

Contents

<i>27-30 December 2008: diary pages from the United States (Laila El-Haddad), and Italy (Lidia Campagnano)</i>	5
The Pain of the Wronged World , by Elio Vittorini	11
<i>30 December 2008-3 January 2009: from Salvador (Maria Ofelia Zuniga), Iraq (“Sunshine”), the United States (Laila El-Haddad), and Israel (“Hope Man”)</i>	15
325 , by Sebastiano Buonamico	23
<i>3-7 January 2009: from Kosovo (Domenico Palazzi), Ecuador (Carla Badillo Coronado), the United States (Laila El-Haddad), and Salvador (Miguel Huezo Mixco)</i>	26
On the Shema and the Prophet Martyr , by Marc H. Ellis	32
<i>7-13 January 2009: from Italy (Lidia Campagnano, Gabriella Fusi), the United States (Laila El-Haddad), Iraq (“Sunshine”), and Israel (“Hope Man”)</i>	46
Spring 1938 , by Bertolt Brecht	53
<i>15-19 January 2009: from the United States (Laila El-Haddad), and Israel (Liza Rosenberg)</i>	53

from “War”, by Franco Buffoni 58

20 January-19 February 2009: from Palestine (Mazin Qumsiyeh), Iraq (“Sunshine”), Cuba (Yoani Sánchez), Gaza (“Peace Man”), and Salvador (María Tenorio) 59

La chéursa, by Raffaello Baldini 67

21 February-11 March 2009: from Iraq (“Sunshine”), Jerusalem (Rita Presepi), Palestine (Mazin Qumsiyeh), and Israel (“Hope Man”) 68

With the shepherds, by Laura Zanetti 77

12-25 March 2009: from Iraq (“Sunshine”), Italy (Massimo Parizzi), Salvador (Claudia Hernández and María Ofelia Zuniga), Jerusalem (“The New York Times”), and Palestine (Alice) 80

Polyphony of Nostalgia. Stories from Ecuadorian Migrants, by Carla Badillo Coronado 86

26 March 2009: from China (Hao Wu) 104

from “War”, by Franco Buffoni 106

Contributors and translators 109

Subscription 117

The news items in the right column were taken from “The New York Times”.

Cover by Sebastiano Buonamico

“Here-notes from the present” is written so that it can be read “as a novel”: from the beginning to the end in sequence. This is **an invitation and an exhortation** to the reader: many diary pages make little sense if not read immediately after the previous ones and before those that follow.

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: massimo.parizzi@alice.it.**

This issue was edited by Gabriella Fusi, Erica Golo, Bea Mahieu, Bruno Manelli, Marina Massenz, Giorgio Morale, and Massimo Parizzi.

Diaries from December 27, 2008 to March 2009

Here

notes from the present

Durham, North Carolina, December 27

Laila El-Haddad

[...] We received a call from my in-laws in Lebanon's Baalbeck refugee camp at an early hour, checking in on my family in Gaza, since they cannot call them directly. We call my parents. My father does not answer. We call his mobile, we reach him. He has just returned from Shifa hospital, we hold our breath. "We are ok. We went to donate blood and to see if they needed any help," says my father, a retired surgeon. "I was out in the *souk* when the strikes began. I saw the missiles falling and prayed; the earth shook; the smoke rose; the ambulances screamed," he said, the sirens audible in the background. He was on Talateeni at the time of the attacks, just a few streets down from one of the attack sites. My mother was in the Red Crescent Society clinic near the universities at the time of the initial wave of attacks, where she works part-time as a pediatrician. Behind the clinic was one of the police centers that was leveled. She said she broke down at first, the sheer proximity of the attacks having shaken her from the inside out. After she got a hold of herself, they took to treating injured victims of the attack, before transferring them to Shifa hospital. There, she said, medical supplies were in short supply: face masks, surgical gloves, gowns... My parents live in the city center, and the

Gaza. Waves of Israeli airstrikes destroyed Hamas security facilities in Gaza, killing more than 225. After the initial airstrikes, dozens of Hamas rockets were fired into southern Israel. One man was killed in the town of Netivot, and four were wounded. Israeli attacks began in broad daylight, as women were shopping at the outdoor market, and children were emerging from school. The center of Gaza City was a scene of chaotic horror, with rubble everywhere, sirens wailing, and women shrieking as dozens of mutilated bodies were laid out on the pavement and in the lobby of Shifa Hospital so that family members could identify them. The dead included civilians, including several construction workers and at least two children in school uniforms.

Israeli war planes attacked people and locations all around them. Over 50 “targets” by 60 warplanes, read the headlines in “Haaretz”. And over 220 killed—in broad daylight; in the after-school rush.

Baghdad. A car bomb killed at least 24 people, many of them Shiite pilgrims.

Durham, North Carolina, December 29

Laila El-Haddad

Gaza’s punishment continues today. Communication has been intermittent, but we have managed to keep the lines open. My father just called to inform me he was ok, after warplanes bombed the Islamic University there, considered to be the Strip’s premiere academic institution. A little later I called my mother, only to hear her crying on the phone. “The planes are overhead,” she cried, “the planes are overhead”. I tried to calm her down: planes overhead mean the “target” is further away. But in such moments of intense fear, there is no room for rationality and logic. There’s you, and war planes; and nothing in between, besides orders and a video game screen. Her panic subsided slightly... “Ok ok, your father says it was the navy gunships... they hit the pier... the poor fishermen, it’s not like it’s even a real pier... its just the pier, just the pier...” She tried to convince my father not to go out to the mosque today. But he did. Most people stayed indoors. [...]

Gaza, December 28. The death toll increased to nearly 300 after Israeli aircraft pounded Gaza for a second day. Medical services, stretched to the breaking point after 18 months of Israeli sanctions, were on the verge of collapse as they struggled to care for the more than 600 people wounded in two days. At Shifa Hospital, one doctor said that given the dearth of facilities, not much could be done for the seriously wounded, and that it was “better to be brought in dead.”

Rome, December 29

Lidia Campagnano

The Israeli army fires indiscriminately into Gaza, causing carnage. As usual. For decades now. It vindicates its honour (its humanity?) saying that this is in response to Palestinian terrorism. As usual.

For decades now. The only message that reaches anyone's heart, I think, is this: bombing and carnage, when carried out by a regular army that answers to a state, is the only political strategy one should believe in and adopt. No other political strategy exists, and politics is this and this alone. Politics, more specifically, does not exist except through bombing and carnage.

After this, thinking that anti-politics is the purely Italian affair of some journalist or comic looking for visibility becomes ridiculous. Anti-politics is this wholesale slaughter of the defenseless, of growing children, who in and of themselves (in a religious sense) should be harbingers of hope for a different future. And the state of Israel, along with the American administration which apes it in Iraq and Afghanistan, is a formidable producer of anti-politics for the whole world. This product alone distinguishes it on the international scene, despite the hearts it breaks even within itself: the opposition, so many women and men, and artists, poets, musicians... Pacifists, they call them, but it would be more apt to say: producers of Otherness.

Anti-politics is the absence of real production geared to life. And it can poison an entire people. And others as well. Its Antagonist as well.

Some mass psychologists, cited by the Israeli media over the decades, say that Israel's commitment to war as the only significant form of political culture derives from its anguish over its Fathers who did not fight, in their day, against Nazi extermination. How can a lie be so powerful? Jews fought against Nazism, and how. All it takes is a bit of research among the names of great anti-fascists to see that. But anti-politics wipes away this evidence, be-

cause it cannot comprehend the entirely political meaning of that struggle. They fought not to have their own army, their own weapons of destruction, their own flag, bloody like all flags, but rather to reclaim a future for all of humanity, the breathing room needed to resume production geared to life, laws for living together in peace, space for the birth of children. For birth, not for death. Of children and of politics, as an art geared to life.

Every time that the Israeli army moves into action, it kills another little piece of that memory. And of that hope.

Durham, North Carolina, December 30

Laila El-Haddad

“There is a complete blackout in Gaza now. The streets are still as death.” I am speaking to my father, Moussa El-Haddad, a retired physician who lives in Gaza City, on Skype, from Durham, North Carolina in the United States, where I have been since mid-2006, the month Gaza’s borders were hermetically sealed by Israel, and the blockade of the occupied territory further enforced.

He is out on his balcony. It is 2 am. “I can only see gray plumes of smoke slowly rising all over the city, everywhere I look” he says, as though they were some beautiful, comforting by-product of some hideous, malicious event. He takes a deep restorative sigh before continuing. “Ehud Barak has gone crazy. He’s gone crazy. He is bombing everywhere and everything... no one is safe.” Explosions are audible in the background. They sound distant and dull over my laptop’s speakers, but linger like an echo in death’s valley. They evoke terrifying memories of my nights in Gaza only two

Gaza. Hamas killed four Israelis after firing more than 70 rockets, including a long-range one into the city of Ashdod, where it hit a bus stop, killing a woman. Earlier, a rocket hit nearby Ashkelon, killing an Israeli-Arab construction worker. The other dead Israelis were a civilian in the Negev desert and a soldier. In Gaza, where the bombardment continued, Hamas gunmen publicly shot suspected collaborators with Israel. At Shifa Hospital, armed Hamas militants in civilian clothes roamed the halls. Asked their function, they said it was to provide security. In the fourth-floor

years ago. Nights that till this day haunt my four-year-old son, who refuses to sleep on his own.

“Can you hear them? Our house is shaking. We are shaking from the inside out.” “Laila, your mother, she is terrified” he adds. She comes to the phone. “Hello, hello dear,” she mutters, her voice trembling. “I had to go to the bathroom. But I’m afraid to go alone. I wanted to perform *wudu* [the Islamic act of washing parts of the body using water] before prayer but I was scared. Remember days when we would go to the bathroom together because you were too afraid to go alone?” she laughs at the thought. [...] “It’s strange, my whole body is shaking. Why is that? Why is that?” she rambles on, continuous explosions audible in the background. “There they go again. One boom after another. Fifteen.” Counting makes it easier. Systemizing the assaults makes them easier to deal with. More remote.

We speak to each other throughout the day. She calls sometimes to let me know if there are gunships overhead, or explosions around them. As though there was something I could do about it; as though my voice would somehow make them disappear. They cracked the windows opened, to prevent an implosion. “By the way we are sleeping in your room now, it’s safer” she tells me, about my empty, abandoned space.

