel of human construction and engineering.

Thus, Issa would cite the resilience of their lives and a persistence that transcends the power of empires. His faith was also based on his progressive ideals that younger generations learn and grow and will build a better life for all inhabitants of the Holy Land, present and dispossessed. His main and repeated advice to everyone was to break the

chains on one's own mind to capture the great potential for progress and coexistence. His words still shape my life.

The 1967 War

I was ten years old, and I remember groups of panicked people passing through our village and heading toward the Jordan River. It was June 5, 1967, the start of the war. My kind mother gave them food, and gave fleeing Jordanian soldiers my father's used clothes. I remember heated discussions among the adults about the wisdom of leaving; those who had left their homes in 1948, during the conflict when Israel became a state, were never allowed back. For three or four days, while the war raged in other parts of the country, we slept in our beds fully dressed, ready to leave at once if necessary.

During these six days, Israel took the remaining 22 percent of Palestine - the West Bank from Jordan and the Gaza Strip from Egypt. I remember Israeli tanks rolling down the hills toward our village, my father hiding us in a cave while an Israeli tank passed, until neighbors motioned us that the coast was clear. I remember Israeli jets streaking overhead. These few days are the dominant memory of my early childhood, the lines of refugees, the jets, the helicopters. But most of all, I remember the fear, not only in us, the children, but on the faces of the adults.

For a few days after the guns fell silent, no one knew what to expect. The Israeli authorities took their time before giving us any instructions. They were busy securing a long new border that kept out the more than 300,000 Palestinians who'd fled

during those six days. A few managed to get back, but many, like my cousins Samir and Makram, we would not see for more than twenty years. We waited while food and supplies trickled in, followed by some semblance of order imposed by village elders. Schools were closed, and my cousins and I spent even more time at my grandparents'. I was already spending more time with them than at my own house; their house was big, their garden plentiful, and their love endless.

Two weeks after the war ended and on a day I will never forget, my grandfather received an extraordinary visitor: his best friend from high school, a Jew, who had been separated from him for nineteen years. In the years between 1948 and 1967, no one could travel in either direction between the parts of Palestine that became Israel and the parts that came under Jordanian and Egyptian rule. I recall watching, not really understanding, as the two old men cried on each other's shoulders. It was the first time I saw my grandfather cry. Later that evening my grandfather tried to explain why people could not visit each other across borders. Sido talked about how, against the wishes of its native people, including his Jewish friend, Palestine was divided. He talked about how Palestinian Christians, Jews and Muslims were forced to move and leave their homes.

Looking back now, I understand that Israel did not want Palestinians streaming back into its newly declared territory, and that Jordan was technically in a state of war with Israel. I understood that even Jerusalem was divided, that no East Jerusalemites could go to the West and vice versa. For the first time, people were excluded from parts of Palestine because of who they were. When the Israelis made the land

whole, they made it an area where Palestinians are the unwanted 'other'.

The years of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and my own village were not kind to our people. While they exchanged Jordanian rule for Israeli rule, there were stark differences. Immediately after 1967, Israel started to confiscate Palestinian land in the areas acquired and to build Jewish-only colonies/settlements there. Palestinians were mostly employed in agriculture, and as their best land was being taken, many were forced to find other jobs. Thousands were forced to work in building the Jewish settlements and the roads that now cover 42 percent of the West Bank and Gaza.

Unlike Jordan, which recognized us as Jordanian citizens (unequal but at least allowing economic progress), Israel imposed on us a most brutal occupation intended to force us off our lands. Arbitrary arrest, torture, disappearances, random killing, home demolitions and economic deprivation were and are still common. Immediately after the 1967 war, any non-Jew outside of the areas occupied in 1967 lost his residency rights. This included two of my cousins. If they had property, their property was now 'absentee property' and turned over to the Jewish National Fund, which, according to its website, administers the land for "the owners of the land of Israel, Jewish people everywhere".

The Refugees

Before the Israeli occupation, my father was the only one in my family who was concerned with the politics of the Israel-Palestine conflict. After the war, in the presence of the Israeli military occupation, it became an issue for all of us. However, I

personally was unaware of the human consequences surrounding the refugees of 1967 beyond those fleeting few days during the war. My parents were teachers who gave us a good life and tried to insulate their six children from ‘unpleasant’ experiences. This sheltered life came to a halt, however, one day in 1976 when I was nineteen, and an undergraduate biology student at Jordan University.

As a class project, I was studying the bats of Jordan. On one of my field trips, I walked from the provincial Jordanian town of Jerash, with its ancient Roman ruins, to the Dibbine forest, where a friend said bats are common. After a two-hour walk in the sun on a hot day in July, I came upon a group of children playing in a small wadi (dry valley). My first thought was that it was too hot to play outside. My second thought was to ask if they knew of any bat caves in the area. Village children usually do. To my pleasant surprise, two older children said yes and agreed to take me to this cave, and four younger kids decided to join.

After a twenty-minute walk, and at the top of a hill, they pointed to a cave with a very small entrance. Crawling inside with a flashlight was difficult, but I was pleased to find a large room deep inside with a bat species that I later identified as new to the known fauna of Jordan. This was very satisfying to me. Dirty, hungry and thirsty, I asked the children if they knew where I could buy a drink. With typical Arab hospitality, one of the two older children said there was no way he would allow me to do that and insisted that I come to his home. He pointed to the ‘town’ below. I had not even noticed earlier, but now, with the sun and our location at the right angle, the town glittered. It was the Jerash Palestinian refugee camp, its hundreds of tin-sheet roofs

reflecting the sun's rays.

The older child, who was perhaps thirteen, asked a younger one, apparently his brother, to alert his family that a guest was coming. I never saw a child run down a hill this fast before. I was exhausted, and walked slowly with the other children. On the way, we talked not about bats but about them and their lives. When I asked where they were from, their answers were of towns I never heard of, and to this day I feel guilty that I did not know or remember the towns they mentioned. These were Palestinian villages that their parents and grandparents had left in 1948. They talked of the *bayyarat* (citrus farms) the *'haquras* (vegetable gardens), the large stone houses and so many other things that seemed so distant to their present reality. None of them had ever seen these places, but their descriptions were so vivid and real that you knew they were told these things in great detail repeatedly so that they committed them to their thoughts.

The 'home' I visited that day was a two-room shack no bigger than 300 square feet. The walls were constructed from bricks with a peeling white covering, and the ceiling was a simple tin sheet. The room I entered was clean but crowded and served as living room and bedroom. A small, sorry-looking coffee table sat in the middle with fruits and snacks, a juice container, a teapot and cups. My young energetic hosts were apologetic that they did not do more, while I was very worried to have caused them such trouble. We talked more about things such as their school, which was UNRWA-administered, their lives, their dreams and their aspirations.

September 29. Hundreds of emigrants try to climb over the ten-foot-high and five-mile-long barbed wire fence, which separates the Moroccan territory from the Spanish enclave of Ceuta. 'Someone' shoots (Morocco and Spain both deny their security forces responsibility): five die. On October 5 hundreds of inhabitants of Ceuta meet in the town centre to ask Madrid for urgent action against "las avalanchas", the avalanches, as they call the masses of emigrants. During the night between October 5 and 6, a thousand emigrants try to get into the other Spanish enclave of Melilla; the Moroccan police shoot and six people die: "Faced with the violence of the assaulters who were pushed by the energy of desperation" the governor of the province, Abdellah Bendhiba, declared, "the police rightfully defended their watch posts". As for Spain, it has decided to raise the fence from ten to twenty feet high and, in order to single out the emigrants and stop them, has sent hundreds more soldiers and helicopters equipped with powerful searchlights to the two enclaves.

For a while, I was in their universe and in their world, and I started feeling that I had been so sheltered, and that my life was so shallow. The joy of having succeeded in my mission of getting the bat specimens I needed was replaced with emptiness and confusion. I asked why they thought they were in this place and not in Palestine. They simply answered, “the Jews wanted our land”. The last question that I asked about their lives was the result of my own bewilderment and simplicity of thought: Do you think you will go back to those places in Palestine? An energetic and simplistic affirmative nod of the head accompanied by ‘in-shallah’ (God willing) was the answer.

Walking back at sunset, many thoughts crossed my mind, some, perhaps, a bit too much for a nineteen-year-old college student. As the years went by and the struggle continued between being involved and watching out for my own career and life, this experience slowly made its way into my conscience and forced me to think more about politics, injustice and human rights.

My color Kodachrome slides of the cave, the refugee camp, and these children seem like black and white photos much older than they really are. I published the paper on new records of bats from Jordan in 1981 (my first scientific paper) to include the data those children helped me get. Meanwhile, many troubling regrets and questions remained unanswered. Did I impose on them and disrupt their lives? (But they seemed anxious to tell me their stories.) Should I have offered them money (I had little to spare as a struggling undergraduate student) and would such an offer have been considered an insult? Why didn't I at least write their names or the

names of the villages they came from? What do they remember of their experience with me? What happened to them? What will their future be like after these various 'peace' moves?

After twenty-five years, my regrets are mixed with pride and hope, but most of all with gratitude. The challenges of my own life over the past twenty-five years all seem so mundane compared to that of the refugees.

Resistance

Since the 1967 War, Palestinian resistance, like any resistance movement by any colonized people, has taken many forms. Most of it has been nonviolent, such as my entire village's refusal to pay taxes and burning military ID cards in 1988, and some of it has been violent. I, like all human rights advocates and most of the world, find these acts of violence against civilians, Israeli or Palestinian, to be abhorrent. But words are not sufficient to end violence. The violence is a terrible symptom of the underlying and ignored diseases of oppression and dispossession, in the same way that the violence that killed both black and white civilians under apartheid South Africa was a symptom.

Historically, this has been the tragic but consistent response to colonial systems. I recall with horror the stories about Native Americans' scalping of English settlers in colonial America, 'necklacing' in South Africa (when tires were placed around the necks of living people and set ablaze to burn them alive), and terror bombings of civilian areas in Algeria and in Palestine, first by the Jews in their fight against the British and then by the Palestini-

ans in their fight against the Israelis. But colonial overlords never needed such acts to label an entire native population as savage and barbarian. Dehumanizing natives as less ‘civilized’ than their European oppressors has always been an important strategy to make it easy to kill and dispossess them of their land.

Native Palestinians resisted by different means, most of which were futile. Those who resisted the occupation or the land confiscation faced what Israeli authorities called their iron-fist policy. A farmer we knew was shot when he tried to tend to his crops on land Israeli authorities had confiscated. A relative of mine had his home demolished because his twelve-year-old son threw stones at an Israeli patrol. Ironically, he was the mason who cut the stones to build so many houses of others (including my parents’ house). My brother-in-law was jailed several times with no charge under rules that allow the military to detain people for up to six months, without trial or charges. They thus put him in jail for six months (with torture), released him, brought him in again for another six months and so on. He and I believe their reasoning was that he was politically outspoken about the Palestinian suffering under occupation, and thus they attempted to silence his voice. Whatever their reason, his torture resulted in permanent kidney problems, and he was never charged or convicted of any crime.

My own experience of Israeli occupation took the form that many Palestinian youth faced and still face today: random beatings, humiliations, strip searches and basic racism. After I finished my bachelor’s degree in Jordan, I came back to teach at public schools in the Bethlehem and Jericho

areas. One day in 1978, I was teaching biology to my 11th graders at the boys' school (schools were segregated and I taught at both boys' and girls' schools). Halfway through the class period, two tear-gas canisters came flying in from outside. The students panicked and rushed to the exit. Israeli soldiers who were manning the exits with clubs were hitting the students as they tried to get out.

When I came out, one young Israeli soldier, no older than my students, swung his club at me. I protested instinctively in English that I was the teacher. This caused this young man to pause briefly, and then ask me in Arabic and gruffly to "move on". Instead, I tried to talk to him, asking why they had thrown the gas canisters into the classroom and why they were beating the students. He lost his temper, grabbed me by the collar and violently dragged me to the yard where a truck was parked with some arrested students sitting inside. We were all trucked to the nearby military building. The soldiers took all our ID cards and threw us into a small cell. We heard nothing from them for more than seven hours. But we were lucky. They simply returned the IDs and asked us to walk home, some of us a bit bruised, all of us shaken. My only guess was that the soldiers were bored and simply wanted some action.

My uncle Yacoub (Jacob) Qumsiyeh, who died of liver failure in early 2001, was superintendent of the Lutheran schools in the West Bank. I remember him coming home one day in 1994, saying that he'd managed to get through the Israeli checkpoint. This was also exceptional, he explained, because a soldier asked where he was going and my uncle defiantly responded: Al-Quds (the Arabic name of

Jerusalem). I felt so depressed to hear such pride in such little triumphs when all around them, Palestinians were seeing their lands confiscated, their homes demolished and their livelihoods slowly suffocated all while supposedly in a 'peace process'. But in retrospect, such small acts of defiance seem so important to maintaining the dignity and sanity of a people under relentless attack.

Since I had always planned to get higher education, I worked to get admitted to graduate studies in the United States, and thus escaped the rapidly deteriorating situation. In my years at home, I did witness Israeli brutality, including against my own father and other relatives. This included harassment at checkpoints, requesting them to do menial tasks (moving things from one side of the street to the other), verbal and physical insults and so on. But again, I never felt that my family suffered as much as other families. The most affected Palestinians were those who were refugees from 1947-1949 and those still living on agriculture in rural areas in the newly occupied areas after 1967. Israel simply wanted Palestinian lands and wanted to make life as miserable as possible for those Palestinians remaining so that they would leave. [...] Israel has already confiscated large swaths of land in the northern part of our small village of Beit Sahour for the growing Jewish settlement/colony of Har Homa. In the past thirty-five years, the hills around Jerusalem have been transformed, covered with high-rise buildings with lucrative tax incentives for Jews from all over the world to come and live on our lands.

I flip through our photo album and I see pictures of my parents, who seem pale and weak with age,

both seeming older than their real age. I am stopped by that determined, yet compassionate look on their faces. The suffering of older generations of my family was always accompanied by persistent resistance. They joined demonstrations and civil disobedience personified in the tax revolt of 1988 in Beit Sahour during the first uprising against the occupation (Intifada). From their house, they see the growth of the settlement called Har Homa on the lands of Jabal Abu Ghneim, and it's creeping toward them.

In my phone calls to them every weekend (now more frequently as my father has been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia), they always lament that the old days are gone. We used to go for picnics to Jabal Abu Ghneim, shopped in Jerusalem, bathed in the Dead Sea, picked flowers in the mountains, etc. The buildings that replaced the trees on Jabal Abu Ghneim stand mostly empty, but they partially block our view of Jerusalem. More tellingly, the bypass roads, for use by Jewish settlers only, now cut off access to the Holy City to all Palestinians living in the West Bank, except those living in East Jerusalem itself.

Flipping through the pictures, I come to the photograph of Hiam Al-Sayed in our own house in Connecticut. This is the little Palestinian girl who visited us in Connecticut to get a prosthetic eye. Her eye was shot out by an Israeli sniper while she walked with her mother in Gaza City to visit a friend. She captured our hearts. It's times like this that I realize how lucky my family has been. It is true that the home of a relative was demolished. It is true that many of my relatives have been exiled. But these families in Gaza and in the refugee camps

in the West Bank and throughout the Middle East are suffering so much more. Yet this does not lessen my own pain, knowing that as an American citizen, my taxes are funding this Israeli oppression. In many ways, through my taxes, I am helping to kill Palestinians (and Israelis) and to keep this unjust war going. That is a heavy burden.

The Cactus

Between 1947 and 1949, more than 450 villages and towns were destroyed and their trees demolished. In 1967, the inhabitants of more villages, such as the biblical town of Emmaus, were moved. Emmaus, which was halfway between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean Sea, was destroyed after the 1967 war and today is the site of a national park. Israel uprooted tens of thousands of olive trees, over 100,000 in the West Bank alone in the past ten years. Yet there are still some olive trees left, proud and stubborn, some old enough to have existed at the time Jesus walked this land. This is traditionally the time of the olive harvest, but this year, the Israeli government has forbidden the Palestinians to harvest what remains of their olives.

But the story of the cactus is the most interesting. In Palestine, village fields used to be demarcated by cactus plants. When these were bulldozed, starting in 1947, an interesting thing happened: The hardy cactuses grew back. It is simply impossible to thoroughly remove all the roots. Thus, in Israel, in many places long abandoned, cactus grows in rows in the same places it was planted hundreds of years ago by the hands of the natives. Tough on the outside, tender inside, and with beautiful yellow or

pink flowers, the cactus has become a metaphor for Palestinians and is in many of our national songs and poems. We cling to the hope and the certainty that, just as happened in South Africa, we shall someday live together in this small place called the Land of Canaan/the Holy Land. Jews, Christians, Muslims and others all did live together for hundreds of years before Britain and the great powers adopted Zionism. Then the rains that filter through the soil in which my grandfather and his Jewish friend are both buried will also nourish new fields of faqoos, sweet cucumbers, and thriving cactus.

Chicago, October 7

Marc Ellis

The Sabbath arrives and I am off to speak at a gathering that seeks peace and justice for Palestinians and Jews in the Middle East. When I travel during the weekend I miss Shabbat at home - challah, candle lighting and the wine blessed around the table. Yet I also know that fidelity as a Jew looms large in a wider world. How can I be faithful as a Jew when war rages, walls are built, homes are demolished and the land for the living shrinks daily? I know that my words do not change the reality on the ground. Shall I then sit back and enjoy Shabbat as if injustice is not occurring? [...]

October 8. An earthquake in Kashmir, between Pakistan and India; 53,000 dead. Very little aid gets there, "La Repubblica" reports: "Rich countries' big government agencies have already had their funds drained away by other disasters" and "private individuals will not be able to really feel involved because of a lack of affinity and very few pictures".

Waco, Texas, October 9

Marc Ellis

I have returned from Chicago. Planes and more planes. And to what advantage? The world remains the same. The borders of nations. the walls being

October 8. A landslide caused by the rains of

the same. The borders of nations, the walls being built, the violence of militarism and the verbal violence of argument and invective remain.

The conference was filled with good people who seek justice in the Holy Land. That justice will be denied. Some hold on to the dream of two states for two peoples, a shared Jerusalem where two broken peoples will gather as equals and begin again. They want a revolutionary forgiveness where confession and compassion allow histories of suffering to come into a new configuration of mourning and movement. Mourning the past, the movement forward takes on depth. Who can appreciate more deeply the breath of new life than one who also mourns? It is not an attempt to cease mourning but to do something life-giving with mourning.

This is why traditions restrict mourning, intense at first, marked and limited by special days later. We mourn the dead. Only the living can mourn. If loss and death are mourned without end living is impossible. We are instructed to carry this mourning with us - into new life.

Has the Holocaust become a mourning without end as if mourning in and of itself can bring life? When we mourn too intensely over too long a period mourning can be used against others and become hollow. When we suffer it is unlike the suffering of others - it certainly feels that way. Yet the suffering of others feels the same way to them. There is a truth here - that suffering is self-contained, deeply personal.

Communities are like that as well. They internalize suffering as if it is unique to themselves. Again there is a truth here if not taken too far. Have we as Jews taken our suffering too far? Do we see it as

Hurricane Stan destroys a village in Guatemala: 1400 South American Indians die.

October 13. A series of attacks by Chechen guerrillas in Nalchik, the capital city of the Caucasian republic Kabardino-Balkaria. Over 80 dead.

October 15. Referendum in Iraq on the new Constitution. Over 78% say yes. About 63% of those eligible vote.

unique and over against others? We certainly think so when others brandish their suffering as unique, incomparable as if it is beyond our comprehension.

During these days of repentance we are called upon to confess. Sometimes I think confession is a mourning spoken out loud, a loss articulated with a sign of hope - hope that repair is possible; the book of life is still open. [...]

Modena, Italy, October 17

Maria Granati

Dear friends, after a lovely afternoon on Saturday (which I've been thinking about again, trying to work out the source of the joy I still feel and the regret that I didn't have more time - hadn't met, greeted, talked, and listened to all the people who were there or who briefly stopped by), yesterday for me was an exhausting and marvelous day.

After very few hours of sleep, I went to work at a polling booth for the primaries here in Modena from seven in the morning until after midnight. I talked to hundreds of people (we had about two thousand voters), distributed voting forms, checked IDs, did all the things that have to be done in a polling booth, in this case in the old city centre. I saw friends I hadn't met for a long time, I shook hands, but above all I saw many faces, some famous and many more unknown; one by one I watched the people as they sat in front of me for several minutes, showing their documents and asking for information: smiling, calm, patient, friendly, curious and attentive, confident or self-conscious, enthusiastic or ironic, fully aware of the seriousness of the task, and always very courteous.

October 16. For the first time in Italy, primary elections are held within the centre-left alliance, in view of next year's political elections. Beyond all expectations, three million people take part in them. Romano Prodi is the anticipated winner.

I was so caught up in this unique rapport spontaneously set up between us, so different from the rather bureaucratic and formal one normally found in polling booths, that I survived from 7:45 (in the end we opened the booth before eight o'clock because at 7:30 there was already a long queue, mainly of elderly people anxious to vote... "then I can forget about it, you know...") until about four in the afternoon without budging, without eating anything, and mostly without drinking.

As the queue got bigger and the room filled up it became a truly wonderful and moving sight. There were actually two very long queues continuing out into the street: a silent, patient and determined crowd. Nobody was pushing or protesting; late in the morning and in the afternoon in particular there was a wait of an hour and a half, even two hours; many people came back several times; as far as I know nobody gave up. We had to triple the number of voting forms - by nine o'clock there were hardly any left and we made photocopies.

There have been occasions before when I've seen thousands of people - the 'left-wingers' - marching in procession, at political or union protests or sometimes at dramatic moments in the life of the nation, where the tension showed in people's faces (funerals of the victims of terrorism and the Mafia); and at other times of normal political or democratic struggle. But you always sensed - or at least I did - a kind of 'otherness' in that crowd: not just an urge for conflict, for *polemos*, and the dialectic of ideas inherent in the *polis* and in democracy, but a kind of extraneousness, or at least a tendency to claim to be different.

This time the crowd's identification with the *polis* and democracy seemed complete, mature, fully

aware. Not that they lacked an adversary, of course. The anti-Berlusconi impetus was clear. But you could see they were happy they'd been called to voice their opinion, to participate; it was as if they'd been waiting just for this - witness the number of participants as well, which surprised the organisers: nobody had noticed what was really happening deep within these people, which says a lot about the crisis in the political parties and oligarchies and about their ability to govern complex societies in the globalised world. This was a stream of humanity upsetting the fragile organisational framework, and I think it shows that in spite of everything there is an enormous vitality and strength in our democracy. It was a roar of voices rising from the town square, recalling an image Hölderlin used (he was complaining that he no longer heard that roar). Conflict, impossible to eliminate in the *polis* but firmly anchored to the rules, to the laws, to shared values. I noticed a strength that was solid, calm, dignified and intelligent, mocking and at the same time enthusiastic; the enjoyment of being together, doing things together, being many, sharing space with kindred spirits. I can't help thinking that all these people, so diverse and so united, so enthusiastic and at the same time aware, so passionate and unselfish, are the best of Italians...

Grottaferrata, Italy, October 18

Daniela Di Falco

They say you have to talk to children and make them think rationally. Or scold them. I'd already been through the whole procedure. But enough's enough: this was the umpteenth tantrum of the day and I knew I was right. I was also tired of being

October: in Europe and the United States there is a stream of disclosures and inquiries concerning Niger-gate (false intelligence, maybe from

right. I went outside onto the lawn and left her whimpering inside the house. I sat at the foot of a tree, fiddling with blades of grass as I tried to calm down. The vague feeling of guilt and defeat at having left her there on her own would not go away and my discomfort grew.

Suddenly she peeps around the open door, but pulls back into the shadows as soon as she realises I've seen her. I manage to shake off all the tension and stretch my arm out towards her, offering her a flower I've just picked. She hesitates, but then comes out onto the verandah. She seems to feel safer. She crosses a small stretch of grass and stops. I stay still too, and continue to hold out my arm offering her the small gift. She takes several more steps and stops a few metres from me. I smile at her, and immediately her sullen expression melts into an answering smile. Now she runs toward me and crouches against me, trying to press her small body as close to mine as possible. Now all is well. The angry mother is no more.

Milan, Italy, October 23

I know now that this time every year, between October and November, I will feel remorse again for not having opened the door to the little girls from upstairs on the night of Halloween. It must have been the evening of Halloween, three years ago.

The year before, when two little voices had answered my "Who is it" from behind the door with "Trick or treat", I was touched and went along with the game; even if I've never liked Halloween festivities, which appeared here out of the blue, and all I knew about the rituals came from the movies. As mysteriously as I could, after feigning surprise at

Italy, that Niger sold uranium to Iraq, which was used to claim that Saddam Hussein packed mass destruction weapons) and CIA-gate (retaliation against Joseph Wilson who, once sent on a mission in Niger, declared that news of those sales was unfounded; such retaliation was carried out by revealing that his wife was an undercover CIA agent).

Germana Pisa

October 23. In Brazil a referendum is held by Lula's government to forbid the selling of weapons and ammunitions. The noes have it: two thirds of the 122 million voters express themselves against the prohibition.

their appearance, I murmured, “Wait, just a second”. And I slowly but surely went to look for my purse on the table. The little girls’ eyes were wide open and their delight was also a reaction to mine, and mine to theirs, because we were both playing a magic role together, in an atmosphere of suspense, and we believed in it. I had taken out a one euro coin for each of them out of my purse and had gently placed them in their tiny hands, then I had hugged them and I had been immediately overwhelmed by their astonishment and by their obvious happiness.

Yet the year after I didn’t open the door and I don’t know why. I don’t even know if the little girls knew that I was at home and didn’t want to open the door: I had tried not to make any noise at all. The bell rang at least twice, but I wilfully didn’t react. Why didn’t I want to repeat the magic ritual? Why did I no longer think that playing the game would be fun and important, not only for them, but also for me?

Lethbridge, Canada, October 29

Marc Ellis

[...] Then the president of Iran declares the need to eliminate Israel from the face of the earth!! So much illusion and at such cost. It simply feeds the accusations that Israel will never be safe and that the endgame is destruction.

How many Palestinians will die in the announced plan to eliminate Israel? Does the symbolism of Israel outweigh the reality of Palestinian life?

So the denial on both sides. Jews don’t exist. Palestinians don’t exist. And yet both certainly exist as ordinary beings deserving of the respect of any other ordinary life. I think it would be revolutionary

October 26. During a conference entitled “A world without Zionism”, an event that takes place every year to express solidarity with Palestinians, the Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad declares: “the Zionist entity must be wiped off the face of the earth”.

to simply accept that Jews and Palestinians are ordinary.

Ordinary life as the goal. The extraordinary coming within the ordinary.

Florence, Italy, October 29

The greengrocer near my house conducts his business in a small shop - so small that there are more baskets outside the shop than in it. And the best produce is outside too. The business is run just about on the poverty line by two elderly parents and a son of uncertain age who was once in a coma as a result of a serious accident, leading to some oddities in his behaviour. Given his situation he is always angry at the world around him (possibly with reason). I never see him in the company of anyone other than those two old people. Sometimes, if the bag of shopping is heavy, he offers to come home with me and we have an opportunity to talk on the way. Thus I found out about his intelligence, his interests, his education gained through solitary reading, solitary journeys and reflections.

Not many customers buy things in this shop. They prefer the supermarket, which may have an abundance and variety of cheaper goods. But I continue to go there for what I want, contrary to all market logic, because I believe I'm contributing to keeping alive the disappearing 'corner shop' so dear to our memory, and also (without wanting to seem pious) to the dignity of making a living for a family at risk. Sometimes I find a bruised piece of fruit in the paper bag and I don't know if this is the result of distraction or desperation.

Often when I go past I find all three of them at the door of the shop, watching the people passing by

Liliana Ugolini

October 26. In Clichy-sous-Bois, inside the Parisian banlieu, two teenagers of Arab origin aged 17 and 15, Ziad and Banou, hide inside a local power plant to get away from the police and die electrocuted. A revolt erupts in the small town, mostly caused by youth of Maghrebian origin, which flares up again the following night and will go on for several weeks spreading to numerous French cities.

October 27, from "La Repubblica": last 29 July, the 2075 inhabitants of the town of Taishi, in the Guangdong region, in China, start collecting signatures to be handed in to the regional authorities to obtain the dismissal of the mayor, accused of having expropriated two hundred and fifty acres of farmland and sold it dearly paying out ridiculous sums of money to the farmers. On September 12 the town is surrounded by a

in the hope that somebody will stop and buy the few things they have. All around, more and more shiny, brightly coloured superstores are appearing with background rock music incorporated and young men and women in uniforms (perhaps they're desperate too). The comparison is almost ridiculous but for me this insistence on shopping there has become a kind of resistance, aiming to resuscitate something that's disappearing, something that's part of us, like the vernacular.

I also meet a craftsman there (one of the last), who knows about prints and presses and has spent his life looking for botanical subjects, becoming an expert in the process. When the local council had the trees cut down (they were sick, according to the councillors), it was thanks to him and the battles he fought together with the people of the neighbourhood that we got them back. So the trees that have grown again and are flourishing speak of him, and have their roots in his skill and stubborn determination. Piety is here, attached to the pavement, while Piero washes the dogs and the woman from the haberdashery drowns in boxes and advises jumpers made from a wool mixture for the children. On the radio a fury of death. Will this freezing cold make each small daily battle futile?

Milan, Italy, November 2

Today, to overcome the fear and the chill I felt inside, I cut out a dress. I'd been thinking about it for a few days; I felt the need to bend over a task, creating something - not just anything, but something personal and intimate. And warm. So, using a light synthetic fleece blanket in sky blue as my material (I have more than one of them: they're cheap at the

column of sixty police vehicles, one thousand policemen close off the town to prevent men from getting back from the fields, anti-riot hydrants aim at the old women picketing the mayor's office and policemen arrest dozens of them.

Germana Pisa

October 27. Last night a fire broke out inside a detention centre for immigrants in Schiphol, Holland, and caused eleven victims; as the Dutch Minister of Justice declared, they were all

market and they're amazingly soft), I cut out a long house dress. For the pattern I used a long dress I've had for many years, made of dark grey wool, slightly coarse but nice: although it's a bit worn by now it hasn't lost its charm or its warmth when I wear it. I laid it over the blue material and cut. I'm fond of that grey wool dress. One day I noticed to my dismay that it had a few moth holes in it. But I was never going to give it up! So to fix the problem I cut some coloured wool flowers from a very matted cardigan that had become absolutely unwearable and applied them over the holes the moths had left. Now I have the feeling I'm going to love the long blue fleece dress too, for wearing around the house (but maybe outside as well). It's very warm and soft on the skin: as I was cutting it I liked the feel of the soft of fabric in my hands, and as the needle went in it gave me a pleasant sensation...

people "whose documents were not in order": "Many immigrants who managed to escape" as reported by "La Repubblica" on October 28 "later tried to run away. During the night, policemen, helped by helicopters, hunted five runaways".

Waco, Texas, November 6

Marc Ellis

Embody the beginning - at the end.

Embody hope.

Despair as a sign of victory, a desperate clinging to something more. The more that is not in evidence, now: lifting up the past as hope - as a possible future.

Now is the future waiting to be born. [...]