My mother’s close friend, Yosra, was asked to evacuate her building. They live in a flat near many of the ministry complexes being targeted. They were advised not to go to the mosque for services, lest they be bombed. Another family friend, an elderly Armenian-Palestinian Christian and retired pharmacist, is paralyzed with fear. Like many

orthopedic section, a woman in her late 20s asked a militant to let her see Saleh Hajoj, her 32-year-old husband. She was turned away and left the hospital. Fifteen minutes later, Mr. Hajoj was carried out by young men pretending to transfer him to another ward. As he lay on the stretcher, he was shot in the left side of the head. Mr. Hajoj, like five others killed at the hospital this way in 24 hours, was accused of collaboration with Israel. He had been in the central prison awaiting trial by Hamas judges; when Israel destroyed the prison he and the others were transferred to the hospital.

residents, she is confined to her home. She lives alone, in front of the Saraya security complex on Omar al-Mukhtar Street. The complex has already been bombed twice. Last night, her windows shattered around her. She went outside to seek help; no one was around. She cried all night. Shards of glass now cover the floors of her home, one that has been in the family for generations.

Yesterday morning, five sisters from one family were killed when Israeli war planes attacked a mosque next to their home. Four-year-old Jawahir Anwar. Eight-year-old Dina Anwar. Twelve-year-old Sahar Anwar. Fourteen-year-old Ikram Anwar. Seventeen-year-old Tahrir Anwar.

The small shop down the street from my parents' home, next to the Kinz mosque where many of the Remal neighbourhood's affluent residents attend, opens for a little while after prayer. My father goes and gets whatever he can, while he can. They have one package of bread left, but insist they are ok. "Those with children are the ones who are truly suffering. Um Ramadan's grand children will only sleep in her arms now. They are wetting their pants again."

My son, Yousuf, chimes into the conversation unceremoniously, popping his head into my laptop screen. "Sido? I like the *fatoosh* you used to make! I miss you. When will the *maabar* open? Sido... are you ok?" "Habibi, when we see other again—if we see each other again—I'll make it for you," he promises. The very possibility seems to comfort him, no matter how illusory.

It is my daughter Noor's birthday on January 1. She will be one year old. I cannot help but think: who was born in bloodied Gaza today?

The Pain of the Wronged World

Here

notes from the present

We came to a kind of square very high up, and there was no more sun, no more goat's bells or bagpipes, my mother was gone, the women were gone. The knife grinder pointed out a shop.

"Want to meet someone who has an awl?" he asked me.

A horse's head of painted wood topped the stone arch of the shop and on both sides of the entrance, hanging on the door jambs and on the open doors, I saw ropes and strips of leather with tassels, bells, and multicolored feathers.

The knife grinder left his rickety cart in the square, and leapt ahead of me onto the threshold, bringing me inside. "Ezechiele!" he shouted. "Ezechiele!"

Inside there was a long dark hallway, with ropes and strips of leather, tassels, bells and feathers, reins, whips, saddles, and every kind of decoration and harness for horses hanging from the two walls and even suspended from the ceiling.

"Ezechiele!" the knife grinder shouted again as we moved forward.

From behind us someone came running, collided with us with a thud, then went on ahead of us, and a boy's voice burst out:

"It's Calogero, Uncle Ezechiele!"

We kept moving forward through the narrow hallway, through horse decorations and harnesses, saddles, reins, whips, etcetera; we groped our way in

From Elio Vittorini, *Conversations in Sicily*, trans. A. Salierno Mason, New Directions, New York, 2000, pp. 129-134.

perfect darkness, descending into the pure heart of Sicily. The smell was good, in this heart of ours, among the invisible ropes and strips of leather; a smell of new dust, of earth not yet contaminated by the world's wrongs, the wrongs that take place on the earth. Ah, I thought, if I really believed in this... And it was not like going underground, it was like following the trajectory of the kite, having the kite before my eyes and nothing else, only darkness, and having a child's heart, Sicilian and all the world's.

Finally we discerned ahead of us a little light, and the little light became more light and a man took shape, sitting in front of a tiny table with reins and whips and shadows of reins and whips dangling over his head.

"Ezechiele!" the knife grinder called.

The man turned around, and his face looked plump, and his tiny eyes gleamed as if to say: "Yes, my friend, the world has been wronged, but not yet here inside!" In a pleasant voice he asked: "Want the awl, Calogero?"

And then he saw me, and his tiny eyes widened with worry, until the knife grinder, my kite, said: "I don't need it, tonight, Ezechiele. I found a friend who has a blade."

"Oh, really?" the man exclaimed, and he stood up, short and plump all over, with curly blond hair and dimples in his cheeks, and his tiny eyes recovered their brightness as if saying again: "The world has been wronged, but not yet here inside."

He looked for something, maybe chairs, under the curtain of leashes and tassels and strips of leather, as he moved there was a sound bells everywhere, then he sat down again without having found or done a thing.

“Tell him I’m very glad to meet him,” he said to the knife grinder.

Next to the table there was a wooden ladder hidden among the harnesses hanging from the ceiling, and the knife grinder leaned on it with one hand.

“He’s very glad to meet you, too,” he answered.

“Very much so,” I said.

And the man examined me, smiling, sure in himself that I was glad to meet him because the knife grinder had said so, not because I said so. It was with the knife grinder that he continued to speak.

“It seems clear enough to me,” he said, still examining me.

“I saw it right away,” the knife grinder answered.

“There’s no mistaking it.”

And the man Ezechiele: “No, there’s no mistaking it.”

And the knife grinder: “He’s suffering.”

And the man Ezechiele: “Yes, he’s suffering.”

And the knife grinder: “He’s suffering the pain of the wronged world. He’s not suffering for himself.”

And the man Ezechiele: “Not for himself, that’s understood. Everyone suffers for himself, yet...”

And the knife grinder: “Yet there’re no knives and no scissors, there’s never anything...”

And the man Ezechiele: “Nothing. No one knows anything, no one notices anything...”

They fell silent, and looked at one another, and the eyes of the man Ezechiele filled with sadness, while the eyes of the knife grinder glistened more white-ly than ever, as if almost frightened, in his black face.

“Oh!” the knife grinder said.

“Oh!” the man Ezechiele said.

And they moved closer together, and leaning over

the little table, each whispered in the other's ear. Then the knife grinder, turning around, said: "But our friend has a little blade. And he's suffering the pain of the wronged world."

"Yes," the man Ezechiele said. And he looked at me, his tiny eyes glistening sadly as if to say: "The world has been badly wronged, very very badly, more than we ourselves know."

Then he turned again to look at the knife grinder.

"Did you tell him how we're suffering?" he asked.

"I began to tell him," the knife grinder responded.

And the man Ezechiele: "Good, tell him we're not suffering for ourselves."

"That he knows" the knife grinder responded.

And the man Ezechiele: "Tell him that there's nothing making us suffer for ourselves, we're not burdened with sickness, we're not hungry, and still we suffer a lot, oh, a lot!"

And the knife grinder: "He knows, he knows!"

And the man Ezechiele: "Ask him if he really knows."

And the knife grinder to me, "Truly, you know, don't you?"

I nodded my head. And the man Ezechiele stood up, clapped his hands, and called: "Achille!"

From the thick of the harnesses appeared the boy who had collided with us in the hallway. "Why don't you stay here and listen?" the man Ezechiele asked him.

The boy was very small, with blond curly hair like his uncle. "I was listening, Uncle Ezechiele," he responded.

The man Ezechiele approved and again turned to the knife grinder.

"So," he said, "our friend knows that we're suffering the pain of the wronged world."

“He knows,” the knife grinder said.

The man Ezechiele began to recapitulate: “The world is big and it is beautiful, but it has been badly wronged. Everyone suffers each for himself, but not for the world which has been wronged and so it continues to be wronged.”

He looked around him as he spoke, and his tiny eyes closed in sadness, then opened and looked eagerly for the knife grinder: “And did you tell our friend,” he said, “that I am writing down the pains of the wronged world?”

In fact he had a kind of notebook on his tiny table, and an inkpot, a pen.

“Did you tell him, Calogero?” he said.

The knife grinder answered: “I was about to tell him.”

And he said: “Good, you can tell our friend. Tell him that like an ancient hermit I spend my days here writing the history of the wronged world. Tell him that I’m suffering but I write, and that I’m writing down all the wrongs one by one, and I’m also writing about all the evildoers who laugh over the wrongs they have done and will do.”

“Knives, scissors, pikes,” the knife grinder shouted.

And the man Ezechiele placed a hand on the head of the boy and pointed to me, “Do you see this friend of ours?” he said. “Like your uncle, he’s suffering. He’s suffering the pain of the wronged world. Learn, Achille. And now, watch the shop while we go for a glass of wine at Colombo’s.”

San Salvador, December 30

Maria Ofelia Zuniga

Dear friends, I am writing this to say hello before 2008 says goodbye... I usually don't talk about looking back because sometimes, looking back is simply impossible. At the end of this year, I have

concluded in my own personal way that: life is what it is. It's good and sometimes hard. However, I still think today that *it is one hundred percent worth it*, being here, living the good and the not-so-good. I still believe that it is worth being alive and even more so when one has so much to share and to live for.

So, at this end of the year, I don't want to reminisce about any one point, I only want to wish that 2009 may bring new opportunities to share, to come together and, of course, if any sort of crisis comes along... then we'll lend each other a hand, won't we?

So I'm here to wish everyone a stupendous new year, but first, at midnight of the 31st, eat the 12 good-luck grapes, drink the champagne, dress in yellow, be naughty if you want to, burn away the bad, welcome in the good and, above all: *give and receive all the hugs you possibly can*, because I think that they are what will give us the strength to carry on... and on... and on, no matter what happens. So, let's get hugging and a happy 2009 for everyone!

Mosul, Iraq, December 31

“Sunshine”

Today we celebrated the New Year, we celebrated our safety and thanked God for his blessings. 2009 has come, I wonder how this year will be, no one knows but God. I certainly hope it will be peaceful for all Iraqis, I pray there will be no more killing, threats, and explosions... I am optimistic about this year, although the conditions around me and everything don't promise any improvement, but I prefer to have hope... 2008 had good and bad times, I'll always remember the good events, and

Mirwais, Afghanistan. One morning two months ago, Shamsia Husseini and her sister were walking through the muddy streets to the local girls school when a man pulled alongside them on a motorcycle and posed what seemed like an ordinary question. “Are you going to school?” Then the man pulled

hope time will heal the painful memories. [...] I learnt a lot of lessons that will definitely help in my life. I learnt that I should not be too kind, that sometimes people could use my kind heart to do them favors and then abandon me, I learnt that if people stab me in the back that means I am in first place... I became more religious, I pray the five prayers every day, I feel so thankful to God for protecting my family and myself every day from the continuous shooting and explosions, it is priceless, I can't thank God enough...

In this year I didn't waste a moment without using it in the best way I could. I read many books, did a lot of research, so I feel I have more knowledge than before, I learnt new handicrafts, how to cook better, play the musical keyboard and discover another talent which is writing poems in Arabic, I also improved both of my English and French language, so yes, I achieved my dreams and everything I planned for last year... Another pleasing event that I will never ever forget is the trip to the north, I had the greatest days in my life there...

But 2008 wasn't an easy year at all, there were very devastating and sad events, losing people we love either because they were killed or emigrated. I reached a point where I lost hope and became very depressed, especially after the threats we got, and when the terrorists wanted to kill daddy, those were very dark days. I lived in a real nightmare and horror the whole time, it was so hard, especially since I know how much my orphan friends suffer, thank God my dad is safe and alive, I realized how much I love him, what I faced made our relationship much better, he is a good father, may God protect him, protect my mom and all of the people I know...

Shamsia's burqa from her head and sprayed her face with burning acid. Scars, jagged and discolored, now spread across Shamsia's eyelids and most of her left cheek. But if the acid attack against Shamsia and 14 others—students and teachers—was meant to terrorize the girls into staying home, it appears to have completely failed. Today, nearly all of the wounded girls are back at the Mirwais School for Girls, including even Shamsia. Perhaps even more remarkable, nearly every other female student in this deeply conservative community has returned as well—about 1,300 in all. “My parents told me to keep coming to school even if I am killed,” said Shamsia, 17. Shamsia's mother, like nearly all of the adult women in the area, is unable to read or write. “The people who did this to me don't want women to be educated. They want us to be stupid things.” Some of the students at the Mirwais school are in their late teens and early 20s, attending school for the first time. In the five years since the Mirwais School for Girls was built here by the Japanese government, it appears to have set off something of

Losing friends, relatives and neighbors assured me that no one knows what will happen in the future, people have plans for their lives and families, but God has another plan for them... I realized that being a good person every day is the best thing I can offer to leave a good impression... So my plans for 2009 are to continue what I am doing (blogging), study hard, I am determined to continue my studies and get high marks, no matter how hard the situation, or how it seems impossible to concentrate despite everything. I'll prove that "impossible is nothing" and continue going to school and working hard to go to a good college. I haven't decided yet what I want to be in the future, I like dentistry, pharmacy and engineering, I haven't made the final decision yet, also publishing my book is my other biggest dream...

I hope next year we'll celebrate New Year's with my aunt and grandparents, we used to have great times, I remember the old New Year's Eves when we used to stay up late, play bingo and eat delicious food. I hope the good days will come back and we'll celebrate New Year's the same as before, and also thank God for keeping us safe, healthy and for all of his blessings. Happy new year to all of you.

a social revolution. Even as the Taliban tighten their noose around Kandahar, the girls flock to the school each morning. Many of them walk more than two miles from their mud-brick houses up in the hills. The girls burst through the school's walled compound, many of them flinging off head-to-toe garments, bounding, cheering and laughing in ways that are inconceivable outside—for girls and women of any age. Mirwais has no regular electricity, no running water, no paved streets. Women are rarely seen, and only then while clad in burqas that make their bodies shapeless and their faces invisible. (New York Times, January 13, 2009)

Durham, North Carolina, December 31

Laila El-Haddad

My father just called. [...] "We... are under... heavy bombardment. Heavy bombardment," says my father in terrified, articulated syllables. "They are bombing the Legislative Council building next to our house. They are bombing just down our street." "Baba... are you safe, are you both safe?"

I ask, not knowing what else to say. “I have to go now... I have to go... I just wanted to tell you that, but I have to go...” he stammers. And the line goes dead.

We have figured out a system. When the electricity is back on in Gaza, which has happened for one hour during the past 48, my parents get on Skype immediately. If I am not around, they give me a quick call from their landline to let me know they are back on; they have two or three hours of back-up generator time after this. They stocked up on fuel during the past few weeks. Then, it is dark again.

When the bombs are dropped around them, they send me a quick note to inform me of what happened before running to safety. I am still not sure where “safety” is; and neither, I think, do they. It is perhaps more a mental state and place than a physical one. In any other situations, people flee to where they perceive are safer locations. In Gaza, there is no “safe”. And there is no where to flee to, with the borders closed, the sky and sea under siege. [...]

Sderot, Israel, January 2

“Hope Man”

The war has been going on for six days. On Saturday, December 27th at 12:08 I received an SMS message from a friend in Sderot that a large-scale attack has started by the Israeli air force in Gaza and that blasts are being heard very strongly in Sderot. I was in the north of Israel with my family, visiting our family. That evening I returned home. My wife and kids remained in the north and are there to this very moment. The past six

days have been extremely troubling. Israel has been continuously bombing Gaza. The sounds of the attacks can be clearly heard in Sderot. For the first two days only very few rockets were launched from Gaza towards Israel and then the counter-attack came. The whole southern part of Israel, covering areas with several large cities (Ashkelon, Beer Sheva, Ashdod), have been targeted. Between 60 and 100 rockets a day have been fired from Gaza. In these attacks, four people have been killed, dozens wounded, and thousands of people that previously had not been regarded as being in the range of the rockets are in shock. In Gaza over 400 people have been killed and thousands wounded. The air force and navy have been targeting hundreds of targets. Public opinion in Israel is largely supporting the war. A poll taken shortly after the attack said that over 81% of the population in Israel supports the action. I am not sure the poll is accurate and what more recent polls will show, but I expect that this percentage will decrease only slightly. Sderot has been attacked, as have all other cities and towns in the range of the rockets (40-50 km around Gaza), but due to the fact that so many other places have been targeted, strangely we have actually been hit less than in some previous escalations... Many people have left Sderot and I estimate less than 50% of the people remain. Very few people are walking in the streets and no children are seen anywhere. The war was a great mistake, however it is no wonder that so many people in Israel support it. The ongoing reality of rockets falling in Sderot and other

Paris, January 1. The Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, rejected the idea proposed by the French Foreign Minister, Mr. Kouchner, for a 48-hour lull in the fighting for humanitarian purposes. "There is no humanitarian crisis" in Gaza, she said, "and therefore there is no need for a humanitarian truce."

West Bank, January 2. Fatah leaders are growing deeply worried over popular reaction and support for its rival, Hamas. Today, security forces broke up larger demonstrations in Hebron and Ramallah, arresting Hamas supporters, confiscating Hamas flags and ripping up placards with pro-Hamas slogans. For the first time in memory, the Palestinian police used tear gas against their own people.

places for eight years is a terrible reality. Many people of our region have left it for good over the years. Bringing up children in such a reality seems almost abusive and certainly irresponsible. There is a feeling in most of Israeli society that there was no choice but to attack Gaza and stop the rockets once and for all. This is a predictable human reaction to the ongoing situation. With that said, I personally think it is a terrible mistake that could have been avoided. For five months there was an almost complete ceasefire. Instead of taking advantage of this long period of quiet to reach a long-term agreement, both sides spent their time preparing for this war by planning and arming. No serious efforts were made to start a dialog. The siege by Israel continued and the smuggling of arms by the Hamas continued. It was a ceasefire, but only to prepare for the next terrible round which we are experiencing this very moment. I am very pessimistic at the moment. My fear is that a ground attack is coming and that much more pain is still ahead. Eventually some kind of agreement will be achieved. I hope it will happen soon, I fear it will not. Peace Man and I talk every day. We support each other and worry for each other's well-being. I am in contact with others in Gaza and share my situation while hearing of theirs. Much fear and pain on both sides. What me and others are doing is continuing the dialog with friends in Gaza. We are working to widen and deepen this dialog with more people on both sides. The day after the war we want to start finding ways to work together and create a form of

normality. We are only several kilometers apart and that will never change. It is extremely important to widen our dialog and create trust between those that are willing to talk. To share our stories, fears and hopes. The day after the war we need a new beginning. Let's start planting seeds of humanity and trust now.

Durham, North Carolina, January 3

We just came back from a protest in Durham. Before we left, my father called to let me know a land invasion was imminent, and that a bomb had destroyed a mosque near them—killing eleven civilians.

He just now informed me that a land invasion *has begun*. Everyone is bracing themselves. He said Israel destroyed three Jawal centers (the mobile provider), so many mobile phones, including his own, are down, but his landline is functional. He tells me that a building behind my cousin's house in Gaza City was destroyed, and is now burning down in a voracious fire. It had an orphanage in it. My mother says she won't lie: they are terrified. Flares and firebombs are being shot to light up the sky. Propaganda leaflets tell people that "they chose Hamas and Hamas has abandoned them" and that "Hamas will lead them to catastrophe". The words are superimposed on the image of a building, destroyed by bombs, and call upon the people to "take charge of their destiny", to call the given number or email with tip-offs. Then follows a warning to call "in secret" (thanks for the tip). Israel is also broadcasting on al-Aqsa TV station there. My father tells me Gaza's streets are as "dark as kohl".

Laila El-Haddad

Gaza. Israeli tanks and troops swept across the border into Gaza, opening a ground war after a week of intense airstrikes. The assault brings new risks and the prospect of many new casualties on both sides in a confrontation that, before this phase began, had already cost the lives of more than 430 Palestinians and 4 Israelis. Before Israel started the invasion, warplanes and ground artillery carried out heavy strikes. A mosque in northern Gaza was also hit, during evening prayer time. At least 11 worshipers were killed and about 30 wounded, according to Palestinian hospital officials. The air force has struck several mosques in the past week, with the military saying they served as Hamas bases and weapons stores.