Paris, November 7

Andrea Inglese

A few days ago someone rang the bell at my council house flat. I wasn't expecting any visits. I looked through the eyehole, but couldn't see anyone. I opened the door all the same and went down the corridor that leads to the other flats. At that point

November 6, from "La Repubblica": in the hall of public Chinese hospitals, luminous electronic boards show patients the prices

corridor that leads to the other flats. At that point I heard some voices, and some thuds. I got curious and quickened my step. Suddenly, a furious man wearing a bath robe came out of one of the flats with a red face and a cigarette in his hand. He shouted: "If you don't leave at once, I'll call the police!" towards a threat which was outside my view. I looked at him in astonishment. He went back in. Two goggle-eyed thirteen-year-old boys appeared. They were dressed up in a bizarre way and were holding rubber masks in their hands. They absent-mindedly asked me for some sweets. "I'll have a look. Follow me", I replied. They stopped in front of the door. I went in and had a quick look around, but there were no sweets in the house. I went back to the door to say goodbye. They didn't look me in the eyes. In the meanwhile, one of them, the one who had never spoken, had put on the rubber mask representing a horror film character. My partner Magali and I were sorry. We would have liked to play the Halloween game, for once. Even though those boys were African-French.

of blood tests, specialist examinations, surgical operations and medicines. First-aid for resuscitation costs 120 yuan, an X-ray costs 300, a blood test 200, etc. the average wage of many manual workers is about 1,000 yuan a month.

Paris, November 8

Andrea Inglese

Yesterday, on Channel One of the national television, the French Prime Minister, Mr. Villepin, a smartly-dressed good-looking man, announced the restoration of curfew in France with a calm intent expression. His dignified posture, his steady voice, his silvery hair, typical of a go-ahead man, everything in him, immortalized in the almost frontal static television framing, reminded me of the character of Georges (Daniel Auteil) in *Caché (Hidden)*,

the latest film by Michael Haneke: everything re-produced the deeply-rooted, unaware-of-itself and devastating attitude of denial which the French-Frenchman displays before an African-Frenchman, an immigrant, an immigrant's son, or an immigrant's son's son. Villepin like Auteuil in Haneke: the same unbridgeable gap, the same being part of a motionless picture, of an identical frame which leaves out every sequence, every unpredictable development, every chance for others to speak, every intrusion, all fluency. Just as for Haneke's character, a successful man and a television journalist, any contact with the non-French Frenchman has always been impaired, since the latter is the carrier of a shadow, a suspect, a lack.

So, the present government is reviving a 1955 law, thanks to which France enforced a 'state of emergency' in Algeria during the war. Such law was used only once after Algeria: i.e., in New Caledonia in 1984-85. However, today it is no longer the reluctant populations of the colonies, whether lost or kept, who are subjected to the 'state of emergency'. The curfew involves the whole of the French territory, from North to South, and is aimed at the French themselves, or rather at the very young French, those between the ages of fourteen and fifteen on average. And yet, it feels as if it were a country dealing with an extraneous body, with an unacknowledged multitude occupying its territory in a fortuitous way and now revealing itself with intolerable violence. Faced with such an intrusion, the answer cannot but be a colonial war law.

Many *cités*, as they are called, have a reputation of being mythical and terrifying places. They *a priori* call up images of poverty and violence, almost as

if they were offshoots of underdevelopment that have settled treacherously in one's own home following the colonial experience. As for those young arsonists, they are literally 'extraneous bodies': their faces don't look French, and they don't speak the French people's French. They are, therefore, suspect even before having set fire to anything. Formally they are French, they have French citizenship. But their fathers aren't, let alone their grandfathers. They come from poor families. They haven't studied much. Today, in Western countries, 'poor and with little schooling' is a synonym for 'potential assaulters' of nice people (those who are less poor and have a little more schooling). Moreover, if one adds the fact that some of them are Muslim and regularly go to a mosque, then the portrait of the enemy is complete. In this case, however, the eternal 'alleged enemy' has taken trouble to become the 'real enemy'. And has obtained the greatest acknowledgment that France could grant him: the state of emergency.

Milan, Italy, November 8

Massimo Parizzi

Some time ago I went to the police station in my district. There were crush barriers to the right and to the left of the entrance. Behind them a crowd of Arabs, black Africans and Asians is in waiting. A wide corridor had been left empty between the barriers. I walked through hardly looking or being looked at. I had to report a theft, they had to apply for a residence permit. Any feeling I might have had was enclosed in that sight. A white man walking between two wings of coloured men and women; they are left on the doorstep, he walks through the door. A colonial sight.

Paris, November 9

Andrea Inglese

How long does it necessarily take for a multitude that has put up with injustice to wear away its own pain, its own humiliation? And through which channels is this sufferance conveyed, almost as if it should inevitably turn into rage, without ever being cancelled? How does it poisonously spread from one generation to another? Constantly hidden, turned into work and obedience, into endurance and tenacity, until it no longer finds any taboos or forms, any ideas or bonds, or ancient mental structures into which to be reabsorbed: and then it suddenly presses, just like an impermeable substance that can't be kept back, through those very youngest limbs, to be finally ejected in violent destructive forms.

Paris, November 10

Andrea Inglese

These days one may hear even people from the Left say that “too much money goes to the *banlieues*, youngsters can take advantage of lots of facilities and opportunities for free, and if they want they can go hang-gliding without spending a penny”. So that feeling starts spreading which people from the left know well, in some situations... the feeling that they have been too naïve, too idealistic, too visionary, too ‘good’. This way of justifying up to the hilt, of excusing, this way of blaming society thus acquitting the alleged ‘rejects’. And what if all these problems, which the state has uselessly been trying to solve for years, after all came from a sick, definitively corrupt generation, and all we had to do was to acknowledge it? And condemn it, at last joining the general chorus crying out “what is broken must be paid for”?

November 10. Al Qaeda claims responsibility for a series of attacks in some hotels in Amman, Jordan, which cause 56 deaths.

Cars are on fire and, as a consequence, ideas are in great turmoil. Later cars will stop burning, since uprisings have a beginning and an end. And everything will get back to calm again. Back to small school and condo vandalism. Back to small neighbourhood wheeling and dealing. Back to petty larceny. Back to exam failures. Back to meaningless days. In other words, back to ordinary life. As Musil wrote in *The Man Without Qualities* [Secker & Warburg, London 1954, II, p. 71, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser]: “Why does man not make history? That is, why does he only attack history like an animal, when he is hurt, when things are on fire close behind him? Why, in short, does he make history only in an emergency?”. This is the outrage that lies before our eyes everyday.

I was Eighteen Years Old

by Dionigi Serra, alias Nisio

Here

notes from the present

I was eighteen years old. I got my call-up notice and at the beginning of September 1943 I went to the barracks at Tortona. I'd been there for five or six days; we knew something was wrong, as we'd been ordered to sleep fully clothed, with our rifles, and they'd given us the magazine although we were

all new recruits and didn't even know how to shoot. During the night we heard parties of Germans making a racket in the streets of Tortona and singing *Lili Marleen*. Around midnight or one o'clock the Germans smashed through the main gate with their tank, and it did a lap or two of the courtyard. They sprayed two or three volleys of bullets into the windows of the barracks; the glass flew out and we all crouched down on the floor. Then the tank left, German headquarters contacted the Italian officers and they had us go down into the courtyard. On September 8, the day of the armistice, there were two thousand of us; over the next few days they scraped together soldiers escaping on the trains and some civilians as well, and then there would have been nearly six thousand of us. We spent four or five days without eating, in the barracks courtyard, and the Germans had rifles in their hands all the time, frightened just like we were and shooting without a second thought. We went to the toilet on the sports ground and after a few days there was a mountain of shit. A friend from Giarolo gave me an egg. But we were suffering from thirst more than hunger, because it was very very hot.

Then they put us all on the train. When we arrived at Castel San Giovanni Station, a sailor whose uniform wasn't so easily recognisable hid in the toilet, and when the train slowed down at the station he jumped off; the Germans shouted and fired two shots and brought him down. At that same station the people were bringing us baskets of grapes, but the Germans didn't let them come near the train, they started it up again. Some others among us tried to escape as we came to a small bridge by jumping into a ditch; there was a burst of submachine fire and you saw the dirt rise; we never knew whether

they escaped or were hit. We were escorted by this armed convoy as far as the Brenner Pass. In Germany there was a train running alongside us carrying bins of rice that had gone bad, with moths in it - there were more moths than rice, but we were really hungry and we ate it.

We stopped in Munich and then after a week of travelling they took us to the huge labour camp at Luckenwalde [about sixty kilometres southwest of Berlin]. We came out of the station and they made us walk some of the way to the camp, about the distance from Ponte Nizza to Serra, but on the flat, six or seven kilometres. We went through a big town where there were hundreds of Germans, women and children, and they spat on us and the guards said nothing: I was really hurt by that. At the camp they gave us another ladleful of slops like we'd had before. The camp could hold 200,000 prisoners; it was as big as the distance between Momperone and Varzi [two towns - like Ponte Nizza - near Serra del Monte]. When we arrived there were something like two hundred French prisoners, then people kept coming: in the end there must have been tens of thousands of us. We were there for a fortnight, eating one or two small potatoes a day and sleeping in huge tents.

Towards the end of that time a Fascist Party leader who was in Berlin was called to put a proposition to us: to join the Republic of Salò. We would have as much as we liked to eat and then we'd go and defend our country. About a quarter went (50,000 of a total of 200,000 - but not one of the two hundred officers), and they let us see them handing out meat in front of our very eyes to the men who had joined. And the Party leader said: "We must thank our German allies for the way they've treated us,

because they've worked to ensure our safety and they've given us food... We must join together with our German comrades for the liberation of Italy". Gradually they split us up; we never saw the officers again and they took us in groups of a few hundred at a time to a labour camp in the centre of Berlin, brand spanking new, and wooden sheds with facilities.

At the beginning of October, nearly a month after we'd been captured, we started working in Berlin. All the companies were looking for staff and we went to work here or there. In the morning the German guards came to collect us and took us to the different companies. We did everything, and nobody kept count of the hours, and then they could call us at night as well, to bury the dead after a bombing for instance. I worked for a construction company. The ones who were lucky and went to work somewhere reasonable were able to eat. Food was very scarce (a potato a day), and we tried to 'nick' something to eat when we went to work. The '*polia*', the person in charge (a very big man), came with us and stopped at his house to eat, and he made us understand with threats that we had to wait for him. We looked up and down the street and if there was a woman around we said the first words we'd learned: "Frau... brot" (Madam... bread). Sometimes a woman would walk on a few metres and then drop a coupon for a hundred grams of bread onto the ground, without looking at us. They were very frightened as well. Sometimes we would slip into a place, like a house that had been bombed, and nick some jams and other things to eat. In an area a long way from us there was a baker's shop where they actually gave us bread for nothing, at their own personal risk, and so when

the boss left us we ran to get to that place, but if there was somebody there we would see how the land lay and turn back. They never gave us clothes, and we washed in sinks; the fleas were eating us alive and they stayed with us until we got home. Every now and again they would try again to get us to enlist with them, but not many joined.

Soon after our arrival the Russian and American bombings started and got more and more frequent. The Russians had got as far as Elba. Many men were dying. At night the alarm would sound and we'd slip into the shelters. There were secure bunkers, but they didn't let us go to those. The guard would say: "Ausländer nicht, raus!". We were in Berlin from October 1943 until the Russian troops arrived, when the Nazis fled or were taken prisoners. This was in the early months of 1945: a year and a half of labour camp. The last battle was terrible. The pilots of the Russian fighter planes were all women. The light planes flew so low that we could see them waving at us. By this time we had the feeling disaster was near. There were rumours that the Russians were very close and one fine day we found them in the camp. Between the huts there were shelters with cement walls at the sides, covered with earth. They were more gun shields than bunkers. At night some men would leave the shelter to go and sleep in the hut. I stayed there all the time with most of the others, but it was painful: we were in a box one metre by fifty and there were a hundred people crammed in there like sardines. During the night, while I was in the shelter, they bombed my dormitory and three men died, they were firing with katyushas (very powerful weapons: they fired seventy shots in two or three seconds), but cannon balls too. Now and again we

would poke our heads out of the shelter and at one point we saw a soldier, quite short, just a boy, who was talking in Russian and asking for watches. A few men had them and we urged them to give them to him. And he answered: "Korosho (good)!". Then he put a round magazine in his Parabellum and fired into the air. We were still inside. Later one of our men warned us: "The Russians are coming this way with coils of telephone wire on their backs". There were officers too. They put a telephone exchange in a hole made by a bomb. They didn't even look at us. Around ten o'clock two or three Russian trucks with katyushas stopped. Their light planes, called 'storks', mostly piloted by women, skimmed the ground, even in the middle of the streets, to machine-gun some German targets, and they waved to us. The female soldiers were more serious and stricter than the men: if there were women at a roadblock they didn't let anyone through, whereas the men could be bribed with a packet of cigarettes. The days after that we were in the huts when they asked us to work for them and build a landing field for their planes; at first we were afraid, then we learned to trust them. The Russians told us to sew a little Italian flag in the cuff of our jackets so we'd be recognised as Italians. For one whole night we heard the sound of a Russian cavalry division. We went to look at these thousands of horses as they went past: they had fine horses and they were very good riders. Suddenly a captain about 25 or 30 years old comes towards us and makes his horse rear up in front of us. We were scared! He dismounts in a flash and smiles at us and says: "Are you Italians? I'm half Italian and half Russian. My mother was born in Bologna and I lived there for eight years studying at the university." We were

dumbstruck, as he got back on his horse and said to us: "I salute you all, friends; soon you'll be going back home! The war is over!" The Russians had no time to think about us and suggested we should go and ransack the city, where there was nobody left in the streets or in the houses: they were all in the cellars, not one of them would come out! Fifteen of us took a hundred kilos of bread, sugar, two hundred packets of cigarettes, all you could wish for, a hundred kilos of flour... The Russians were laughing! Someone suggested going and taking some pigs; we put the proposal to a Russian officer and he gave us permission. We went with one of the Russians' carts and got two pigs; we butchered them, cooked them and ate them. The Russian rear-guard stopped to eat with us. Then one time a fellow from Venice suggested looting two or three cartloads of "Sublime" cigarettes. They landed some around and sold some. For me this was an uncomfortable situation, but half the soldiers agreed with it. Then after a fortnight the Russians started imposing some order (they asked us to take only what was necessary) and organising us to leave Berlin.

At that time I spent several days in Buckow [about fifty kilometres east of Berlin]; it was a town where Hitler went for holidays: two small hills covered in pines, and a lake around it. The Russians made an aviation camp there for small planes, the storks, and a military hospital; a woman ran the hospital, a blonde - what a woman, you should have seen her! At night with the colonel they went around in the jeep hunting for deer. An officer who worked at the aviation camp came and asked four or five of us if we would help them clear out some houses; we were just there doing nothing, so we cleaned up two or three cottages: there were dog carcasses and

human bodies, and on two days he brought us a tray of pastries as a reward.

After a month we were loaded onto trains and taken to Poland, where things had to be put back in order; on the journey we had to travel a hundred kilometres on foot as well. We were there for two months, sleeping in a shed, cutting wheat with their machines. We had food. Then two thousand of us had to leave for another area; there was a captain about eighteen years old who had distinguished himself on the battlefield, and he directed us into a lorry and trailer, with all our packs with the stuff we had collected around the place: we weren't going to leave anything behind! He loaded us all up and we headed for the Oder-Neisse line: vast plains, as big as from here to Pavia. There were white and black cows like we have here, herds that went on forever, beautiful country. The trailer had five holes but only three bolts; we went on a pontoon bridge to the Oder-Neisse line and I was watching the trailer connection: it was okay. When we arrived there was sugar beet to be hoed for several weeks; they treated us well. If I found any really good people they were the Russians: they never raised their voices and they always fixed everything, whereas the Germans were like mad dogs, but them no, never, never ever! At night they would come with their little mouth organs and sing: "Nima khleba nima kukuruza, piats malenkikh nima moloka (no bread and no grain, five little ones and no milk)". We asked when we'd be able to go back home and they told us: "Zakoncite rabotu i idite domoj (finish the work and you'll go home)". They would smile; the truth was they didn't know either.