325

by Sebastiano Buonamico

Here

notes from the present

Three hundred twenty-five. The dream ends with this number which dismays everyone. A number to play in the lotto, a wonderful nightmare. The veiled, scorching daylight filters through the half-opened shutters. It caresses the antique furniture, glass-doored cupboards and ottomans full of cushions and cat hair; the interior of an aristocratic home from times gone by. Two old spinsters, seated in front of their cups of tea, talk softly about the situation. When I go over to the window, they take care to warn me not to open it because, in times like these, you never know. But I know that they're not really afraid; I know these are women who have seen their share of events. They're against it, really against it and they tell me so between sips of tea and bites of biscuit. They won't come for us here, I can feel it, but out on the streets... on the streets there's the Coup d'État. Something like Chile, police and soldiers presiding over the crossroads. The supporters of the coup took advantage of a visit of a delegation from the Arab League to invade the streets in their riot control gear. The Delegation of Emirs arrived a couple of days ago, accompanied by an airborne battalion of soldiers on dromedaries, and what I can see now, peeping through the shutters, is hilarious: the camel-back troops are charging our riot police, waving their 19th-century muskets in the air, the camels' big feet

go flop, flop, flop down the asphalt, the riot police scatter before them like the Romans in Canne attacked by Hannibal's elephants. The same panic in their eyes. I find it rather bizarre that the emirs' bodyguards are attacking the police of their host country; the fleeing police are replaced by papier-mâché armored vehicles while the herd disperses in a cloud of dust at the end of the street. Then fake tanks invade the streets, their turrets turn and their machine guns spit out rounds at the windows, rounds of real bullets. I draw back. The two old ladies are in a panic, then they comfort me and themselves: "Don't worry, they can't come in here". I feel like I'm in a Buñuel movie, any minute now the soldiers will burst in and arrest us and Fernando Rey will say, "You can't do this, do you have any idea who I am? This is an outrage!" Instead, nothing. The shooting in the streets continues with the noise of bursts of fire, broken glass, thuds and the frightening roar from the tank motors. A Carabinieri car arrives and parks out front. I'm pinpointed right away even though I'm hidden by the half-closed shutters. Two Carabinieri in uniform rummage through the trunk of their car, then pull out a sort of vacuum cleaner and point its hose at me. In an instant I'm enveloped by a gust of boiling energy and my hair bursts into flameless fire. I jerk back from the window, reeking like a singed chicken. Oh! Poor dear! What have those bullies done to you?! The two old ladies fuss over me with bandages and glasses of cool water. The doorbell rings. After a quick glance through the peep-hole, one of them opens the door to let in a slightly younger couple; the man is hugging a huge Chinese vase, the blue-enameled kind with dragons and ideograms in gold: "And now

I'll break those bastards' heads with this!" He speaks with the lisp of someone used to long drawing-room debates. He's got it in for the Carabinieri. Almost bald at this point and still smoldering, I try to stop him. It's no use, the vase crashes down on the hood of the Carabinieri car. We turn off the lights and stay perfectly silent. This time we've really gone looking for trouble... I somehow manage to get out, and I realize that only part of the city has fallen under the control of the coup leaders. I hear rumors that resistance groups are spontaneously forming at the Porta Garibaldi station. The area in front of the station was recently "re-furbished" (as they say) with fake grassy hills, fake streams, pedestrian walkways and an underground labyrinth with large spaces covered by the transport hub that has just been inaugurated. The resistance movement is here, right underneath: what immediately strikes me is the power in the looks of the people, ordinary people, not militants, men, women, old people and children, all of them vigilant and energetic and working with disconcerting determination. Some of them are selling staple necessities at low prices, others are collecting funds for the brigades of freedom fighters; I see groups huddled around improvised orators, beautiful girls running through the corridors delivering messages or caring for young children. And most of all, I realize that neither cell phones nor televisions are working anymore. Like the others, I wander through this place, feeling good deep down inside, like you can feel only in dreams, when you realize that the useless and sickening rules we have known up to now have fallen one by one, without a trace. Everyone is waiting to hear the death toll. Everyone knows that people have died but we don't know where or

how many. An old wrinkled, white-haired man makes his way through the crowd and steps up onto a wooden crate. A surreal silence falls: there are 325 dead. Tragically, 325. No one feels like adding anything else and the authoritative voice of the old man puts any doubts to rest. We all know it's the simple truth. The truth of a massacre.

Goraždevac, Kosovo, January 3

Domenico Palazzi

It's hard to find someone in Kosovo who doesn't have a definite political opinion. Or at least they think it is. I'm always amazed when I see those old women, trapped all their lives in muddy, distant villages, discussing UN agreements and Security Council resolutions. Or when I enter any *cafana* (typical Balkan pub) in Kosovo and am certain to find men who are always willing to drink and talk about politics. This, of course, doesn't mean that every person you meet has an intelligent and realistic view of the overall political situation. In most cases, the words they are saying you've already read in the newspapers or heard spoken by someone who is a politician based hundreds (sometimes thousands) of kilometres from the place you are in at this precise moment.

During the last two election campaigns before the independence of Kosovo there was one aspect I found both peculiar and amusing. Every time the election campaign became a hot topic in a discussion, the people involved would first and foremost defend their party's political programmes. Of course, everybody knew the leaders of their own political wing (without ever forgetting the ghosts who keep coming back from the past and who have gained immortality destroying the present of those

who still inhabit those lands, using their own political legitimization to do violence just as they pleased), but the ideas they represented were even more important.

Being a pro-European or a radical, a socialist or a liberal still means something here, perhaps. Buying or not buying a product, learning or not learning a language, wearing or not wearing a particular kind of clothes is still a way to assert one's political identity, sense of belonging and freedom. Sometimes. Yet the meaning of all this begins to escape you when you learn that, one night, the Prime Minister of Kosovo was allowed to go and stand in front of the house of a political opponent, hurl insults at him from below his window, and then started shooting. For the record, his opponent was found dead in a well a few days later along with the four members of his staff.

However, the aspect I found most peculiar concerned the ideas that the people defended through their political affiliations. The idea of an independent Albanian Kosovo, or that of Kosovo as a part of Serbia; the idea of a great Albanian state to be created in the Balkans, or that of Serbia as a part of this *big mother*, the EU: all of these ideas involve a political outlook geared towards the future, ideas that outline the future one would rather be living in. The future, that empty box where all the illusions are kept. And illusions as such can easily be manipulated.

The Balkans in the '90s were a theatre where everybody was defending their own share of power, racking their brains all the time to find new ways to grab yet another piece of the remaining cake. To do so they all had to play a part, changing their masks at the right moment and this did the trick.

It is no coincidence that, in order to revive the Serbian nationalism of olden days, Milosevic's cronies exhumed the remains of the legendary King Lazar and carried them in a procession throughout Kosovo. It is no coincidence that the Croatian war of independence broke out during a football match between the teams of Zagreb and Belgrade. It is no coincidence that people in Bosnia died in mass graves in spite of the presence of Dutch UN soldiers deployed there with the specific mission of defending the enclaves. It is no coincidence that those cunning manipulators have become the wealthiest and most powerful members of the new, yet just as grey, nomenklatura. The plundering of what remained of the former Yugoslavia has made so many dark characters considerably richer. It is no coincidence that, arm in arm with them, the mafia struck it rich as well. The mafia in the Balkans got back on its feet and was institutionalized after Tito's death. Power, politics and mafia. Once again, three proves to be the perfect number.

Quito, Ecuador, January 3

Could there be a more refreshing way to start the new year than opening your eyes and seeing a volcano and a lake? Despite the overcast sky, Taita Imbabura, the volcano skirted by Lake San Pablo, managed to bid me good morning. From my balcony I could hear *Alli punlla, alli punlla* ["Good morning, good morning" in Quechua]. As I stepped out of my hut, the breeze gave me the first caress of the year. It's amazing how sights like these can fill you with so much vitality. I definitely put an enjoyable finishing touch on the old year. I spent some time with family and friends and I can still

Carla Badillo Coronado

Gaza, January 4. Israeli troops and tanks, protected by heavy air, sea and artillery fire, sliced through the center of Gaza. Most of the fighting was taking place in northern and eastern Gaza, but at least five civilians were killed and many wounded when Israeli shells or rockets landed in the market of Gaza City while people were stocking up on sup-

hear their voices (Jack's, Neeli's, Aggie's, Mark's), speaking at midnight from far away. I did all the New Year's rituals: grapes, the burning of ugly dolls called *monigotes* that symbolize the old year, a mixed drink called *quemado*, red underwear... Then there was something I could really enjoy: the 40-minute party cruise. We all put on costumes and were randomly given whistles and maracas and things. I was the only one who got a harmonica, even though it was a toy harmonica. I kept playing "Baby, Please Don't Go"... well, "play" might not be the right word. It sounded like pretty good blues to me even though the harmonica was made of plastic. Then an excellent accordionist struck up a tune and we spent the rest of our boat trip on the lake singing Ecuadorian songs, Russian songs, cumbias, boleros and rancheras. It was great fun! No one wanted to stop dancing, least of all my mom and I... we've been known to cut a rug or two.

All that said and done, we went back to the big cabaña, where a live orchestra and a dance contest awaited us. Guess who took part in the contest! Several couples—generally understood to be made up of one man and one woman—stepped onto the dance floor. Since my dad, though he does dance, wasn't up to the contest, and I was all alone... my mom and I burst onto the dance floor together. They even gave us a number to wear: couple number 3. Mom couldn't really let loose because her knee problem was bothering her and she needed to be careful, but we must've forgotten. We ended up dancing to seven different styles: rock 'n' roll, waltz, tango (I nearly laughed my head off for that one), salsa, polka, Ecuadorian (of course we did our *tullpucuna* dance steps for this

plies. At Shifa, Gaza City's main hospital, dozens of casualties seen being brought in over many hours all appeared to be civilians. Reliable reports on the fighting, death toll and civilian situation in Gaza were scarce, since Israel has barred foreign journalists from entering Gaza for most of the past two months and every day since the war began, despite an Israeli Supreme Court order that it permit a pool of foreign correspondents.

one) and cumbia (we showed off our Latin *sabor*... making up for the tango disaster). One by one we saw the couples around us being eliminated. We were one of the three finalist pairs that went into the last round and... guess what... we won!! It was so worth it! Nothing could wipe the smile from our faces. I want to send out a big thanks to my family and friends for being a great audience. Now it's time to go back to the city... and on to the next destination. Cheers!

Durham, North Carolina, January 4

[...] I call my father every hour; sometimes every few minutes when I see renewed bombardment on my television. Sometimes he calls me for assurance: "What's going on? what's going on?" he repeats in a weary, hypnotic tone. "It just felt like they bombed our street from the inside out. I can't see anything. I don't know what's happening. What's the news saying?" he asks frantically, desperate for any morsel of information that could make sense of the terror being wrought upon them. "The Apaches are right above our house. It's complete darkness outside, complete darkness," he goes on. I ask if he got any sleep—I was up with him a good part of my night until dawn rose, as the earth was blasting apart around him. "Two hours, better than nothing." He said he went out for a quick breather, and took a picture of some children who went out for a few tense minutes to kick a ball around. He passes the phone to my mother. She tries to make pleasant chitchat, asking about when we will celebrate Noor's birthday—though I already told her a few days ago we had a small party. "Oh that's right, that's right. Yassine?" she says,

Laila El-Haddad

Gaza, January 5. The Samouni family knew they were in danger. They had been calling the Red Cross for two days, they said, begging to be taken out of Zeitoun, a poor area in eastern Gaza City that is considered a stronghold of Hamas. No rescuers came. Instead, Israeli soldiers entered their building late Sunday 4 night and told them to evacuate to another building. They did. But at 6 a.m. on Monday, when a missile fired by an Israeli warplane struck the relatives' house in which they had taken shelter, there was nowhere to run. Eleven members of the extended Samouni family were killed and 26 wounded, with five children age 4 and under among the dead. A Red Cross official in Gaza said

addressing my husband. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. It’s strange, strange. My body is literally trembling from the inside. From the inside. Why do you think that is? It’s strange...” she rambles on. I ask how they are doing on food supplies. She says she stood in line for one and a half hours for a parcel of bread yesterday. [...]

there had been many cries for help. In the case of the Samouni family, she said, the organization was told by the Israelis that it would be too dangerous to go into the Zeitoun neighborhood.

San Salvador, January 7

Miguel Huezo Mixco

A visit to downtown San Salvador—full of history, memory and scents—is one of the stops on the tour we give to friends visiting the country. It includes, of course, a visit to the tomb of Oscar Romero, the martyred bishop, one of the most renowned figures in Salvadoran history. We repeated the visit on Sunday with George Yúdice and Sylvie Durán, who arrived on January 1st to celebrate the New Year. George is a touchstone for studies in international culture. His parents—Salvadorans—emigrated to New York in the ‘40s. This visit downtown helped him, in many ways, to take the leap from TV and postcard images to the real world. The city started to awaken from its post-celebration hangover. In the streets, heaps of garbage glittered like a futuristic nightmare. When we entered the crypt, I had the clear sensation that there were two churches in that place. One is the upper church with its gilded altars, crowned by an extravagant dome where one can make out feathered Indians presenting offerings. The other is the lower church, Romero’s crypt, which you reach as if going down through a metro entrance: half-abandoned, half-dark... Paradoxically, here lies one of the most luminous beings this country ever brought forth.

Gaza, January 6. Israeli mortar shells killed as many as 40 Palestinians, among them women and children, outside a United Nations school where they were taking refuge. The night before, three Palestinian men were killed in an Israeli attack on another United Nations school for refugees in Gaza.

Many believe that Romero performs miracles. Miracles that desperate people come to ask for: healing (making the crippled walk and alleviating distress: heart murmurs that are not only related to love). They also ask for social miracles. This afternoon, we read with certain trepidation a message left on Romero's coffin, in which a mother asked him for the miracle of getting a job for her daughter. We went up to the main church, walking amongst the congregation that brings candles to an image of Christ covered with the Salvadoran flag. Bombarded with questions by our guests, we came back out into the street down the stairs that on May 8, 1979, were bathed in blood. From there, looking at Plaza Barrios and the National Palace, it was impossible not to think of the human wave fleeing from the bullets, on that Palm Sunday in 1980, during the funeral of Oscar Romero. [...]

Gaza, January 6. Phones in Gaza homes rang with recorded Israeli military messages saying, "We are getting rid of Hamas." Leaflets dropped from airplanes littered the streets, saying: "Hamas is getting a taste of the power of the Israeli military, and we have other methods that are still harsher to deal with Hamas. They will prove very painful. For your safety, please evacuate your neighborhood." But many said they had no place to go because many neighborhoods received the same message.

On the Shema and the Prophet Martyr

by Marc H. Ellis

Here

notes from the present

Each morning I begin the day with my prayers, an eclectic array of lines drawn from traditional Jewish prayers; I end with the Shema, the affirmation that Jews, that I, have heard the word of God and God is one. "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone."

The Shema is the closest that Jews have to a creed; it is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The text is found

A Jewish reflection on the 26th anniversary of the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero.

dational to the giving of the covenant; it seals the covenant in memory and embrace. As have most Jews, I have been reciting this since I was a child. And now, after my children awake, I recite it again with them:

“You shall love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead, inscribe them on your doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

The affirmation of God, the affirmation of the covenant, is also, ironically, the martyr’s prayer, the prayer that Jews recite moments before their death. Growing up in the shadow of the Holocaust, I knew the Shema was the martyr’s prayer before I knew where to find it in the Torah; its original context was somehow transported to a different day and time. I was taught the prayer as an act of remembrance for those who had died in the Holocaust, and if I, God forbid, faced the same situation. As with those who perished in the Holocaust these might be my last words on earth.

Even more, I think of this prayer as one that will be with me as I step forward, commit myself to justice and reconciliation, even at a personal cost. With my children I also think of their preparation for commitment and the consequences of that commitment. A strange thought: to prepare your children for commitments that can be costly.

In 1980 I thought of this prayer when I heard that Archbishop Romero had been assassinated and

then, without reflection, I recited it. I was at that time at the epicenter of liberation theology in North America, Maryknoll, where two Maryknoll Sisters had been martyred in El Salvador just months earlier.

The people at Maryknoll knew these women well as classmates, friends and comrades. I had students in El Salvador, and some of them knew Archbishop Romero. I had just met Gustavo Gutierrez and others involved in the movement. I was beginning to be immersed in the world of liberation theology, a world that emphasized the God of Life.

It was also a world of death. Was there a God of death? As some wrote, the God of Death is a non-being worshiped by the powerful, a form of idolatry. The God of Life, the real and living God, was the one who prompted the poor and the marginalized to struggle for more and a better life. Those who died in that struggle defied death; they were embraced and resurrected by the God of life; even in their death they seeded the world for more life.

Here I was reciting the martyr's prayer as a child, as a lament for those who had perished and for my own life, as a memory and possibility. But what Jew was prepared for the rise of martyrdom in our time and, even more startling, within a religion that had for more than a thousand years perpetrated martyrdom on the Jewish people?

The conceptual difficulty of understanding this massive transformation was countered by attending the liturgies of those who were now named as martyrs, liturgies presided over and peopled by those who knew them.

The whirlwind of publicity, the politicization of the deaths of the Maryknoll Sisters and of Romero,

was immediate in those early days of Ronald Reagan's presidency and the escalating policies of repression in Central America, sponsored and funded by the United States government. Early on, Maryknoll and others concerned with the fate of the Religious and the people of El Salvador distanced themselves from the political. After all, the Church was charged with preaching the Gospel, not playing politics. Others who were against the emerging Church stance on behalf of the poor spoke critically of the Church as entering the political realm. Soon the discussion was divided by those who saw the Maryknoll Sisters and Romero as martyrs and those who saw them as utopian dreamers who had crossed the political red line.

I was not taken in by this debate. Instead I wondered about the incredible transformations of Christianity in the last decades, first on the question of the Jews and now on the defense of the poor. Had Constantinian Christianity simply been a phase of Christian history, one that endured for over a thousand years and seemed intrinsic to its very life? Was this phase of Christianity over or was this a new civil war within Christianity, a war over the very meaning of the Christian witness? Phase or war, the outcome was uncertain. After all the rulers ruled; those in opposition were being celebrated as martyrs.

Did God receive their testimony? Was their testimony to the depth of their faith and to humanity? Could Christianity celebrate its martyrs in a manner as triumphant as those who celebrated Christianity in its conquests?

Triumphalism in death is a conceit practiced in proximity to the powerful. The powerful are there-

by tainted even as their power may be further consolidated. The power of the martyr's death, at least its claim, is that material and political power is transitory, always unstable and destined to collapse. The martyr is testimony to that collapsing idolatry, a marker on the way that is planted like a cross on the demise of empire.

As I sat through the Masses at Maryknoll, I wondered at this sense of triumph. The certainty of resurrection, the too-easy claim of God's faithfulness, struck a wrong chord. It was as if their deaths were cleansed of the brutality that befell them, the women raped and shot at point blank range, Romero assassinated as he intoned God's protection and grace.

My memories raced to the Holocaust and the question, despite the recitation of the Shema, of whether they were victims or martyrs. After all, martyrs are thought to have a choice in their testimony of faith, the ability to recant or even convert. Those who died in the Holocaust did not have that chance and they were murdered regardless of whether they had faith or not. They were murdered because they were Jews. Was God with the Jews who died by the millions?

Was God with the Sisters and Romero as they were brutally murdered?

With Romero it is clear; his religious vision guided him until the end. Whether God was with him is unknown. He asserted, beautifully, tragically, hauntingly, that he knew that God was with him and the people of El Salvador. He said it often in his last days: "I should mention to you that I do not believe in death, but in resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise in the Salvadoran people."

This thought was not an idle one, mystifying and transforming death into life without cost; it was not an afterthought. Rather the preface was hard-hitting, deeply political and religious at the same time, asserting his authority and the authority of the Church: “We warn the government to take seriously that reforms achieved with so much blood serve no one. In the name of God, then, and in the name of the suffering people, whose cries rise to the heavens, every day more steadily, I beg, I ask, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression.”

Was there ever a more haunting statement of hope for a world where the divisions of class and culture cease and empires collapse into a community foreseen in parts of the Torah and the New Testament? In these words there seems no division of religion either; the empire that Christianity followed and blessed is foresworn. History is at a standstill, even the progress of reform is called to account.

Is this the moment of the giving of the covenant, rehearsed and expanded at a different time and place? Or is this the time of the covenant that never changes, the offer of fidelity always available in the here and now? “Take to heart these instructions I charge you with this day.”

“Impress them upon your children.” This transposition: then, Jews as martyrs in Christian Europe; now, Christian martyrs in Christian Central America.

What do I say to my children now that the martyrs are Christian, for their faith and for humanity, and that now, with our new-found power, Jews are creating martyrs?

The truth of this is clear in Israel and Palestine; it was only dawning on me at the time that I was becoming acquainted with liberation theology. The death of the Maryknoll Sisters and Romero were part of my own awakening, paradoxically, as a Jew. As I traveled throughout Latin America, Asia and Africa in Christian liberation circles, I was drawn back to the meaning of Jewish testimony today. Hadn't we now embraced a Constantinianism that had infected Christianity and ultimately led to the martyrdom I am speaking of today? A Constantinian Judaism had arrived, though the words to describe it would come later.

The martyrdom of the women and Romero was in close proximity to Constantinian Judaism. As I embarked on writing what would become *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, I became aware of Israel's military and security role in the dictatorships of the Americas. I also learned of Israel's close relationship with South African apartheid, where Israel and South Africa together explored and developed atomic and nuclear arms.

I discovered these alliances as I researched the origins of the state of Israel, the displacement of the Palestinians, and the continuing expansion of Israel after 1967. While uncovering these disturbing facts in the mid-1980s was difficult, in retrospect that seems to have been almost an innocent time. Today the expansion of Israel is on the verge of completion, as is the Wall that will segment, surround and ghettoize the Palestinian people. The 1980s were before the policy of might and beatings, before the use of helicopter gunships that target defenseless villages and towns, before the settlement expansion and permanence, before the

hope for a real two-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ended. Or was I, even in my new-found learning, simply naive?