Then a train was organised to send us to the Brenner

Pass, but they made a mistake and sent us to France. We turned around and went back to Munich, where there were Russian and American troops. There was a bit of tension here; they handed us over to the Americans and we set off, but it took us weeks to get to the Brenner Pass. At the start of the journey, while we were still in Germany, the train stopped opposite an orchard. A thousand men got off and stripped it bare. They came to blows with the German farm workers and one of them finished up in hospital. The Russian officer didn't say anything. Then a higher-ranking Russian officer was called urgently and came on a motor cycle to restore order. We took a day and a half to do a few kilometres along the Adige from Merano, because there was just a single line and each train had to wait, then there were German prisoners fixing the railway line. Now it's October 1945. The train left me on the Po bridge. We crossed the Po on the barge at Pavia because the bridge was broken. I took the little train that goes from Voghera to Varzi, and stopped at Cecima: no one was expecting to see me after two years and no news. People were surprised. At home my mother removed all the fleas from me and boiled my clothes.

Camisano Vicentino, Italy, November 11

Mariela De Marchi

“I want to thank everyone who helped me. Those who prepared the food for the party today, those who gave me a hand when I arrived, those who helped me get this house, and those who welcomed me so warmly. I also want to ask God to protect those who are far away: the people who are risking their lives among the bullets at this time. Let's drink

a toast: cheers!”

“Cheers!” we all respond in chorus as we sip some prosecco. It’s my new neighbour’s party - Brent, who is putting on this gathering to christen the house. He’s an American soldier who’s been in Iraq. He’s black, like most of the guests. There are children too, and my daughter is playing happily with the others.

I’m shy, and I barely manage to exchange a few words. I start a conversation with an Italian girl who works at the Ederle American base in Vicenza and looks after the quartering of the soldiers. She asks me questions about Bolivia, talks about this and that and gets quite friendly. When she hears me talking to my daughter in Spanish she says she loves listening to our language and confesses that she detests English: she took the job at the base to make herself learn it properly once and for all.

My partner goes home early. I stay on, partly because my little girl just doesn’t want to hear any talk of leaving her new friends, but above all because I’m interested in getting to know these people. Before we came my partner said he wanted nothing to do with anyone involved in war, but I wanted to meet Brent for this very reason. And by ‘working’ as an interpreter for my father-in-law, who owns Brent’s house and mine and who doesn’t speak a word of English, I was able to come into contact with him. What can I say? He’s a friendly and likeable person, without doubt more affectionate and understanding than the rest of the neighbourhood. In any case I find it hard to imagine him behind a machine gun. Certainly we haven’t yet talked about the war, or about our ideas in relation to it. And I don’t know when I’ll do that, if ever.

I have recently referred to an official document dated December 17, 1983 and entitled *The Quality of Life in the Suburbs of Big Cities*. It is a small volume edited by the “Economic and Social Council” for the *Journal officiel de la République française* (Official Journal of the French Republic); it is therefore a document for the use of Parliamentary debating and aimed towards government political intervention. It is written in the style of a report. The second part, entitled “The Problems of Endangered Suburbs”, is subdivided in a number of chapters and related paragraphs. These include “Population” and “Harmfulness”. Some of the paragraphs have predictable titles such as “The Youth” or “Illiteracy”. Others have more appealing ones such as “City Planning without Planners” or “Cuckoo Politics”. But the paragraph which most attracted my attention was the one devoted to immigration. The title - why be surprised? - is “The Problem of Immigrants”.

In this paragraph, “The *Problem of Immigrants*”, you can read: “In the 19th century, French demography, which has never recovered from the losses of life back in the times of the Revolution and the Empire, bucks the trend if compared with the rest of Europe. While its neighbours suffer from an excess in population, France seems to be inadequate and already imports workers. [...] War losses and economic development make this need even more impelling”. And then, with reference to the “reasons for their presence in France” today, the following “determinants” are reported among others: “In the first place, life’s precariousness back in their home countries, both because of political

By the way. In a diary page published in the latest issue of this magazine Massimo Parizzi wrote: “In Thailand I bought a book about the ‘hill tribes’, the ethnic minorities, most of whom live in the mountains in the northwest and southwest of the country. Even on the second page, it explains that they pose ‘many problems’. One is the ‘lack of a sense of national identity’ ...”.

reasons, and, more often, because of economic reasons. Secondly, historical and geographical reasons concerning an important aspect of French colonial history [...]. Finally, a manpower shortage existing in certain sectors of the economy where low salaries and hard life conditions are predominant”.

This hierarchy of factors simply needs to be inverted: in the first place, the French need for low-cost manpower for “difficult” jobs, that is jobs that are “dangerous for workers’ health and life”. Secondly, the colonial system which, having the exploitation of natural resources as a priority, has always also entailed an exploitation of manpower. Finally, the third factor which makes it possible to avoid ‘forced immigration’, that is a slave trade which would be inadmissible in 19th century Europe: immigrants come to our country of their own free will. There’s enough here to promote the putting up of statues dedicated to the anonymous immigrant, just as one does with hospital and school ‘donors’.

Let’s conclude with our document though. Let’s move on to the next paragraph: “A difficult today”. “For decades these immigrants have been welcomed to France without effectively considering *the problems* [my italics] that this population may have raised. Our country has accommodated them in barracks or in hastily-built boarding houses. [...] We have almost always pursued laissez-faire and have trusted the immigrants’ ability to *do it on their own*”. The expression used in French is *esprit de débrouillardise*, the ability, the gift to get by in difficult situations and hostile environments.

In short, an immigrant’s life, in France, for at least two generations has required the features of *heroism*: great spirit of self-sacrifice, humbleness, perseverance, etc. Despite all this, the institutional stance has not given up classifying it under the ‘big prob-

lems' chapter rather than under the 'unhoped-for bits of luck' one. But the trend has regrettably reversed. Apparently, the latest generations have cast off their heroic garments. In the meanwhile, they have watched a lot of MTV, read youth magazines, looked at advertising posters, wandered around shopping centres, memorized advertisement slogans. They don't know what the expectations of a 'French citizen' are, they have not absorbed them in the communities where they live. (That means they don't expect to do well at school or at work, nor do they expect to have life plans according to more or less ambitious goals, etc.). On the other hand, they have assimilated the expectations of a 'globalized consumer' effortlessly. (The shrines of merchandise are truly accessible to everybody, with no sex, race, age or religious discrimination). It will therefore be difficult to ask them, and what's more tacitly, to perpetuate their fathers' and mothers' virtues of humbleness and sacrifice.

Paris, November 13

Andrea Inglese

With reference to the uprisings in the *banlieues*, people from the Left tend to say: these youngsters are delinquents because they have not been educated. Because their parents could not educate them: they worked all the time and/or they could not speak French, they themselves were not very literate, etc. But hasn't the state done anything to solve this 'problem'? The state has invested in schools and associations. And why have they not become 'normal' kids, why, despite all the schools, teachers, educators, trainers, etc., have they become 'delinquents'? Because - here is the answer - the state has not done enough, it has made mistakes

here and there, more must be done for the school, etc. The assumption behind this left-wing evaluation is that the state is able to intervene in determining individuals' social future. Once the state had done all it had in its power to provide everybody with equal opportunities, the arsonist would no longer have any extenuating circumstances: he would be a delinquent from his own diabolic free choice.

But can school really intervene in the education of youth? In other words, can school compete with a society of the spectacle? Can it refute, inside its classrooms, what is celebrated and reaffirmed everywhere in the world: that there is no desire and no enjoyment outside merchandise? Hasn't the state already given up defending the entire society, at school as well as at work, from the strategies of capitalism, which reorganizes every sector of human life exclusively according to its own specific goals?

Luino, Italy, November 13

Paola Turrone

A woman and a man in a gym. A few details are shown: firm legs and sweaty arms. The man and the woman glance at each other. The rhythm, both that of the intensity of the exercises and that of the montage, increases, though it is not desire that makes them look at one another, but the challenge for each of their own bodies to get better. And above all to be the same as the other one, so that whatever one of them does the other is able to do too; more and more difficult, more and more a display of strength. Sexual equality! Up to a final sigh, when the two, blissfully worn out, leave the gym, smile, and you realize they are a couple. They look at their parked car, there is an umpteenth defiant

look and the beginning of a sprint, and the commercial stops, just before we know who will 'win', who will have the honour to drive. Equality is maintained, and it is up to those watching, in their own lives, to establish who is the winner. Car adverts have always been a perfect reflection of the social and anthropological situation in the world that produces and buys cars. The car is probably the symbol-object of our way of considering our world, of our relationships, of our desire mechanisms; moreover, no doubt motor-car manufacturers, who have a lot of money, can afford the best socio-psychological research work that lies behind the launch of each product. As regards the above-mentioned commercial, there is an obvious exasperation of an ambition, of a target. Or a danger. Men and women are the same. Mistaking equal rights for sameness leads to a degeneration of desire and to a degradation of mankind. What happens in the commercial takes this process to extremes by trivializing it, since the matter is focused on the body. A woman's body is not the same as a man's. It is not so either outside or inside, and therefore the gestures it requires and makes are inevitably different too. The levelling-off of male and female roles within society (and the family!) strongly contributes to cultural mediocrity and emotional insecurity, and to all that follows from them.

Luino, Italy, November 14

Paola Turrone

Branded. We have got used to finding a brand on every object we use, and every object is named, recognized, and valued by its brand. And so are we, accordingly. A commercial that has been on the air

From "La Repubblica", dated September 23. In November 2003, NewBoy Design Studio, based in Syria, designed and

for about a year celebrates and defends that. Brands are our certainties, our educators, our accomplices. In the various stages of your life, as the commercial goes, we brands have been by your side, and now please appreciate it, keep on buying us, since if you stop, if you do not appreciate it, you will betray us and will be left alone. Besides being present in what we use and touch, brands are also present, as the car commercial a few years ago rightly warned us (“prepare to want one”), in every object we want. We imagine an object with the brand that labels it. We are *a priori* customers, regardless. This seemed to be the climax of the market advance into our life; on the contrary, another commercial prowled into our houses, i.e., it prowled because it was disguised as the classic perfect-family commercial. In the perfect family there are beautiful, happy individuals who are fond of one another and above all health-conscious. The latest outpost of brands is the human being. *My husband is a Barilla chef*. “My husband is a chef” no longer means anything as far as cooking skills are concerned; it is a brand that qualifies him, that makes him immediately identifiable. Mine is a *Barilla husband*, and the brand is no longer only on spaghetti or cans, but also on the people who, more or less realistically, work there. So, her husband is a Barilla chef, my husband is a Foppapedretti carpenter, your husband is a Benetton tailor. Mind you, this is very different from the sentence “I am a Fiat worker”, as ‘worker’ is a general term which in itself means subjection to an industrialist, it means browbeating and alienation, and no one is shocked if it is connected to property. Chefs, as well as the other jobs used as examples, have always been conceived as workmen, as individuals who are aware of their own

launched on the market Fulla, a doll based on “Muslim principles”. Although she has a “beautifully varied wardrobe (sold separately)”, she is usually put on display with her standard clothes on: a dark cloak and a veil over her head. A “pink felt prayer mat” is included in the box. “The doll - “La Repubblica” reports - has quickly become a best seller all over the region. It is virtually impossible to walk into any shop in Syria, Egypt, or Qatar without bumping into Fulla breakfast cereals or Fulla chewing gum, or not to catch sight of a girl riding her Fulla bicycle, and all these items are ‘Fulla pink’, a regularly registered colour.” “Fulla is honest, sweet and thoughtful, and she respects her father and mother”, Fawaz Abidin, brand manager of NewBoy, says, and on Arab satellite channels an “incessant” Fulla advertisement shows her while “she recites prayers at dawn, prepares a cake for her friend Yasmeen, or reads a book”.

job, who have chosen, learnt and loved it. They are terms that define a whole world, an ability. P.S. And in fact here comes the next ad... A daughter speaks this time: Mum is a Barilla creative designer! Inspiration is concerned! No expertise with a first and last name: it is the multinational that defines, incorporates and determines, *even* where, so far, there has been freedom to question, emerge and trigger a change.

The Davy Crockett Cap

by Marina Massenz

Here

notes from the present

A group of friends meet again after thirty years. They belonged to the same parish youth group, and they all left it at the same time. They then followed a path of political commitment which they experienced in separate realities and in different ways; still, radical and pure and strong they were, they did not die, and after many stories (love stories, disappointments, desertions, jobs, children, flights, homecomings, partings, etc...), they get together almost by chance and realize, with surprise and joy, that they still like one another. However, something perhaps even more important happens: they *recognize one another*. Something has remained intact amid thousands changes, something that concerns *the soul*, though not intended in the sense that stems from our common Catholic background, but rather in the slightly mythical sense in which Hillman speaks about

James Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, Random House, New

mythical sense in which Hillman speaks about it, for example when he says that “we bear from the start the image of a definite individual character with some enduring traits. [...] We each embody our own idea. [...] And this form, this idea, this image does not tolerate too much straying.”. And also: “We make soul with our behavior, for soul doesn’t come already made in heaven. It is only imaged there, an unfulfilled project trying to grow down”. We met as young teenagers, and now, in those fifty-year-old faces and bodies, I have found again something so deeply similar to then, something subjective and untouched, something I have carefully observed in each of them, so much that now I think with joy that those among us I met again were all safe, or rather saved, in that none had sold their soul. It had only grown, but it survived in their gestures, in their eyes and words, even though it bore the scars of time.

Later on we tell each other many stories; we spend many evenings in front of the fireplace and a glass of wine, and we talk, discuss, narrate... fragments, like those of interlocked lives coming together again in casual movement, in the apparent chaos that leads our meeting, in the anarchy of a word without a specific goal, without a destination, a word uttered for the pleasure of saying it. A narrative flow with neither a plot, a story-line, nor embellishments. That’s how, by pure chance, we get to the ‘childhood night’ when we tell each other of when and how we attended primary school, and which did you go to, and remember so-and-so?... , did you go there too? We find out that a kind of coonskin cap with a tail at the back, known as a Davy Crockett cap, was very popular with children then; many of us wanted one, very few

had one. It was ‘stuff for the rich’; a real status-symbol for children then. In those times we looked at one another and recognized each other by our clothes as belonging to different classes. Whether true or false, our imagination went hand in hand with the symbols of the nouveau riche; for instance, I was ashamed of living in an ‘old’ building, while Marina C. lived in a ‘new-with-liff’ building. Needless to say, grown-up standards were different, and the ‘old’ I referred to could be regarded as ‘ancient’, just as there may have been more beautiful and more expensive hats around than the one which had caught on in the minds of us all. Anyway, what matters is the fact that none of us mentioned this to other children then, but, while telling one another now, we find out that it was just so, for everybody.

And that’s where Dario’s lovely tale comes in; his mother, knowing how much he wants that kind of hat, makes him a ‘fake’ Davy Crockett cap with an assortment of bits of furs she has at home. His classmates immediately find out that it is not a ‘real’ one, but an ‘imitation’. Dario stops wearing it. “Why?” his mother asks him. Her son replies that it is “too hot”. A tender mother-son relationship is described here, in which the child doesn’t want to hurt his mother, and his mother does as much as she possibly can to make Dario feel as ‘trendy’ as his most ‘highly-thought-of’ classmates. Well, an old-time tale, though somehow identical to many we see everyday staged between parents and their children always asking for gadgets, models, brands, and games launched by the latest commercial. This is the story of a fake designer label, homemade in that recycling style which was still very widespread then. Nowadays, nothing is recycled, or mended,

some things are only occasionally sewn or exchanged, re-used, adapted. The escalation of consumerism is uncontrolled, we live in a 'disposable' world in which the lifetime of an object is no longer a value, nor an indicator of good quality. It is hard to defend oneself or one's own children from such a system. In those times there was no, or hardly any, advertising for us children; we watched very little television, 'children's TV' and sometimes a film on Saturday or Sunday. Yet, we as children were not very protected by our parents in this sense either; the Sixties' *Italietta*, that of the boom, craved for standardization, for possessing status 'symbols' (often the newly-obtained petit bourgeois status), just as their children wanted to 'be the same as others' by possessing idol objects which became a sign of one's own being 'inside' the classroom community, the group. The frailty of childhood, which, because of its small Self, cannot easily put up with its likely diversity, and the frailty of the grown-up world, dominated by spending and equally incapable of a critical attitude towards such 'induced needs'.

In 1968 and around then, we eventually created our antibodies; denunciation of consumerism, conventionality, prissiness, etc. So we proudly went around dressed like tramps, with trainers and the then revolutionary blue jeans (I don't know whether such clothes were as transgressive for men as for women), while our middle-class or petit bourgeois families shouted: "No, you won't go out dressed like that!". A small yet big revolution. Sometimes head-on, sometimes sideways (like carrying your favourite clothes in your handbag and changing in secret in the hallway). Surely, after that autonomous vaccination we would never have wanted Davy Crockett caps again. That was enough for us, in

that we experienced adolescence and youth safe from fashions, at least the 'capitalist' ones, except we then created an alternative one (parkas and flowery skirts) which we triumphantly wore for a long time as a symbol of our rebellion.

I now ask myself: have we later been able to protect our own children likewise? Have we been able to teach them to use their critical mind and to accustom them to conscious consumption and to considering such circular advertisement-fashion-need mechanisms? I am not sure. Surely, that's very hard to do and children today are very vulnerable. Every day European children spend an average of four to five hours in front of television and/or computer screens (according to a Censis report on *Children and the Media around the World*, 2003). That of children is by far the category that consumes the most television. Advertisers' professional magazines explicitly suggest using them as 'shopping advisers' in that, by throwing tantrums, they manage to convince their parents to buy just anything. That conflict, which almost every day opposes parents and children, is theorized and hoped for: "Buy it for me", "No, yes, no... yes". In order to put an end to the conflict, parents buy; or else they reach a compromise. I'll buy it for you today, but tomorrow I won't. It is a never-ending haggle. Yet, since 1990 a law has been in force in Italy according to which cartoons cannot be interrupted by commercials. However, just try and watch TV with a child for two hours during the broadcasting time in which the audience are mostly children: you'll see how and how much that law is broken all the time. The conformist weakness of childhood is structural, it concerns the charter of children who learn by imitation and imitate with-

out the critical filters that another mental age may establish by offering tools for distinguishing and choosing. Therefore, an adult must do it for them. It is also important, in my opinion, to consider children's lucid and intuitive ability in recognizing those *symbols* that define integration, a sense of belonging, social classes. It is also true, however, that they can be the victims of *false perceptions* (as in the above-cited example, where 'old' and 'ancient' functioned as synonyms).

All the children I meet in my job possess the most common and widespread symbol-objects and they all want to be as similar as possible to others (or less different); it is also much more difficult to distinguish such objects as indicating a sense of belonging to a certain social class, maybe even because of a greater prosperity widespread in the population, at least in Italy, at least so far. As a matter of fact, they are owned by bricklayers' as well as nurses' children, just as by lawyers' or doctors' children; the difference lies only in the 'filter' maintained and used by the parents. Unfortunately and paradoxically, I happen to observe more 'duly-branded' clothes and shoes on less well-off children than on those with parents who are really richer. The latter seem, at times, to be more protected, maybe because a better education, if associated with an anti-consumerism orientation more aimed at valuing other kinds of children's needs and requests, creates a sort of barrier; these kids are less vulnerable to advertising slogans, they are a bit less dependent on this childish frenzy about brands, a real plague and social curse. What really scandalizes and outrages me is realizing how children are overwhelmed by advertising: a dismal sign also of their loneliness in front of the screen. I wonder why

parents do not switch off these damned televisions. The TV speaks and everybody keeps quiet: video-addicts are there, in silence, subdued, both adults and children. And such a terrifying phenomenon is bound to increase thanks also to the proliferation of ways in which TV and computers complement each other. A frightening amount of hours, if added together, a childhood doomed to grow up with many more 'swollen up' hours of television than the hours of school, games, movement, relationships.

As early as 1994 Karl Popper, in *Cattiva maestra televisione* ("Television: a bad teacher") wrote that "television is a thief of time", which deprives children of precious hours that are essential to learn something about the world and about themselves. It is a thief and a deceitful one, too; as far as both values and real facts are concerned. It shows a false and twisted world, and it dishonestly induces a sense of omnipotence (anything can be obtained without any effort), it produces miseducation compared with the real struggle to grow up, with the difficulties one has to face, with the limits one has to accept, and the frustrations one has to put up with. And what is even more worrying than the messages conveyed by TV programmes are commercials, which are after all in real facts the vehicles for such 'bad education'; in fulfilling induced needs, when the parents eventually buy, one gets secondary reinforcement of this form of infantile omnipotence. The child already feels majestic (as in the programme of the magical super-hero, for example) and finds further validation, this time on a real concrete level, of how easy and possible it is for him to obtain everything when what is offered him in commercials included in the programme is bought for him. Thus that rather wide-

Karl R. Popper and John Condry, *Cattiva maestra televisione*, Reser-Donzelli, Milan 1994, p. 32.

spread vicious circle is produced, by which the child is in command and the parent is a hostage; impotent parents and omnipotent children, little kings in the home, bound to never grow up, or to grow with great efforts and problems. Reducing the influence exerted by television in children's lives is a first step towards helping them to be less victims of it, and it is a step to be taken immediately. To re-establish the natural role mismatch (it is the parent that leads and makes decisions) is just as urgent an imperative, also in order to allow one's own children to feel protected, contained and guided along the hard road to growing-up.

Waco, Texas, November 14

Marc Ellis

Arendt's Jewishness denied by her critics. Now it is forgotten. Or almost so.

The fate of important Jewish intellectuals: assimilation into the Western canon. On the one hand, a good thing - contribution to the universal. On the other hand, particularity is stripped. A person without particularity is stripped of her identity, of the very history and community from which she emerges.

Incredible: Arendt comes from a Jewish household, experiences antisemitism as a child, flees Germany with the rise of Hitler, organizes Jews to leave for Palestine in France, calls for the formation of a Jewish army in Europe, helps Jewish refugees in New York, argues for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, attends and writes about the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, shows great concern for Israel in the days leading up to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war - and her Jewish particularity is stripped

by her critics and by her admirers!

Thought becomes public and the person - at least the deeper strata - is beyond the person. Descriptions of the person as an out of body experience. Who in the public fray hasn't experienced this? The violence of it all, a cycle that is, in the end, unstoppable.

Is it worth reclaiming Arendt's Jewishness? Who will use that identification? Who will benefit?

Strange. Once in the cycle of violence and atrocity even one's particularity cannot escape being used as a weapon of destruction. Should we therefore cease particular stressing identifications and communal sensibilities? [...]

Remember Edward Said's warning about identity - always moving, never defined, interweaving with other identities. Essentialism as false. Essentialism as a trap.

Agreed and not. Yes and no. Both and.

Rome, November 15

Lucianna Argentino

I haven't slept for three nights and I have a splitting headache today. The fact is that when you find yourself having to make a choice and you are no longer twenty or thirty years old and you are not in a position to be able to say, "OK, I'll try, and if it doesn't work out, I can always try again somewhere else", it's not easy to choose, even if the prospect for you is like a dream come true, even if it is what you have been wanting for years. Finally, I have a chance to change jobs, to work in a bookshop that is about to open, and I'm really thrilled with the idea, because I know it will be another world. I'll be in a different environment, with a

variety of work opportunities, including proposing my own ideas for organising cultural events. And besides, I'll be surrounded by books... For me, it truly is a dream come true. Yet, all the same, as I was handing in my resignation to the manager of the supermarket, I had tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat, because I spent eleven years of my life there. I've met a lot of people and I've heard a lot of stories and outbursts. I've laughed with joy and I've cried with sorrow; and it hurt me to hear some customers say, "here's our miss". I felt almost guilty. As a matter of fact, I feel like a mom who has to leave her children behind and wonders: how will they manage without me? I am also really sorry for a colleague I've been very close to for several years, and when I told her I was leaving, she cried. Yet I know that everything will go on as usual, but I hope that my colleagues, the new ones and those who will replace me, will remember to have a gentle word or a kind thought for everyone, and that they especially don't forget that they are dealing with human beings and not just anonymous customers with wallets forking out as much small change as they can, but real people to look in the eyes.

The fact is that starting all over again when you are over forty-three years old and beginning a new life gives me a dizzy feeling, but I am happy and, anyway, my fears are not dampening my enthusiasm; and I feel that the beauty of life lies in putting yourself to the test when you least expect it.

Baghdad, November 17

R.

It sat on my PC desktop for five days. The first day I read about it on the Internet, on some site, my heart sank. White phosphorous in Fallujah. I knew nothing about white phosphorous, of course, and a part of me didn't want to know the details. I tried downloading the film four times and was almost relieved when I got disconnected all four times. E. had heard about the film too and one of his friends S. finally brought it by on CD. He and E. shut themselves up in the room with the computer to watch the brief documentary. E. came out half an hour later looking pale, his lips tightened in a straight line, which is the way he looks when he's pensive... thinking about something he'd rather not discuss. "Hey, I want to see it too..." I half-heartedly called out after him, as he walked S. to the door. "It's on the desktop, but you really don't want to see it" E. said. I avoided the computer for five days because every time I switched it on, the file would catch my eye and call out to me... now plaintively, begging to be watched, now angrily, condemning my indifference. Except that it was never indifference... It was a sort of dread that sat deep in my stomach, making me feel like I had swallowed a dozen small stones. I didn't want to see it because I knew it contained the images of the dead civilians I had in my head. Few Iraqis ever doubted the American use of chemical weapons in Fallujah. We've been hearing the terrifying stories of people burnt to the bone for well over a year now. I just didn't want it confirmed. I didn't want it confirmed because confirming the atrocities that occurred in Fallujah means verifying how really lost we are as Iraqis under American occupation and how incredibly useless the world is in general:

November 7. A fact-finding report filmed in Fallujah, Iraq, by Rainews24 (http://www.rainews24.rai.it/ran24/i/chiesta/video/fallujah_IN_G.wmv) shows "charred, melted, skeletal bodies with intact clothes on". That is the result of white phosphor bullets used by USA armed forces.

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November 18, from "La Repubblica": in the USA 50,000 pages of documents dating back to the Sixties which were kept in national Archives are declassified (they are now available at the Texas University Internet website). Many of them are about the Vietnam war. Among other things, one can find out that, after the massacre of My Lai, a small town in South Vietnam, where in March 1968 a platoon of American soldiers killed over 500 civilians, Secretary of Defence Laird warned President Nixon that the massacre could cause "our government extremely serious embarrassment" and bring "grist to the pacifist movement's mill". Henry Kissinger suggested a solution by saying that "Laird must show he is shocked too, so as to play the dove's role, and then immediately set up a martial court and give the impression we are taking

the UN, Kofi Annan, humanitarian organizations, clerics, the Pope, journalists... you name it - we've lost faith in it. I finally worked up enough courage to watch it and it has lived up to my worst fears. Watching it was almost an invasive experience, because I felt like someone had crawled into my mind and brought my nightmares to life. Image after image of men, women and children so burnt and scarred that the only way you could tell the males apart from the females, and the children apart from the adults, was by the clothes they are wearing... the clothes which were eerily intact, like each corpse had been burnt to the bone, and then dressed up lovingly in their everyday attire - the polka dot nightgown with a lace collar... the baby girl in her cotton pajamas, little earrings dangling from little ears. Some of them look like they died almost peacefully, in their sleep... others look like they suffered a great deal: skin burnt completely black and falling away from scorched bones. I imagine what it must have been like for some of them. They were probably huddled in their houses: some of them - tens of thousands of them - couldn't leave the city. They didn't have transport or they simply didn't have a place to go. They sat in their homes, hoping that what people said about Americans was actually true: that in spite of their huge machines and endless weapons, they were human too. And then the rain of bombs would begin... the whoooooosh of the missiles as they fell and the sound of the explosion as it hit its target... and no matter how prepared you think you are for that explosion: it always makes you flinch. I imagine their children covering their ears and some of them crying, trying to cover up the

immediate action to get rid of the bad eggs [...]. This is the only way we can alleviate public pressure".

mechanical sounds of war with their more human wails. I imagine that as the tanks got closer, and the planes got lower, the fear increased, and parents searched each other's faces for a solution, for a way out of the horror. Some of them probably decided to wait it out in their homes, and others must have been desperate to get out, fearing the rain of concrete and steel and thinking their chances were better in the open air, than confined in the homes that could at any moment turn into their tombs. That's what we were told before the Americans came: it's safer to be outside of the house during an air strike than it is to be inside the house. Inside the house, a missile nearby would turn the windows into millions of little daggers and walls might come crashing down. In the garden, or even the street, you'd only have to worry about shrapnel and debris if the bomb was very close; but what were the chances of that? That was before 2003... and certainly before Fallujah. That was before men, women and children left their homes only to be engulfed in a rain of fire. Last year I blogged about Fallujah and said: "There is talk of the use of cluster bombs and other forbidden weaponry." I was immediately attacked with a barrage of emails from Americans telling me I was a liar and that there was no proof and that there was no way Americans would ever do something so appalling! I wonder how those same people justify this now. Are they shocked? Or do they tell themselves that Iraqis aren't people? Or are they simply in denial? The Pentagon spokesman recently said: "It's part of our conventional-weapons inventory and we use it like we use any other conventional weapon". This war has redefined 'conventional'. It has taken

atrocities to another level. Everything we learned before has become obsolete. 'Conventional' has become synonymous with horrifying. Conventional weapons are those that eat away the skin in a white blaze; conventional interrogation methods are like those practiced in Abu Ghraib and other occupation prisons... Quite simply... conventional terror.

Waco, Texas, November 19

Marc Ellis

A few days ago the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Among many others, Condoleezza Rice and Ariel Sharon attended the commemoration. Several days before Hillary Clinton was pictured in the New York Times touring an area where the Wall is being built. She commented that all countries must provide for the security of their citizens. When queried why the Wall was on Palestinian land in the West Bank she declined comment. Such is the liberal voice on the issue. [...] Arendt: the 19th century and early 20th century saw the emancipation of the 'exceptional' Jews- Jewish businessmen aligned with the burgeoning capitalist economies; Jewish radicals aligned with Communist and Socialist movements. Both groups grew out of the Jewish situation, fought to be free of it. They also needed the mass of Jews, seen as backward by the powers-to-be, as the backdrop for their exceptionality. In the mid-20th century this arrangement fell apart when the exceptional and the backward were swept away. The problem according to Arendt: being the exception and benefiting from that precluded the fight for political rights for all

November 18. Another fishing boat with about 200 African emigrants on board shipwrecks in Sicily; five of them die. Since 1996 there have been 6356 proven cases of emigrants who died in the Mediterranean sea as they were trying to reach Europe, but according to several estimates the figure is much higher: between 10,000 and 20,000.

Jews. Hence Zionism as a political program of emancipation. Yet Arendt demurred from state Zionism feeling that it was a false political empowerment - for some Jews and not all - and against the backdrop of depriving others of their political rights. [...]

Waco, Texas, November 22

Marc Ellis

[...] The war in Iraq continues and now with the American body count beyond 2000 dead the debate heats up. Congressman Murtha, a defense hawk, has now come out against the war - immediate withdrawal he demands - and the charges of cowardice and patriotism are traded as barbs. The dead and wounded increase on all sides; the fallout will be with us for years. Why didn't the Democrats really take a stand against the war before the war? They plead ignorance and false intelligence but they had to know that the charges of Iraq's connection with September 11 were false. They also knew that there were no weapons of mass destruction to be found or if they were they had to know they were primitive and localized.