In the 1980s I also visited Israel many times, and it was at that time that I began to move among Palestinians. There under occupation, Palestinian life was marked by the violence perpetrated by Jews in Israel. The Jewish establishment in America enabled this violence with a narrative of Jewish innocence and redemption. Was this the same innocence and redemption that Christians used as a shield for their violence against the Jews of Europe, but also, among other areas of the world, in the conquest of the Americas?

I was brought into homes in Gaza and the West Bank where children had been lost, murdered by Israeli soldiers for stone-throwing, for resisting home demolitions or for even crying out against the murder of a family member. There I sat with families, often large and poor, surrounded by framed portraits of their sons, murdered—and yes, martyred—by Israel. I wondered if these known to the Palestinians as martyrs were also martyrs to me. Were they enfolded into my history, part of the Jewish narrative that I affirm, so that now the separation of Jew and Palestinian has been foreclosed?

It was all happening at the same time: the Maryknoll Sisters and Romero; my understanding of a sea-change in Jewish life; the Palestinian martyrs. The transformation of Christianity and Judaism in opposite directions; the emerging civil war within both Christianity and Judaism between those who seek empire and those who struggle for community; the expansion of martyrdom and thus of fidelity to a broader tradition of faith and struggle.

This broader tradition included those throughout history and today who struggled, with and without faith, against empire and for another way of life. Was this the tradition I genuinely belonged to, a tradition that included some Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, agnostics and Jews? Was this my tangible particularity, one I would then hand down to my children?

“Inscribe them on your doorposts.” The mezzot on my doorposts carries the Shema in full, hearkening back to the Exodus where the homes of the Israelites were marked to be passed over so that death mandated by God for the Egyptians would leave the Israelites untouched. When I pass and touch the mezzuah as I enter and leave my home, I am admonished to be just and compassionate; the gateways of my home are signed with this intent. In a world of empire, I must reach out to the stranger, widow and orphan, to the poor and marginalized, as a sign of the covenant and as a sign of God’s presence. I must move toward community with others so moved; that is my community.

Those who pursue empire, whatever their denomination, are also part of a joint effort. They, too, range across denominations and religions. They are also part of a tradition, a tradition that produces martyrs, again across the religious and ethnic boundaries. The great, fundamental, I would say, foundational division is now named. The question of why it has taken us so long to discern these true divisions and why we have accepted the established oneness of faith and nation for so long is a mystery, one covered in the blood of the martyrs. Still, no matter this recognition of the broader tradition of faith and struggle, the Cross remains for

me a symbol of violence; I shudder as it approaches me. Now the Star of David, adorning a military that subjugates another people, also produces that tremor for Palestinians—and for me.

Here lies the great crime of those who pursue empire in the name of religion. The very symbols which produce meaning and nurture a people, even and especially in their suffering, are debased in the cycle of violence and atrocity they engender. Those very symbols, the Cross and the Star, become infected with atrocity. Such are the ways of Constantinian religion, whether it be in its Christian, Jewish or Islamic variant.

Do the martyrs rescue those symbols, and thus the tradition, from this infection, cleansing the virus from the religion and thus restoring it to health and well being? Another twist: those who murder do so in the name of that religion; they also murder the dissenters within—or hand them over, or silence them in the name of that very religion.

The martyrs are the prophets silenced, surrounded by violence, doomed. The doomed prophet is another way of looking at the Catholic women and Romero himself, or the prophetic embodied in them, struggling to articulate a truth that will live on in history, in the history of the people, as a seed for the generations of prophets yet to come.

Martin Buber, the great Jewish religious figure, understood this well when he spoke about the circle of prophets that spiral through history, staking out an alternative history that identifies with the suffering and the hope that one day the world will revolve around justice and community rather than violence and empire. As witnesses to the failure of Israel live to see its vision and mission, the proph-

ets struggled against inertia, greed and brokenness. Through the ages they continue to lift up a destiny inscribed upon Israel from the beginning, that of a liberated and liberating people and a God that is with Israel in that struggle for a new kind of community.

Before his death Martin Luther King, Jr. described this vision as the beloved community. His language was quite beautiful, having confidence in a universe with an arc that bends toward justice.

Through failure and martyrdom?

The German and larger European Jewish communities that Buber came from and served were annihilated. The Palestine that Buber entered as a refugee from the Nazis, the Jewish homeland that Buber sought to build alongside the Arabs in Palestine, was already failing in his lifetime. King's vision of an America based on values and character rather than race, a demilitarized America that embodied the justice and freedom it spoke about, was, in his lifetime, severely challenged by entrenched racism and America's war in Vietnam. King's assassination poignantly enshrined this sense of failure.

The prophetic then as failure. Does the failure of the prophetic become deeper in death?

In some ways yes. In other ways no.

Yes in the sense that the life that embodies the prophetic is no more; the vision become articulate is suspended, as it were, in mid-sentence. The words that we want and need to hear, the presence that so illumines our own destiny, can now be found only in picture, representing the prophet who is no more.

No because the life that is gone is also rescued from the moments after, a duration that is frustrating in

its ordinariness and in the fact that the prophetic vision will not come to pass. Alive, the prophet feels the pain of his commitment since any resolution will be partial, limited, contained and overturned. Alive, the prophet may even glimpse the promised land as it actually will become.

So in death the prophet martyr is spared the future and perhaps even his loss of the prophetic. Imagine Buber today with Star of David helicopter gunships patrolling the Palestinian territories. Or King with the victory of civil rights so partial and, in its own way, conforming to power. Imagine King with his successor, Jesse Jackson, and the disappointment he would feel. Imagine the Maryknoll Sisters and Romero with a changed and unchanged El Salvador.

In martyrdom, the prophet is spared a reality that would quiet and sear his soul.

The Maryknoll Sisters and Romero, Buber and King, and Christians and Jews and Muslims of conscience—of every faith and community throughout history—are the voice of the doomed prophets and the prophetic that will never die. Remembering them as they have been and are handed over by all political and religious authorities to be disciplined, mocked and executed is a necessity. It represents our stake in the prophetic voice and the foundation for our call.

Our call to be prophets? Throughout history there have only been the few that we can genuinely call prophets. Why some are prophets is a mystery. Are they called; is theirs a destiny felt within themselves? If so, where does that destiny come from? How does it unfold? Does this separate them from the rest of us? Or is it simply that they, at the appointed time, stand up where others back down?

Perhaps at other moments they did back down or will in the future. The point is that they stood up, and for a moment or a lifetime, for causes and people that are unpopular with the powers that be. The prophets who say no to unjust power and die as a consequence also say yes to another way of living. Their death is a prophetic moment, a martyrdom, a testimony to life.

Yet the prophet martyrs are nothing if they stand alone and they do not and cannot stand alone. The prophet martyrs come from traditions that, though deeply bruised and abused, remain as subversive memories; memories of a calling and destiny, memories of another way.

Those memories are those of the community and so call others to that calling and destiny. Always, there is a community that gathers around the prophet martyr; they are witnesses beyond his death. They bond together to carry on the mission.

Perhaps there is a yet another bonding that accompanies us, albeit, for now, without articulation. What if the death of the prophet martyr in one part of the world and coming from a particular tradition responds to and begins the healing of a suffering at another time and place or even anticipates a future time when a healing is needed or the foundations for another in that same line.

I think here, in Italy, of Primo Levi who, in his own struggle and the struggle of his people, experienced an inversion of hope so terrible that even the Shema could not be recited unchanged. Thus his haunting poem, *Shema*:

You who live secure
In your warm houses,

Who, returning at evening, find
Hot food and friendly faces:

Consider whether this is a man,
Who labors in the mud
Who knows no peace
Who fights for a crust of bread
Who dies at a yes or a no.
Consider whether this is a woman,
Without hair or name
With no more strength to remember
Eyes empty and womb cold
As a frog in winter.

Consider that this has been:
I commend these words to you.
Engrave them on your hearts
When you are in your house, when you walk on your way,
When you go to bed, when you rise:
Repeat them to your children.
Or may your house crumble,
Disease render you powerless,
Your offspring avert their faces from you.

On the one hand, Levi's *Shema* serves as a retrospective celebration of the martyr's life. The dead are not cleaned up; they remain without names or hope. Memory here is the telling of the story that has no transformed story or moral. The tale is to be told; instead of a renewed boldness of action in the future, only a penalty is invoked for not telling the story. Levi's *Shema* rejects a rising or a symbolic seeding of the earth. Blood is blood; the fight for a crust of bread remains; the eyes are empty. Did Romero ever read Levi's *Shema*? I doubt it.

Romero does not believe in death. Romero's rising is within the history of his people, but that history, at least in Romero's vision, will be different: it will be redeemed. In fact, Romero's death, along with the Maryknoll women and the thousands of other Salvadorans who died, is preparation for that moment of redemption. In this sense the dead are already redeemed, the prophet martyr among them.

Does Levi's *Shema* stop Romero's rising? Does Romero's rising add a stanza to Levi's poem, an ending not unlike Job? Or do Romero and Levi simply stand side by side, without comment or theory?

In the decades after, there are those who still struggle. Our fidelity is to their vision, one that should be inscribed on all of our doorposts. The *Shema* within the *mezzuah*, the *mezzuah* now expanded with the texts of all prophets, the words of Romero too: "I beg, I ask, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression."

Rome, January 7

Yesterday, I heard a mild-mannered democratic person say that the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might be the extermination of the Palestinians. It wasn't the first time I'd heard that said, and some experts report that this is a widespread opinion in Israel. It hit me so hard I did not reply directly to him; I talked loudly to the other people there. I played dumb, as if faced with a trap. Too much feeling drives you mad, emotional anaesthesia turns you into an idiot. The fact is, since then, the word corruption has kept stirring in my head.

Lidia Campagnano

Gaza, January 8. International aid groups lashed out at Israel over the war in Gaza, saying that access to civilians in need is poor, relief workers are being hurt and killed, and Israel is woefully neglecting its obligations to Palestinians who are trapped, some among rotting corpses in a nightmarish landscape of deprivation. The United Nations declared a sus-

Here in Italy, that word brings to mind bribes, favours and city council offices. We've become an insignificant corner of the world and are unable to reflect even on this insignificance. So we don't notice the degree of corruption in the pseudo-political babble of someone grappling with the waning of an earlier political passion, the one that marked all of his youth. That passion consisted of the possibility of concretely rising above the insignificance and brevity of life and claiming one's own role in human evolution across the face of the earth. That is to say, transcending space and time. Having introjected the burden of that ambition, that responsible transcendence without the help of a God, the senile penitent of politics thinks he should be moderate. By moderating his desires and becoming cold, he becomes a beast. In what he says. A human beast, of course. The leonine beast is apolitical; the human beast is anti-political and babbles chunks of political words.