What is the difference between that 'ignorance' and Hillary Clinton's endorsement of the Wall built by Israel in the West Bank? Political calculation at the expense of others. Blindness for political advantage. I wonder if these politicians have any self-respect or if they think that even their admirers respect them. [...]

Date very much ingrained in my mind. Kennedy assassination. Dallas 1963. Even the name of the

November 19, from "La Repubblica": about 100,000 people in Niger live in bondage, but, as Jead Lieby, head of UNICEF in the capital Niamey, says, "the traffic of manpower involves one million and a half people out of a population of 11 million". While Niger seems to be the crossroads of such trade, its victims also come "from Mali, Chad, Sudan, and end up serving in rich people's homes in Abu Dhabi, Tunis, Riyadh, Rabat and Casablanca". They work up to 18 hours a day earning, in some cases, as little as two euros (2.42 USD) a month.

city invokes his death and, living just an hour or so away I still steer clear.

Waco, Texas, November 24

Marc Ellis

Thanksgiving day. Never a big holiday in my youth or for me now. Still it's nice to be home - the weather a bit cooler. And time to prepare for my travel to Italy - Pax Christi sponsored conference on the Abrahamic faiths. I always resist this nomenclature. Is Abraham our common ancestor? Seems a way to recover innocence of religious traditions complicit in atrocity. Recover the before as way of distancing us from the after. Why don't we just move ahead? Fear of losing our identity but then what is our identity doing for us? Stuck in being Jewish, being Christian, being Muslim. Yet upon investigation, a little probing, what do we find? Void.

Sharon has dissolved the Knesset and new elections are likely in March. At the final cabinet meeting of his government Sharon spoke directly to his old adversary, now partner, Shimon Peres, that their work was not yet complete. Sharon, with Peres, wants to draw the final borders of Israel - his lifetime goal at 77 years of age within his grasp. Peres as partner? Of course though he was always seen, at least in Europe and America, as polar opposite to Sharon, it turns out that they have been in cahoots their entire career. Same vision - different rhetoric. Fortify Israel, expand it, dismantle Palestinian national aspirations, plead the case of Israel as innocent. Job well done, mission accomplished.

I remember the roiling angry debates in the 1980s and 1990s - shouting matches really - when I said that the vision of Rabin and Peres was no different

November 20. In view of the coming political elections, which will take place on March 28, the Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon leaves the Likud, which he contributed to found, in order to create a new party, Kadima (Ahead). In the days that follow former Labour leader Shimon Peres announces his withdrawal from the Labour Party to support Kadima "from the outside", claiming he absolutely agrees with their program.

than that of Begin, Shamir, Sharon and Netanyahu. Liar!!! they exclaimed. Yet the lie is now enfolded in history as facts on the ground. [...]

Baghdad, November 25

R.

We woke up yesterday morning to this news: Sunni tribal leader and his sons shot dead. “Gunmen in Iraqi army uniforms shot dead an aging Sunni tribal leader and three of his sons in their beds on Wednesday, relatives said...” Except when you read it on the internet, it’s nothing like seeing scenes of it on television. They showed the corpses and the family members - an elderly woman wailing and clawing at her face and hair and screaming that soldiers from the Ministry of Interior had killed her sons. They shot them in front of their mother, wives and children... Even when they slaughter sheep, they take them away from the fold so that the other sheep aren’t terrorized by the scene. In war, you think the unthinkable. You imagine the unimaginable. When you can’t get to sleep at night, your mind wanders to cover various possibilities. Trying to guess and determine the future of a war-torn nation is nearly impossible, so your mind focuses on the more tangible - friends... Near and distant relations. I think that during these last two and a half years, every single Iraqi inside of Iraq has considered the possibility of losing one or more people in the family. I try to imagine losing the people I love most in the world - whether it’s the possibility of having them buried under the rubble... or the possibility of having them brutally murdered by extremists... or blown to bits by a car bomb... or abducted for ransom... or brutally shot at a checkpoint. All disturbing possibili-

November 23. About ten days ago, following an explosion inside a petrochemical plant in Jilin, China a great amount of benzene pours into the Songhua river forming an almost 45-mile-long slick. The river feeds the water supply of many towns and of Harbin, which has a population of 4 million inhabitants and is situated about 235 miles below Jilin. After nine days’ silence, yesterday authorities discontinued the supply of drinkable water due to “maintenance work”. Only today they have admitted the existence of the toxic patch.

ties. I try to imagine what would happen to me, personally, should this occur. How long would it take for the need for revenge to settle in? How long would it take to be recruited by someone who looks for people who have nothing to lose? People who lost it all to one blow. What I think the world doesn't understand is that people don't become suicide bombers because - like the world is told - they get seventy or however many virgins in paradise. People become suicide bombers because it is a vengeful end to a life no longer worth living - a life probably violently stripped of its humanity by a local terrorist - or a foreign soldier. I hate suicide bombers. I hate the way my heart beats chaotically every time I pass by a suspicious-looking car - and every car looks suspicious these days. I hate the way Sunni mosques and Shia mosques are being targeted right and left. I hate seeing the bodies pile up in hospitals, teeth clenched in pain, wailing men and women... But I completely understand how people get there. One victim was holding his daughter. "The gunmen told the girl to move then shot the father" said a relative. Would anyone be surprised if the abovementioned daughter grew up with a hate so vicious and a need for revenge so large, it dominated everything else in her life? Or three days ago when American and Iraqi troops fired at a family traveling from one city to another, killing five members of the family. "They are all children. They are not terrorists" shouted one relative. "Look at the children" he said as a morgue official carried a small dead child into a refrigeration room. Who needs Al-Qaeda to recruit 'terrorists' when you have Da'awa [Islamic party], SCIRI [The Supreme Council for the Islamic Revo-

lution in Iraq] and an American occupation? The Iraqi Ministry of Interior is denying it all, of course. Just like they've been denying the whole Jadriya torture house incident and all of their other assassinations and killing sprees. They've gone so far as to claim that the Americans are lying about the Jadriya torture house. In the last three weeks, at least six different prominent doctors/professors have been assassinated. Some of them were Shia and some of them were Sunni - some were former Ba'athists and others weren't. The only thing they have in common is the fact that each of them played a prominent role in Iraqi universities prior to the war: Dr. Haykal Al-Musawi, Dr. Ra'ad Al-Mawla (biologist), Dr. Sa'ad Al-Ansari, Dr. Mustafa Al-Heeti (pediatrician), Dr. Amir Al-Khazraji, and Dr. Mohammed Al-Jaza'eri (surgeon). I don't know the details of all the slayings. I knew Dr. Ra'ad Al-Mawla - he was a former professor and department head in the science college of Baghdad University - Shia. He was a quiet man - a gentleman one could always approach with a problem. He was gunned down in his office, off campus. What a terrible loss. Another professor killed earlier this month was the head of the pharmacy college. He had problems with Da'awa students earlier in the year. After Ja'afari [interim Prime Minister, leading exponent of Da'awa] et al. won in the elections, their followers in the college wanted to have a celebration in the college. Sensing it would lead to trouble, he wouldn't allow any festivities besides the usual banners. He told them it was a college for studying and learning and to leave politics out of it. Some students threatened him - there were minor clashes in the college. He was killed around a week ago -

maybe more. Whoever is behind the assassinations, Iraq is quickly losing its educated people. More and more doctors and professors are moving to leave the country. The problem with this situation is not just major brain drain - it's the fact that this diminishing educated class is also Iraq's secular class...

Rome, November 26

Lucianna Argentino

Today was my last day of work at the supermarket - at checkout counter number three. The day was filled with goodbyes and emotion, on my part and on the part of some customers, sorry on the one hand and happy for me on the other... I too felt good about myself, and even a little worried about my usual silly uncertainties and fears that are fortunately not stronger than the joy I feel. I can say that I've been waiting for this moment for eleven years, since I didn't choose the job in the supermarket, but I had to accept it because I urgently needed to become economically independent. I still remember the tears I shed for several evenings on the way home, and it was useless for me to repeat to myself that I had been lucky to find the job, because it just didn't go down well. I felt like a fish out of water and I have to say that I went through all those years as if I were holding my breath. Anyway, Silvia's tears made me feel bad this evening when she hugged me and dashed away. On the other hand, the words of Sara, a former colleague just over twenty, demoralised me. Commenting the fact that I'll be working in a bookshop, she said that books aren't for her because, "After three lines I fall

asleep”. So, as I stepped out of the emergency exit for the last time, from where we staff members usually leave, I felt a deep sense of liberation, and even if the sky was covered with clouds and it was raining, I felt that Dante’s words were mine and I repeated them to myself like a short prayer: “And we came out once more to see the stars”.

Milan, Italy, November 27

Germana Pisa

I hope my Diana makes it to her 20th birthday, on December 8. Twenty years is really old for a little dog, but she’s very lively, courageous and intelligent and full of initiative. Sure, now she is looking tired - more so every day - and she sleeps nearly all the time; she doesn’t complain, but certainly things are an effort. She eats and drinks slowly - very slowly, and since she’s been almost unable to see she hasn’t wanted to go out. She has more or less stopped barking: not that she can’t do it any more, but she is saving her strength. The proof of this is that if she finds herself in difficulty she barks to ask for help, like the day before yesterday for example, when she was locked out on the balcony in the cold. Or last night, when her feet got caught up in the radio cord.

This summer she fell from the first-floor balcony, a leap of five or six metres. She’s always had a habit of walking along edges - edge of the road, edges of ravines - and in this case she was walking on the edge of the balcony; we were at the beach and on that part of the balcony there was no protection. She survived without anything being broken; for two days she was crushed, then on the third she

November 27. Due to an explosion inside a coal mine in Dongfeng, China, over 135 miners die. Every year 6000 deaths occur inside Chinese mines.

started testing the ground around her, taking a few small steps, and when she saw she wasn't falling any more, she charged ahead and it was as if nothing had ever happened to her. She was normal again; yes, normal, the old Diana, the one that watched you from afar and came to greet you every now and then with a delicate touch of her nose on your leg - the Diana who is ageing slowly, taking leave of life, it seems to me, slowly. Inexorably. Yes, inexorably.

Milan, Italy, November 29

Germana Pisa

A few hours ago, Diana went into the deep sleep we sink into when we enter a new dimension halfway between life and death. Those who knew her can confirm how likeable she was, full of energy and with so much love to give, and now I'm feeling the whole burden on my shoulders. There's a big silence all around. I'm searching for words. The most vivid memory, and the one will stay with me, is one of the last. Three nights ago she came to me and let me stroke her, but only until I think perhaps she noticed a pang of grief in me: then she pulled away. She did something else too: she slept on her bed close to me. For days she had been hiding under the bed or in a corner somewhere, perhaps due to some premonition. This is the way animals behave when they sense their end is near. I feel a tug at my heartstrings.

Waco, Texas, November 29

Marc Ellis

[...] Reports and commentary on the upcoming *November 30: the "Los*

Israel elections continue. Another round of hope? Uri Avnery, the now old but persistent peacenik, thinks about the 'earthquake' that has just occurred - Sharon leaving the Likud party he founded and founding another one, plus the new Labor leadership of Peretz. Avnery argues that if the election is run on security Sharon, or even Netanyahu, has the edge. But if Peretz sticks to economic development and peace with the Palestinians as the path to that development, the election might get interesting. What is interesting, I mean politically, that can have results that are meaningful? The most we can hope for is some amelioration of the situation for Palestinians and some release among Israelis from fear. In daily life this is a lot and should not be minimized. Still the future looms large. If some kind of stability and livability emerges over the next years then the subverting of injustice may begin. In general a kind of civil rights movement across the contours of the land, even if ostensibly divided into two unequal states. It could begin - it may have already begun - in my lifetime. [...]

Angeles Times” has disclosed that, in order to improve the image of the USA mission in Iraq, the

American armed forces secretly pay some Iraqi newspapers to publish articles which are in fact written by a special task force of theirs, as if they were written by independent journalists. The high command of the USA occupation troops in Iraq has confirmed this. On the other hand, some time ago, “La Repubblica” dated December 4 recalls, even in the United States “a TV journalist confessed to having taken 250,000 dollars from the government to support it and many local TV stations admitted to having broadcast reports which had in fact been arranged and packaged directly by the White House”.

Waco, Texas, December 1

Marc Ellis

[...] Now preparing for the last day of class - Jewish Philosophy. Strange the last day of class - a conversation that ends and does not end - it's just that it won't be continued in the same way.

December 1. It is “World AIDS Day”. According to the latest research by WHO-UNAIDS, there are over 40 million HIV-positive people in the world, twice as many as in 1995, and almost 26 million of them are in Africa. In order to fight the disease, the new pope, Benedict XVI, claims, “we need abstinence, promotion of fidelity

Of course I told them that we were not going anywhere, that there was no destination, that there wasn't any place to arrive. “The last time you heard the Sermon on the Mount / The last radio playing.” [Bob Dylan]

In a sense the end of life is like the last day of class,

a conversation that could go on endlessly and does go on in other venues comes to an end - in mid-sentence. No matter how old - in mid-sentence. [...]

Does this make life absurd? In a way, yes. Meaningless, in a way, perhaps. Is it less so if I assert that nevertheless life is wonderful or that my belief in God or Jesus guarantees that life is not absurd or meaningless? [...]

I might just break off the class in mid-sentence, begin reading and end before the end which is not an end anyway.

Would that be nihilism, saying that there is no end? Or is this a different way of suggesting eternity? [...]

*promotion of fidelity
within marriage, and the
importance of family life".*

Baghdad, December 5

R.

I didn't get to see the beginning of the [Saddam Hussein's] trial today. We were gathered in the kitchen after a brief rodent scare, trying to determine where the mouse had come from when I was attracted by the sound of yelling coming from the living room.

A cousin was standing in front of the television adjusting the volume and there was a lot of bel-lowing coming from the court. That was nearly the beginning; the defense lawyers were pulling out of the trial because apparently, Ramsey Clark [the former US attorney general had joined Saddam Hussein's defense team] wasn't allowed to speak in English - something to do with the sovereignty of the court or trial and the impropriety of speaking in a foreign language (slightly ironic considering the whole country is under foreign occupation). The lawyers were back later - although I didn't see that

December. In Europe and the United States there is a stream of disclosures regarding the network of "secret prisons" situated in Europe and used by the CIA to interrogate suspects of terrorism, and regarding flights performed by CIA aeroplanes to transfer suspects of terrorism to countries where they could be interrogated without any restrictions or controls, after having kidnapped them. In Germany alone, as disclosed by the Deutsche Flugsicherung, the German authority for the control of air traffic security, there were 453 flights.

either.

I really began watching when they brought on the first witness, who was also the first plaintiff. He talked about the whole Dujail situation and his account was emotional and detailed. [Dujail is a small town north of Baghdad, where an unsuccessful assassination attempt was staged against Saddam Hussein on July 8, 1982. As reprisal, 143 of the town's inhabitants were killed, 1,500 people were incarcerated and tortured, while other residents were sent to desert camps.] The details were intriguing considering he was only 15 years old at the time. The problem with his whole account is that so much of it is hearsay. He heard from someone that something happened to someone else, etc. Now, I'm not a lawyer, but I'm a fan of "The Practice" and if watching Dylan McDermott has taught me anything, it's that hearsay is not acceptable evidence.

The second witness was more to the point but he was ten when everything happened and that didn't help his case. In the end, when the judge asked him who he was making a complaint against, he said he wasn't making a complaint against anyone. Then he changed his mind and said he was complaining against one of the accused... Then he added his complaint was against anyone convicted of the crime... And finally it was a complaint against "All Ba'athists at the time".