The moderate human beast evokes his pseudo-enemy: the fanatic. They are an inseparable pair; they are bedfellows.

Isn't this corruption, in a deep-seated, lethal sense? I'd like to hope no child, adolescent or young person ever hears these kinds of statements. I would like to find a way to prevent this, but that hope is futile. And in any case, the eyes of some children in Gaza, just like the eyes of an infinite number of children in the world, are mute with the muteness of those who have listened: to explosions or corrupt words. And they have looked into so many vacant gazes that have become incapable of reflecting anything.

We'll pay for it, we're already paying for it. All of us.

pension of its aid operations after one of its drivers was killed and two others were wounded despite driving United Nations-flagged vehicles and coordinating their movements with the Israeli military. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported finding what it called shocking scenes, including four emaciated children next to the bodies of their dead mothers. In a rare and sharply critical statement, it said that "the Israeli military failed to meet its obligation under international humanitarian law to care for and evacuate the wounded."

Three hours. And each person, family, group, had to decide how to allocate that time. Some divided the labor: bread, blankets, food. Others rushed to visit loved ones—or simply to get some fresh air. My parents decided to visit some of the “UN schools-cum-shelters”, and described the scene to me:

“Every family consisted of at least ten members; and there was one blanket for the whole lot. We took some donated blankets and clothes with us. Many of these people told me they are well-to-do, but now find themselves with little more than the clothes on their backs. But despite it all—remarkably—everybody is standing hand in hand, supporting one another. Their spirits are remarkably high,” my father said over the phone, his voice sounding more rested than it had in days.

Further south, in Rafah, the news was much more grim. Just as a “pause” was in effect, hundreds of residents there received calls and leaflets from the Israeli army demanding they leave their homes ahead of an imminent bombardment. I called my friend Fida Qishta for an update—in the background, a commotion of voices.

“The announcement was for everyone to leave—the border area people; half the city left, but many are refusing to go. We are hosting many families—that is all the noise you hear. We have about 30 people here with us,” said Fida. “You have to understand something: it’s not about bulldozers anymore... they are bombing with F-16s... destroying entire families, Laila... entire families,” she repeated, driving the point home. [...]

Gaza. Israel held its fire for three hours, the second day in a row, to allow in aid.

Gaza. Antoine Grand, head of Red Cross operations in Gaza, said his group’s workers came under Israeli fire. He said a convoy of two trucks, one clearly marked as Red Cross and the other from the Ministry of Health, was taking medical equipment to the southern city of Khan Yunis, followed by 13 ambulances heading to the Egyptian border. He said the convoy’s movement was “fully coordinated with Israel. I did it myself.” And it was during the three-hour lull, at 3:30 p.m., he said, when they stopped in front of the checkpoint that the Red Cross vehicle was shot at from a tank.

Mosul, Iraq, January 9

“Sunshine”

This week, the oral mid-year examination started, I did well, and on Sunday the written exam will start. I pray the roads will be open, and also pray the weather will get warmer, many times I feel that I can't write or move my frozen fingers! However I decided to take oil with me to school for the heaters, and I hope my friends will do the same. Otherwise we'll get sick and freeze, especially since many classrooms have no windows due to the continuous explosions. Since the terrorists threatened to bomb more cars in the neighborhood, my dad and grandpa started to think about any possible way to make the house less dangerous for us, so they covered the majority of windows with wood, can you imagine how dark it has become? As we don't have electricity most of the time, and we have power from the generators in the afternoons only, I spend the mornings carrying my books and moving from one room to another in order to find which room is calmer and better-lit. When my family members come into a room I can't concentrate because of the noise, so I try to find another place. And when the weather is cloudy I feel upset and cloudy too. Let's hope we'll have more hours of electricity, and the situation will be good so that we have our examinations in a normal environment.

Sderot, Israel, January 10

“Peace Man”

We are now two weeks into the war. One week since the ground incursion and Peace Man and I have been in very little contact since. He is out of electricity 99% of the time and cannot charge his cell phone. Added to that is the fact that re-

Gaza, January 8. The Geneva-based International Committee of the Red Cross said it had been seeking access to shell-damaged areas in Zeitoun

ception of cell phones from Gaza is almost nil, he has to be in a high and exposed place to talk. This endangers him, so we have had very little contact. It is a horrifying reality.

Clearly the situation in Gaza is much worse than what we are experiencing, however I will share what we are going through so the complexity and absurdity can be understood. On the Israeli side, one million people are in the range of the rockets from Gaza. Many people have fled to safer areas in Israel. Most rockets are hitting in open areas, however some have injured civilians and lots of damage has been caused to homes and buildings. People are in constant fear and alert. The war has created chaos in most of the southern part of Israel. No school or university studies, people are not allowed to form crowds, which means weddings and other gatherings are not allowed, many businesses are closed and people have not been to work for two weeks.

I have personally spent most of the time in Sderot, however my wife and kids have been out of the area for the whole time. Today we are all together again at home. The rockets are still hitting, however it feels good to be back home even in the face of danger. We have been in this reality for eight years, so for us it seems amazingly normal.

Today has been a rather quiet day in Sderot. Only rocket alerts, no one hurt and no damage. It feels rather normal, however as I type, I can clearly hear the sounds of war. Blasts and planes, shooting and helicopters. A horrible war so close across the border. I am horrified by the number of civil-

in the east of Gaza City since Saturday 3, but the Israeli authorities granted permission only on Wednesday 7—the first day that Israel allowed a three-hour lull in the attacks on Gaza on humanitarian grounds. The statement said a team of four Palestine Red Crescent ambulances accompanied by Red Cross representatives made its way to Zeitoun Wednesday where it “found four small children next to their dead mothers in one of the houses. They were too weak to stand up on their own. One man was also found alive, too weak to stand up. In all, there were at least 12 corpses lying on mattresses.” In another house, the statement said, the rescue team “found 15 other survivors of this attack including several wounded. In yet another house, they found an additional three corpses. Israeli soldiers posted at a military position some 80 meters away from this house ordered the rescue team to leave the area, which they refused to do. There were several other positions of the Israeli Defense Forces nearby as well as two tanks.” Because of berms built by

ian casualties in Gaza. The civilians are to suffer once again from the brutality and incompetence of their leaders and this time the result is worse than ever.

For four and a half months from June to November 2008 we had a ceasefire. Only a very small amount of hostile actions from both sides were occurring. Our life was back to a very quiet and normal reality. The main problem was that for the Gazan civilians, the ceasefire did not create any hope, since there was an ongoing siege on Gaza. Both sides were blaming each other. Israel claiming that the Hamas was not abiding by the ceasefire since there were occasional rockets and the arms smuggling continued, and Hamas claiming that Israel was not fulfilling its part since the siege continued. This war has broken out for the simple reason that neither side was willing to make a serious effort to avoid it. Both sides were sharpening their swords, waiting for the next horrible round.

Was there no other option? Of course there was! Both sides state that on the other side there is no partner to talk to. However the initial ceasefire was achieved by talks. Indirect talks, but that is only a technicality. We all know that sometime (hopefully very soon) there will be some kind of agreement and both sides will talk. We all know that this agreement will not disarm either side and remove the threat of future hostilities. However it will be reached.

Why then did so many civilians have to pay such an appalling price for the stupidity and incompetence of our leaders? I am both furious, heart-

Israeli forces, the ambulances could not enter the area so "the children and the wounded had to be taken to the ambulances on a donkey cart," the statement said.

Gaza. January 10. The commander of the Israeli army's elite combat engineering unit, Yahalom, told the Israeli press on Wednesday 7: "We are very violent. We do not balk at any means to protect the lives of our soldiers."

broken to see how our region has fallen so deep into this tragedy which could have been avoided in the first place. More bombings are heard from my home across the border, deepening the pain, suffering and hatred. Once this is over there will be so much work to be done to build any kind of hopeful future. We keep this dialog going to make it just a bit easier when it ends.

Milan, Italy, January 13

Gabriella Fusi

This morning I wasn't listening to the radio with much attention. It was on as I tidied up before going out. Why aren't the peace flags being hung out again? No doubt the question was just a part of a wider debate, but I was busy doing something else. It kept flashing back into my mind later in the morning as I went from the supermarket to the chemist's, and then to see my brother who's ill with bronchitis. It was like an advert and, just like in an ad on TV, I saw the flag washed clean, not torn like a flag in a battle, but only the worse for the weather: there in the drawer next to the dishcloths and dusting rags.

In the afternoon I asked Bruno if he could help me. Yes, years ago we did have two flags hanging from both sides of our wide balcony, rainbow flags which would "talk the same language" with those hanging from other windows or clash with the US flag right below them, on the fourth floor. The weather had spared only one, the one in the drawer. Tomorrow morning? No, right now. So, like in Brecht's poem, we went and hung it out.

Its fluttering disturbed the handful of sparrows who are regular visitors to the balcony all year round

First used in Italy in a peace march in 1961, the rainbow flags bearing the word *Pace* (Peace) were hung out in great numbers in 2002 as part of the "Peace from every balcony" campaign against the war in Iraq.

and are hungrier than usual on these snowy days. I was upset to see them scattering: maybe I didn't have the right to do as I wanted to in a place that had also become theirs. Then the flag wrapped around itself. I straightened it out and used a needle and thread to hold it better in place. As I walked in again I asked myself out loud if it would hold. Depends on which way the wind blows, Bruno replied. Right. Which way will the wind blow?

Spring 1938

by Bertolt Brecht

Here

notes from the present

Today, Easter Sunday morning
A sudden snowstorm swept over the island.
Between the greening hedges lay snow. My young son
Drew me to a little apricot tree by the house wall
Away from a verse in which I pointed the finger at those
Who were preparing a war which
Could well wipe out the continent, this island, my people, my family,
And myself. In silence
We put a sack
Over the freezing tree.

From *Poems 1913-1956*, trans. Derek Bowman, Methuen, London, 1987, p. 303.

Durham, North Carolina, January 15

Laila El-Haddad

[...] Another night of terror and confusion has passed on Gaza, another weary dawn has risen. I was unable to speak with my parents all day, and

so I rang my father just after midnight my time. He sounded wrecked and suffocated, not his usual collected self. “I’m so tired. . . I’m just so tired. I didn’t sleep all night, the bombs are tearing through my head. I really have no idea what’s going on outside, nobody has any idea what’s going on. . . I can’t even hear anything on the radio anymore, everyone is just praying. I really just want to go now, dear, I’m sorry. Goodbye.” He ended abruptly. “Seedo?” piped in Yousuf. “Just remember—the only one who has the power to stop this is God.”