Couldn't they find more credible witnesses? They were fifteen and ten at the time... it just doesn't make sense.

At one point, the defense lawyers wanted to leave the trial yet again because apparently some security guard or police officer was threatening them from

afar - making threatening gestures, etc. The judge requested that he be pulled out of the court (the security person), but not before hell broke loose in the court. Saddam began yelling something, the defense lawyers were making accusations and Barazan [Saddam Hussein's half brother and co-defendant, former leader of the Iraqi secret service, Mukhabarat] got up and began shouting at the person we couldn't see. The court was a mess. There was a lot of yelling, screaming, sermonising, ranting, accusing, etc. I felt bad for the judge. He really seemed to be trying hard to control the situation, but everyone kept interrupting him, and giving him orders. He's polite and patient, he'd make a good divorce judge, but I don't think he's strong enough for the court. He just doesn't have the power to keep the court in its place.

It wasn't really like a trial. It reminded me of what we call a 'fassil', which is what tribal sheikhs arrange when two tribes are out of sorts with one another. The heads of the tribes are brought together along with the principal family members involved in the rift and after some yelling, accusations, and angry words, they try to sort things out. That's what it felt like today. They kept interrupting each other and there was even some spitting at one point... It was both frustrating and embarrassing, and very unprofessional. One thing that struck me about what the witnesses were saying: after the assassination attempt in Dujail, so much of what later unfolded is exactly what is happening now in parts of Iraq. They talked about how a complete orchard was demolished because the Mukhabarat thought people were hiding there and because they thought someone had tried to shoot Saddam from

that area. That was like last year when the Americans razed orchards in Diyala because they believed insurgents were hiding there. Then they talked about the mass detentions - men, women and children - and it's almost as if they are describing present-day Ramadi or Fallujah. The descriptions of cramped detention spaces and torture are almost exactly the testimonies of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, etc. It makes one wonder when Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney, and the rest will have their day, as the accused, in court.

Waco, Texas, December 9

Marc Ellis

Reports that the president of Iran has struck again, this time suggesting that Israel be moved to Europe and that the support of the European nations for the formation of Israel after the Holocaust was based on the presumption that the Holocaust in fact occurred, a fact that he seems to deny. Of course, the response of the Israeli government was predictable and included their call to the West that Iran be denied the capability to develop nuclear weapons. [...]

Jews as symbols in the West. Palestinians as symbols in the East. Symbol = dislocation, destruction and death. [...]

A lighter note: the 25th anniversary of the death of John Lennon. The Beatles, especially their journey years from *Sargent Peppers* on, very influential in my life.

Rome, December 13

Lucianna Argentino

I would have liked to talk about my new job in the

bookshop and how it seemed impossible that they would be able to open it on December 3, since the workmen were still working the evening before, while we were arranging the books on the shelves... I would have liked to tell how amazed I was seeing the changes taking place in those 1300 square metres of space day after day, and how utterly happy I was until my father was admitted to hospital with cerebral ischemia that had paralysed the left part of his body. The doctors said that it was fairly extensive, but that it was too early for a precise and definitive diagnosis. I feel so afraid and so distressed: to see a man like him, who was still very active at the age of seventy-seven, even too active perhaps, in that condition, was hard. I have no difficulty admitting that Dad was and is the most important man in my life. I have always been able to count on him. He has always been close in difficult times and I love him so much. I hope with all my heart that he finds the strength to react and to give himself and us the chance to help him beat his illness and be his old self again. I am hopeful, because he is mentally lucid. He says he misses his grandchildren a lot. Images of him as I hope to see him again have been coming back to my mind too the last few days, such as my little Arianna rushing to meet him in the morning, when he would come to pick us up to take her to school and me to work. I also think of the talks in the car the last few days, when he drove me to the bookshop and came to pick me up. I still have the last SMS he sent me the evening before it happened: "It's cold, let someone pick you up". As a matter of fact, he hadn't been feeling well for several days. I feel half a person. Dad was a part of me, an extension of me. He would help me when I couldn't manage,

even in simple everyday chores like paying bills, registered letters, photocopies, but there's always a solution for these things, not for his absence.

Waco, Texas, December 13

Marc Ellis

[...] In America it's about Christmas and whether Christians have lost their nerve when they wish people to have happy holidays rather than a happy Christmas. In the local paper a complaint from a reader that the big department stores with headquarters in the "East" (read New York and Jewish) are skewing Southern and Christian culture.

Also again a big debate, now locally, about certain churches closing for Christmas day and others charging that closing buys into the secularization of the culture. After all it is the 'Lord's' day and those who argue for family time are really hoping for a big meal and presents around the Christmas tree.

The same day a welcome back at our university basketball facility for thousands of troops from Iraq. The governor of Texas says that their service has changed the world. Romantic sentiments to be sure. I don't know what he believes to be true and surely there was nothing else he could say.

Interesting that in all these stories the larger questions remain unasked - what Christmas really means, the Iraq war, Israel as a mighty warrior, America as the defender (?) of freedom. [...]

Skepticism toward religious claims is not itself irreligious. Bringing religion down to earth gives us the space to search out what it means to be human - in all its messiness. That is where meaning becomes a struggle, must be struggled for.

Eternity is too neat and tidy, like a Christmas gift under the tree. Jews tend to ask about how the tree

December 12, from "La Repubblica": in Dongzhou, China, a power company obtains from local managers of the Communist Party permission to build a power plant on farmland cultivated by farmers who are offered "miserly" compensation. The farmers present authorities with their protests by sending to the main city some delegates who are arrested. Last December 6 police arrived in the village to carry out other arrests and the farmers organized an opposition sit-in. At ten o'clock in the evening, anti-riot military troops reinforcements arrive, who start shooting at eye-level. According to the village inhabitants, 20 people die.

December 14. While speaking in one of the poorest and backward cities in southeast Iran, Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadijeh defined the Holocaust "a legend known as the massacre of the Jews".

became a symbol for Christmas, where it came from, how the date of Jesus' birth is known, whether the story of his birth, and life, is accurate, whether the accounts of his last years are mythic or real, and on and on and on.

Endless and too much analysis can move skepticism to cynicism. Cynicism the other side of eternity systems?

Spielberg's *Munich*, the story of the Israeli athletes murdered during the Olympics in 1972 and the revenge killings by Israel of the Palestinians involved, just being released. Evidently, Spielberg sees his account as documenting the cycle of violence that ends up going nowhere. Also, the leader of the Israeli hit-squad seems to lose faith in revenge and ultimately in Zionism and Israel itself. At least according to the movie. Need to find out if this is the case and, if it is, why. Sure to be controversial on all sides. [...]

Don't want to see the movie though I might have to if useful for my class on Modern Judaism. Holocaust films the same way: I only see them for others. Why? The violence is too much and movies seem to trivialize violence. Or, even though I write about it, I don't like to see violence depicted in a powerful/visual way. [...]

Baghdad, December 15

R.

Elections have been all we hear about for the last ten days at least. The posters are everywhere in Baghdad. There are dozens of parties running for elections, but there are about four or five 'lists' which stand out from the rest. *National Iraqi* (731): Avad Allawi's list which now includes some other

*December 15.
Parliamentary elections in
Iraq: 11 million out of 15
million people eligible to
vote take part. The party
with the most votes, over
5 million, is the Unified*

Ayad Allawi's list, which now includes some other prominent puppets including Adnan Al-Pachachi, Ghazi Al-Yawir, Safiya Al-Suhail, etc. Ayad Allawi is a secular Shia, CIA-affiliated, ex-Ba'athist. *Unified Iraqi Coalition List* (555): Hakim, Ja'afari and various other pro-Iran fundamentalists, in addition to Sadrist [followers of Moqtada al-Sadr]. *Kurdistani Gathering* (730): Barazani, Talbani and a few other parties. *Iraqi Front for National Dialogue* (667): mainly Sunni, secular list; includes the Iraqi Christian Democratic Party and is headed by Salih Al-Mutlag. *Iraqi Alliance Front* (618): mainly Sunni Islamic parties. We've been flooded with election propaganda this last week. Every Iraqi channel you turn to is showing one candidate or another. Allawi, Hakim and a handful of others dominate the rest though. No one is bothering much with the other lists because quite frankly, no one hears of them that often. Allawi's face is everywhere, as is Hakim's turbaned head. It's disconcerting to scan a seemingly innocent wall and have a row of identical Hakims smiling tightly down on you. The last press conference I watched of Hakim was a few days ago. He was warning his followers of electoral fraud, which is slightly ironic considering his group has been accused of all sorts of fraud this last year. The audience was what caught my interest. The women were sitting on one side of the audience and the men were sitting on the other side, the sexes separated by a narrow aisle. The women all wore black *abbayas* and headscarves. It could have been a scene out of Teheran. Some of Allawi's campaign posters show himself and Safiya Al-Suhail. I can only guess Safiya being used in his campaign posters is meant as a gesture to Iraqi women who have felt more oppressed than

Iraqi Coalition List, followed by the Kurdistan Gathering (2,642,000

votes), the *Iraqi Alliance Front* (1,840,216 votes), the *National Iraqi* (977,325 votes) and the *Iraqi Front for National Dialogue* (499,963).

campaign posters is meant as a gesture to Iraqi women who have felt more oppressed this year than ever. The problem is that if there's one woman Iraqi females can't relate to, it's Safiya Suhail. She's the daughter of some tribal leader who was assassinated abroad in the eighties or seventies, I'm not sure. She was raised in Lebanon and when she's on TV she comes across as arrogant, huffy and awkward with her Iraqi accent tainted with the Lebanese dialect.

It's a poster war. One day, you see the posters of Allawi, featuring Safiya Suhail, the next day, Allawi's big face is covered with pictures of Hakim and Sistani. Allawi's supporters have been complaining that Hakim's supporters were sabotaging campaign posters. Even SMS messages are all about voting lately. (Several rather vulgar jokes about list 555 - I can't go into it on the blog, but Iraqis know what I'm talking about). Secular nationalists are leaning towards Salih Al-Mutlag (of list 667) who is seen as less of a puppet than the rest. After all, he is the only heading one of the more popular electoral lists who wasn't blessed by the American army and Bremer when Iraq was invaded in 2003. He supports armed resistance (but not terrorism) and he has a group of prominent anti-occupation nationalists backing him. There's talk that after elections, his list will support Allawi to strengthen the secular movement. The incident of the day yesterday was news of a tanker or truck that had been caught in the town of Wassit full of fake voting ballots from Iran. There is also news that voting centers haven't been properly equipped in several Sunni provinces. There was a skirmish between Iraqi National Guard and the electoral

December 14. Yesterday, the sixth summit of the WTO, the World Trade Organization, opened in Hong Kong. Poor countries are asking rich ones to abolish farming subsidies that stop their products from entering the industrialized world's markets. "La Repubblica" provides some figures: 80% of European financial support goes to 20% of the richest farms; cotton produced in the USA (where 0.9% of the population works in agriculture) receives so many subsidies that it is sold at a lower price than cotton from Bangladesh (where 84% are farmers); Europeans and Americans spend 11 billion dollars a year to provide financial support for butter, more than the whole GDP of Uganda. The European commissioner for trade, English Peter Mandelson, has declared that "Europe has not come to the summit empty-handed", but has offered the poorest countries one billion euros (1,212,670,000 USD) as aid; that's half as much as Brussels pays out as subsidies to olive oil producers only every year. The summit ends with rich countries committing

committee to preside over elections in Salah Al-Din. More people are going to vote this time around - not because Iraqis suddenly believe in American-imposed democracy under occupation, but because the situation this last year has been intolerable. Hakim and Ja'affari and their minions have managed to botch things up so badly, Allawi is actually looking acceptable in the eyes of many. I still can't stand him. Allawi is still an American puppet. His campaign posters, and the horrors of the last year, haven't changed that. People haven't forgotten his culpability in the whole Fallujah debacle. For some Iraqis, however, he's preferable to Hakim and Ja'affari after a year of detentions, abductions, assassinations and secret torture prisons. There's a saying in Iraq which people are using right and left lately, and that I've used before in the blog, *Ili ishuf il mout, yirdha bil iskhuna*, "He who sees death, is content with a fever". Allawi et al. seem to be the fever these days...

themselves to abolish those subsidies in 2013.

Florida, December 18

Marc Ellis

Arrival in Cape Canaveral early in the morning yesterday. Drove straight through - about 20 hours. Stopping on the interstate - fast food dining and a sense of the decline of culture, and of course the general impoverishment of America. Unhealthy food, unhealthy bodies. In general I am protected from much of this.

We traveled around New Orleans; one can still see some of the devastation of the various hurricanes. Again I am always struck by the poverty of these areas and now more than ever. America as an illu-

December 14. The annual report on the situation of childhood round the world has been presented by UNICEF. It refers that over 50 million children, one third of those being born every year, are not registered at birth, therefore they have no access to basic services such as education and health, and are more likely to be completely unprotected

sion, one that I am living within.

The Cape is much the same, with little change since my childhood. More affluence - the proximity of Orlando is responsible for this; the boom and bust cycles associated with the space industry is not as important as it once was. When I was growing up in the 1950s the Orlando area was filled with orange groves. Now Disneyworld reigns supreme. Driving through the Gulf Coast into Pensacola and down through Orlando I am also reminded of the racism of the South in my childhood. I am not sure how much has changed.

This evening while eating at a pizzeria the television news scrawl reported that Ariel Sharon had a "minor" stroke. Most of this news is managed so I will need to wait and see what the real story is, but certainly earthshaking if he in any way is removed from the political scene. Another illusion: the sense of the inevitable, as if everything will go on the way it is moving. The surprise - an early death, a heart ailment during the middle of the campaign, a scandal that erupts out of nowhere - can change everything, or so it seems. More likely things will remain more or less the same. Still I must remain open to an unexpected opening.

Strange, the change of geography, here where I stay only blocks from the sea, is itself an opening. Yet I ask myself - an opening to what? It is not so much an attempt to leave everything behind, as if this can be done.

The return to the geography of my childhood is part of this journey. Is this an illusion? The first few days at least are days of transition between there and here. Difficult days at close quarters; everyone is feeling their way. Then a sense of regularity is established, a new pace.

when faced with wars, parents' deaths, sexual and work exploitation. 55% of children born in poor countries are not registered

(with peaks of 62% in sub-Saharan Africa, of 70% in Southern Asia and of 93% in extremely poor countries such as Bangladesh and Afghanistan). The report also focuses on orphans (143 million in poor countries) and on children who are forced to precociously take on adult roles, an expression that refers to phenomena such as precocious marriage (80 million girls get married before they are eighteen), child labour (171 million children work under risky conditions), participation in wars as fighters or with auxiliary roles (hundreds of thousands children are involved). One million children are convicted in prison, two million are victims of sexual exploitation, over a million every year end up in the hands of dealers in human beings .

No television or radio in our place, a decision I made years ago. And no missing them either. I read the morning papers, take walks on the beach, frequent the public library, ride my bike.

The wars over Munich accelerate with Leon Wieseltier in the “New Republic” lambasting Spielberg for equating Israeli (read Jewish) life with Palestinian life. Clearly a mistake of judgment and possibly a crime. Reading excerpts of the review, my own sense is that Wieseltier would have Spielberg tried in a law court if he could; in the court of public opinion for sure. Maybe we should have Spielberg spend time in jail? There he would have time to reflect on his crime and perhaps repent. [...]

God help us! Yes a sign of weakness. Appealing to God when the loss here on earth is assured.

Florida, December 19

Marc Ellis

[...] Word, too, that Spielberg has hired one of Sharon’s lieutenants to publicize his new film. Money and influence wins out over principles. Always?

December 16. Municipal elections in the West Bank: except for Ramallah, Hamas win everywhere.

I remember how surprised I was when I learned that the financing of the first Palestinian uprising often went through Israeli hands. The government suppressed the Uprising, describing it as a threat to its national security. Yet money was also to be made and one of the few ways the Palestinians from outside (Tunis) could funnel money inside was through Israeli bank accounts. Of course, the Israelis who helped the money through received a hefty profit. [...]

December 18. Elections in Bolivia. The new president is Evo Morales, an Aymara Indian, a former trade unionist for cocaine farmers and an exponent of the MAS, Movimiento Al Socialismo (Movement Towards Socialism).

The naiveté runs deep even with seasoned critics

of Israeli policies. I remember when I first read of the rapes that were committed by the Jewish forces in 1948 and later by the Israeli army in war and during the occupation. On the one hand, I know that men rape in war. On the other hand, I never thought that Jewish men rape during war. A discrepancy that has no place in rational thought. It is a myth about Jewish innocence, a myth that I still, at some level, accept.

So Jews help finance their enemies; Jews rape in war. They also help prop up apartheid in South Africa, provide arms to dictatorships that suppress and murder dissenters, teach others how to torture and... The list is endless. And still a sense that Jews are different?

In *Munich* the then prime minister Golda Meir is quoted as saying: "Every civilization finds it necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values." Yes and every nation-state; every people and religion.

Usually the breach has to do with survival; at least survival is called upon in order to breach the highly held value the civilization is about to break. It turns out that usually 'survival' has to do with expansion and more power, a lust that seems to affect communities as much as persons. Should I expect any less (or more) from Jews and the state of Israel? In the end, the state of emergency that calls for suspension of the ethical is infinitely expandable, so that suspension is the wrong word. With nation-states - but is this also true for religion? - the norm is suspension. When these entities act ethically that is the suspension. [...]

Florida, December 27

Marc Ellis

This morning sunrise on the beach. The ocean is beautiful, with blue-green waters stretching to the horizon. The tourists have yet to arrive, in a week or so they will descend. The beach is almost empty. Cool and misty. Quiet.

Morning prayers with the sound of the waves coming to the shore.

Yesterday the anniversary of the Tsunami. The ocean gives and takes. This morning it gives solace, beauty, healing. [...]

For years, I have been photographing the wooden bridges that take you from the street to the beach. I continue to be fascinated with this sense of leaving one world and entering the next. The bridges are mostly fifteen to twenty feet in length, though some stretch for twenty yards or so, but as I approach each one on foot or bike I still have this sense of anticipation.

For a moment I am stranded between the two worlds; my back is to the street, to civilization, and I cannot yet see the beach, the world of nature. On foot or bike that natural world cannot be traversed or explored except for that tiny strip of beach. The vast ocean is before me; I can see to the horizon, but my mobility and power is limited. I cannot go to the horizon and there is no way that I can manipulate the ocean for my use.

I am surrounded by a profound quiet, yet the surf itself is loud - it is difficult to describe the sound. Smells of the ocean, even blocks away, permeate life. This other world is other-worldly. The bridge brings me to this world and then I leave the bridge behind; it disappears in sight and consciousness. What is happening that day - the waves, wind, and temperature - is. Where I am then - I am. Everything is reduced to the elements and my place

within them.

Then I return to the bridge, cross it and return to the more familiar world. The ocean is left behind. Can I take the ocean world back to my own? The war within the ocean world, for survival and dominance, is outside of me. There I am free. The war in my world is outside the ocean world; both are irrelevant to the other. Two kingdoms, one where grace is found, the other corrupt until the end of time? Or both corrupt within their own boundaries? [...]

Florida, December 29

Marc Ellis

Sharon has a hole in his heart; the reality/metaphor is simply too good to be true. Yes it is so on both levels, but no less for Jews in general, especially the high and mighty elite of our community.

“Bury Sharon and Arafat together” [see www.texansforpeace.org], yes, and create a large burial plot where the former prime ministers of Israel and leaders of the Palestinians will be reburied together and place a large notice in all the languages of the world, beginning with Hebrew and Arabic, that all future leaders of both sides will also share the same burial place. Perhaps we can have an international committee that oversees this area and determines where everyone will be placed, and who deserves to be side by side. [...]

December 30. Egyptian special forces in Cairo attack a city camp with 3000 refugees from the south of Sudan and from Darfur. They had camped in front of the premises of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to protest against its decision to temporarily stop issuing application papers to obtain political refugee status, after the peace treaty signed in Darfur. Twenty people, including two four-year-old children, are beaten or trodden on to death.

Florida, December 30

Marc Ellis

Leaving tomorrow to return to Waco. Feeling sad about leaving; the ocean and palm trees are part of me. Strange how childhood frames a person, the smells and sky colors are part of home, homecom-

ing. Leaving is part of the exile and returning to exile is particularly difficult.
Where is home really, for any of us moderns? [...]

Contributors and translators

Here

notes from the present

Lucianna Argentino was born in 1962 in Rome, where she lives. She has published several poetry collections.

pp. 28, 75

Johanna Bishop (icchiojo@tiscali.it) was born in Chicago in 1974, and lived in Pennsylvania and New York before moving to Tuscany in 1998. She translates from Italian into English. In this issue she has translated Bruno De Maria's *The Crack-Up*.

p. 8

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cover

Maddalena Chataignier was born in Milan in 1942, but has lived in France since 1967. She is member of an association which assists leukaemia patients and which is carrying out a campaign to sensitize hospital staff to the importance of 'accompanying' terminal patients in their last days.

p. 4

Brigitte Ciaramella (brigitte.ciaramella@fastweb.net.it) was born in 1966 and was brought up bilingual Italian/English. She is a Philosophy graduate and an EFL teacher, as well as a freelance translator with a special interest in literary works. In this issue

she has translated the texts by Paola Turrone, Andrea Inglese, Massimo Parizzi, and Marina Masenz's *The Davy Crockett Cap*. pp. 62, 63, 65, 66, 67, 77, 79, 80, 81, 83

Mariela De Marchi, 30, was born in Bolivia of an Italian father and a Bolivian mother. She lives in Camisano Vicentino, near Vicenza, Italy. She's a translator and sometimes a journalist. pp. 6, 25, 75

Bruno De Maria was born in Turin and lives in Milan. A psychoanalyst, he collaborates for several magazines. He has also published a novel. p. 8

Daniela Di Falco was born in Rome in 1961. She lives in the Castelli Romani area, where she works as a translator and teacher. p. 57

Marc H. Ellis was born in North Miami Beach, Florida, in 1952. He is University Professor of Jewish Studies and Director of the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University (Waco, Texas). He has authored fifteen books and edited five others, among them: *Israel and Palestine: Out of the Ashes: The Search for Jewish Identity in the Twenty-First Century*, Pluto Press, London-Sterling, Va., 2002; and *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: the Challenge of the Twenty-First Century*, 3rd expandeded., Baylor University Press, Waco, Tex., 2004. Ellis' many articles have been published in diverse American and international publications, including "International Herald Tribune", "Jordan Times", "Ha'aretz", and "Journal of Palestine Studies". His complete diary of the last few months, of which we are publishing extensive excerpts, can be read in <http://american-jewish.blogspot.com>. pp. 3, 7, 22, 28, 29, 31, 53, 59, 62, 90, 96, 97, 98, 104, 105, 109, 111, 115, 117, 118, 120

Maria Granati was born in Potenza Picena and lives in Modena, Italy. For many years a political militant in the Italian Communist Party, she has been elected to Parliament for three periods of legislature. She is now involved in cultural activities with associations that deal with adult education. Her diary page published here comes from *Intellettuale/Storia* (<http://vulgo.net/index.php>). p. 55

Andrea Inglese was born in 1967 in Turin, Italy, and lives in Paris. He has published a few poetry collections and an essay on the theory of the novel. pp. 62, 63, 66, 67, 77, 79

Marina Massenz was born in 1955 in Milan, Italy, where she lives. She's a therapist of psychomotricity, and is the author of several essays on this subject. She has also published a poetry collection. pp. 26, 83

Barbara McGilvray lives in Australia. For 35 years she has been translating from Italian into English and visiting Italy whenever possible. Here she has translated the texts by Maddalena Chataignier, Marina Massenz (September 11), Gianni Meazza, Daniela Di Falco, Maria Granati, Liliana Ugolini, Mariela De Marchi (November 11), Germana Pisa (November 2, 27, and 29), and Dionigi Serra's *I was Eighteen Years Old*. pp. 4, 26, 30, 55, 57, 60, 61, 67, 75, 103, 104

Gianni Meazza was born in Milan, where he lives, in 1938. He has always been involved in social, community and political activities in his neighbourhood, and in the movements against neoliberalism, for peace and for the protection of the environment. p. 30

Massimo Parizzi was born in 1950 in Milan, Italy, where he lives. A translator, he is the founder and editor of this magazine. p. 65

Germana Pisa was born in 1941 in Milan, Italy, where she lives. A housewife “with a lot of interests”, as she describes herself, she is actively involved in the Seattle movements.

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Mazin Qumsiyeh, associate professor of genetics and director of cytogenetic services at Yale University School of Medicine, is founder and president of the Holy Land Conservation Foundation and co-founder of Al-Awda, the Palestine Right to Return Coalition. He has recently published *Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human Rights and the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle*, Pluto Press, London-University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 2004. His text published here comes from “Northeast Magazine”, Hartford, November 7, 2002.

pp. 31, 32

R. “I am 26 years old, I’m a woman who lives in Baghdad. I have a degree in computer sciences but I currently work from the house because it is not very safe in other places. Before the war, I worked for a private computer company.” Her diary pages published here come from <http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com>.

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106, 112

Dionigi Serra, alias Nisio, was born in 1924 in Serra del Monte, where he lives, a small cluster of houses on the crest of one of the hills that divide Lombardy from Piedmont, in northern Italy. He has always been a farmer. His story was recorded on tape by Ferruccio Cartacci.

p. 67

Paola Turroni was born in 1971 in Monza, Italy. She holds theatre, cinema and communication workshops for children, parents, and teachers. She has published a volume of short stories, and several poetry collections.

pp. 80, 81

Liliana Ugolini was born in Florence, where she lives, in 1934. She has published a book of prose, and several poetry collections.

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Don Var Green (dv.green@wanadoo.fr) is a professional translator with a special interest in literary works. His working languages are English, Italian and French. Here, he has translated the texts by Germana Pisa (October 23), Lucianna Argentino, Mariela De Marchi (September 4, 11).

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102, 109

Subscription

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The cost of a **subscription** to 3 issues, either the Italian or English edition, is 25 Euros in Italy, 30 (\$36) in Europe and the Mediterranean area, 35 (\$42) in the rest of the world. However, since these prices are too high for many countries, you may ask for a **reduced-price subscription**. So far, readers from the United States (for whom we fixed the cost of a subscription at \$38) and from Argentina (\$30) have done so. You can subscribe by **credit card** providing us with its number and expiry date via fax or phone (0039-02-57406574); or you can send the money through a **postal money order** to ‘Here - notes from the present’, via Bastia 11, 20139 Milano, Italy; or pay by **bank transfer** on the following bank account registered in the name of ‘Qui - appunti dal presente’: national bank code (BBAN) V 05584 01624 00000025101; international bank code (IBAN) IT 03 V 05584 01624 00000025101. Please, remember to indicate your name, address, the object of payment and which edition you wish to receive. For further information, please call or send a fax to the number 0039-02-57406574, or write to massimoparizzi@alice.it.

Last issues

Number 10, “and suddenly it’s Beslan”, February 2005 - Foreword - 1-5 September 2004: diary pages from Italy (Massimo Parizzi, Adriano Accattino, Maria Granati, Marosia Castaldi, Mariela De Marchi, Marina Massenz, Germana Pisa), Croatia (Drazan Gunjaca), and Finland (Hanna Snellman) - **Children of the underground**, by M. Castaldi - **6-9 September:** from Italy (Lucianna Argentino, M. Castaldi, A. Accattino, M. Parizzi), and Argentina (Gladys Croxatto) - **Migrations**, by H. Snellman - **10-25 September:** from Argentina (G. Croxatto), Italy (A. Accattino, Giorgio Mascitelli, L. Argentino, M. Granati, M. Castaldi), and Palestine (Cris) - **An unknown warrior’s confession**, by D. Gunjaca - **30 September-20 October:** from Palestine (Cris, Letizia, Logan), Italy (M. Parizzi, G. Pisa, M. Castaldi, M. De Marchi, Andrea Arrighi), Argentina (G. Croxatto, Christian Grecco), and Finland (H. Snellman) - **Power and weakness**, by Franco Toscani - **Mirror**, by Stefano Guglielmin - **20-22 October:** from Palestine (Letizia) and Italy (M. Castaldi) - **Omnocracy**, by Roberto Taioli - **Michael Moore: soul orthopaedics**, by Andrea Inglese - **1 November-26 December:** from the United States (Svetlana Broz, Laura Zanetti, Keren Batiyov), Italy (M. De Marchi, M. Castaldi, Paola Turroni, L. Argentino, M. Parizzi), Palestine (Brett Cohen), and Finland (H. Snellman)

Number 11, “after the tsunami”, June 2005 - 26 December 2004-10 January 2005: diary pages from Italy (Marina Massenz, Lucianna Argentino, Mariela De Marchi, Maria Granati) - **Of the power to print**, by Massimo Parizzi - **10 January-10 February:** from India (Carol Faison), Palestine (Operation Dove, Logan), Italy (M. Granati, M. De Marchi, Maria Bastanzetti), the United States (Silvio Grignaschi, Gery Moyano), France (Andrea Inglese) - **The act of giving**, by Roberto Taioli - **10-27 February:** from Italy (Germana Pisa, M. De Marchi, M. Granati), and Palestine (Logan, Operation Dove) - **Here is the world**, by Jouni Inkala - **Poetry in the ‘time of destitution’**, by Franco Toscani - **1-6 March:** from France (Maddalena Chataignier), India (C. Faison), Italy (M. De Marchi, Paola Turroni), the United States (Benedetta Scardovi), Denmark (Flemming Dymman) - **Does the Left already know everything?**, by M. Parizzi - **9 March-8 April:** from Afghanistan (Graziella Longoni, Laura Quagliolo), Palestine (Julie, Operation Dove), Armenia (Stefano Guglielmin), Italy (G. Pisa), the United States (B. Scardovi, Keren Batiyov), France (M. Chataignier) - **April 9. On Deir Yassin and the Jewish Future. Remembering and resisting**, by Marc Ellis - **It took a long time**, by Tommy Tabermann - **11-28 April:** from Italy (P. Turroni, Donato Salzarulo), and Palestine (Logan)

Number 12, “pausing for reflection”, October 2005 - 15-30 May: diary pages from Italy (Germana Pisa, Marco Giovenale, Maria Granati, Lucianna Argentino), and Croatia (Drazan Gunjaca) - **Bloodied dog**, by Jáchym Topol - **Poetry and the present:** *Foreword*, by Massimo Parizzi; *The present of Capital and poetry in exodus*, by Ennio Abate; *Present in and of itself*, by Giorgio Mascitelli; *Poetry and the present*, by Lelio Scanavini - **9-27 June:** from Italy (L. Argentino, M. Granati), and Palestine (Dorothy Lal) - **On the Jewish Civil War and the New Prophetic**, by Marc Ellis; **Zionism versus Judaism!**, by Azzam Tamimi - **1-12 July:** from Italy (Paola Turroni, L. Argentino, Marina Massenz, M. Parizzi) - **From Indochina. Travel notes**, by M. Parizzi; **The traveller’s ego: upturns and downturns** by M. Massenz - **8-23 August:** from India (Carol Faison), and Italy (L. Argentino, M. Granati) - **Does the left already know everything?: Foreword**, by M. Parizzi; *What does the left already know?*, by Christian Grecco; *The politics of results*, by M. Parizzi; *The left that knows too much*, by G. Mascitelli - **August 24. The remaining 99.5%**, by Amira Hass; from the Israeli newspaper “Ha’aretz” - **24-25 August:** diary pages from Italy (Laura Zanetti, Alfredo Menghetti)

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