Gaza, January 15. Israel stepped up its 20-day-old offensive shelling the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and other buildings in central Gaza.

Gaza, January 16. Israeli tank fire killed two boys at a United Nations-run school in the northern Gaza Strip town of Beit Lahiya.

Durham, North Carolina, January 17

Laila El-Haddad

My mother—a pediatrician—spent the day yesterday visiting the child victims of Israel’s war on Gaza. She distributed some toys bought with donations to try and bring a smile to their destroyed lives. My father took some pictures of the children, as well as of ambulances hit by Israeli shells and shrapnel. They spent what they told me was the most terrorizing night of the past two weeks yesterday—missiles destroying buildings around their house, lighting apartments and towers on fire. He sent me a brief email around dawn; in terrifying clarity, it read:

Jerusalem. After 22 days of war, and the deaths of more than 1,200 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, Israel declared that a unilateral cease-fire would begin in Gaza within hours.

“Loved ones: I thought to take few moments on the generator to write this email to you, it might be our last communication. The Israeli army has been heavily bombarding everything in Gaza now. They escalated their attack intensively after 4 am. Tal El-Hawa is on fire, they just fired a missile on one apartment in a huge apartment building in front of our house (Borj Al-Shorook), I guess Laila knows it. Phosphorus bombs now are fired everywhere

on houses and on people. UNRWA's [United Nations Relief and Works Agency] main stores in Gaza were hit. Hundreds of people are trapped in burning buildings in Tal El-Hawa and Al-Sabra and everywhere. It is clear now that these people decided now to finish everyone and everything in Gaza Strip. I still have faith in Allah." [...]

Karkur, Israel, January 17

When I tell Israelis that I've been keeping this daily diary for a BBC World Service radio show, I'm often met with a pleading response to "explain that Israel had to do this. Explain to everyone how we didn't have a choice." While I would be lying if I didn't say that there are definitely some Israelis who are celebrating what's been happening in Gaza, most of the people who I've spoken to do not feel that way, feeling instead that Israel did not have a choice.

As we entered this conflict, many Israelis were genuinely puzzled by the fact that no one else seemed to understand why we felt this way. Part of me has felt this way also. I've been having these terrible feelings of frustration as this conflict has dragged on, being tugged back and forth by events that have happened— Hamas' cynical use of its civilian population, questioning Israel's ethics when it fired on a school. I've had feelings of sadness as I dealt with a loss of innocence of sorts, as my four year-old son learned that there are bad people who shoot rockets at schools, and his belief that if I were to buy him a sword, he would be able to defeat the bad guys.

There have been times that I felt were incredibly important, times when I had an opportunity to

Liza Rosenberg

To critics abroad, Israel's war in Gaza is a wildly disproportionate response to the rockets of Hamas, causing untold human suffering. Yet here in Israel very few, at least among the Jewish population, see it that way. While tens of thousands have poured into the streets of world capitals demonstrating against the Israeli military operation, antiwar rallies here have struggled to draw 1,000 participants. The Peace Now organization has received many messages from supporters telling it to stay out of the streets on this one. Israel has turned in the past couple of weeks into a paradigm of unity and mutual support. Flags are flying high. Celebrities are visiting schoolchildren in at-risk areas, soldiers are praising the equipment and camaraderie of their army units. Ask people anywhere how they feel about the

shape my son's thoughts and wanted so badly to ensure that he understood. When he told me that his teacher explained that there are good Arabs and bad Arabs, I responded by reminding him that there are good people and bad people, and that it doesn't matter where they're from or if they're somehow different from us. I tell him that in Gaza, there are little boys just like him, little girls, mommies and daddies, that they are good people, and that they are probably very scared right now.

As this will probably be my last daily diary entry, I was asked by my editors if I would be willing to conduct a joint interview with my counterparts in Gaza. I thought about it, but felt that I couldn't go through with it. What could I possibly say that wouldn't sound hollow and completely ridiculous in light of the fact that my country is destroying his? To say sorry would be so hopelessly inadequate in this situation, I think. I would feel ashamed, embarrassed, helpless. And they might take their anger out on me, which, though misplaced, would be understandable. Or perhaps they would be gracious, and that would be even more unbearable, because I would feel so horribly, horribly guilty.

After all, as I sit here in Israel with all of these thoughts, all of these worries about what my son is understanding, these gentlemen are worrying about whether their families will survive another night in Gaza. I'm not personally responsible for anything that's been happening down there, and I believe Hamas has to realize that there will be consequences to its actions. I want more than anything for there to be peace and quiet for my fellow Israelis in the south. Ideally, I want the same thing for the Palestinians in Gaza as well. As I formulate my words, news networks are reporting that

army's barring journalists from entering Gaza and the response is: let the army do its job. Israelis deeply believe that their military works harder than most to spare civilians, holding their fire in many more cases than using it. For many of the 1.4 million Israelis who are Arabs, the war has produced a very different feeling, a mix of anger and despair. The largest demonstration against the war so far, with some 6,000 participants, was organized by an Arab political party. But that is still distinctly a minority view. Polls have shown nearly 90 percent support for the war thus far, and street interviews confirm that Israelis not only favor it but do so quite strongly. The war, of course, is portrayed differently here and abroad. What Israelis see on the front pages of their newspapers and on their evening broadcasts is not what the rest of the world is reading and seeing. Israeli news focuses on Israeli suffering—the continuing rocket attacks on Israel, the wounded Israeli soldiers, with pictures from Gaza coming later. But the Israeli news media are not so much determining the national agenda as reflecting it.

Hamas has agreed to a one-year, renewable cease-fire, if Israel is prepared to meet certain conditions. And I wonder how we'll ever find our way out of this mess that we Israelis and Palestinians have managed to create.

Even the left and what was long called the peace camp consider this conflict almost entirely the responsibility of Hamas, and thus a moral and just struggle.

Durham, North Carolina, January 19

Laila El-Haddad

There is a an unfamiliar stillness in Gaza today, says my father. No F-16s ripping through the sky. No ravaging explosions. There is time to hear yourself think. All a sort of anesthetic. A pause in a sick calculated brutality—to allow the caged disposables a moment to contemplate their options—to create the illusion they even have options.

Gaza, January 18. It was a day of digging and bitter discovery. As the people of Gaza emerged from hiding, they confronted, for the first time, the full, sometimes breathtaking extent of the destruction around them wrought by the Israeli military. Anger was compounded when people concluded that Israeli soldiers appeared to have been using their houses. The Sakers found wrappers for chocolate cranberry power bars and corn puffs with Hebrew writing. In another, a child found a tiny Torah.

“This siege will endure until we are truly persuaded into choosing a harmless slavery but in total freedom!” And so the cowering uncower. The homeless return to no homes. The decomposing dead are unearthed from the rubble, only to be buried once again. The damage is surveyed. Uprooted trees. Entire groves. A city eviscerated. People burned to a cinder. Disemboweled streets. And more tales of horror on every corner.

A woman's five sons are killed in the assassination of Saeed Siam. They lived in the building over. Twenty-five more bodies recovered from a Samouni family. An ethnic cleansing. Reports of executions by young, trigger-happy Israeli soldiers, cheerleaders on the borders. A boy, fifteen years old. And in between, air force pilots on playstations. “I want to destroy the city,” said one gleefully. And sub-contracts are handed out to further enforce the siege. Hands are shaken. Lives taken. “They destroyed anything in their path—people, buildings, streets... nothing was left untouched,”

Gaza, January 19. Decomposing bodies continued to be uncovered in the worst-hit areas, with the death toll for the 23-day conflict passing 1,300, according to health officials here.

my father said. “It is calm, for now. We sleep, for now. But the siege continues. And make no mistake—Gaza will rise.”

From “War”

by Franco Buffoni

Here

notes from the present

Find another word instead of country
To talk about these fields and those
Ramps of vineyards, the wall down there and the executed.
But now there is no cry even for vengeance
From these expanses of bones overpowered
By fresher ranks of the dead in boots. [...]

With two hands you can grasp a gun
Or a tennis racket
A cock in open palms
Or the round cone of a tit,
With two hands you can bind two other hands,
The greatest crime is to commandeer
Emulation, brotherhood
Geographic origin,
To take advantage of a generous body
That weds another body, a body
Goaded on to stir up its spirit
Suck out all the goodness, friendship
The jokes the laughter and translate them
Into utter hatred and ambushes laid for friends
Of other laughter. This, done to young men,
By those in command
This evil use of goodness
This is what we will not forgive.

On coming back to Palestine I had not slept much, since my flights (US-Baku-Istanbul-Amman) had poor connections and timing (arriving in Amman at 2 am). I stayed at the airport till dawn and headed to the bridge to cross into the occupied West Bank. My trip from Amman Airport to the Bethlehem area (a distance of a mere 60 miles) took nearly eleven hours.

Washington. Barack Hussein Obama was sworn in as the 44th president of the United States.

We were delayed partly because about 20 buses of Palestinian security personal returning from training in Jordan were put ahead of us. Also at one point in the Israeli entry area, they took my passport and asked me to wait. Every 20 minutes they came with a batch of Palestinian ID cards or passports and called out names (batches to let them go and batches to take to interrogation). After about two and a half hours they called my name in the batch for interrogation. The questions I got asked all had answers that can be found by anyone who searches for my name on the Internet. Here are some samples:

Q: You have a US passport. How come? A: I lived in the US for many years. Q: So you married an American to get your passport? A: No, I got it through my work. Q: So you live there? A: No, I moved back to live here. Q: Why? A: Because this is Palestine, our homeland. Q: You are Christian? A: And Muslim, and Jewish, and Buddhist, and other things. Q: Are you joking? A: No, I think there are elements of truth in all religions. Q: But it says on your ID card that you are Christian? A: You are the ones who issue these ID cards and you are the ones who put these things on them. Q: What

is the name of your son? A: (I hesitated a bit but then thought they could find it on the Internet anyway). And so on...

Baghdad, January 27

I finished my exams last Wednesday; the teachers brought very hard questions, but I did fine. I was planning to have two lectures everyday during the mid-year holiday, but my grandparents and everyone urged me to take a break, relax and spend the holiday in Baghdad. After I thought about it, I decided to take their advice and have a break, I really deserve one after nine months of continuous studying so that I don't get bored later. So on the first day of my holiday I traveled to Baghdad, the road was really good except the two hours we stopped before we reached Baghdad because of the crowded road, as the cars must be inspected before we reach the Baghdad gate... I am having a pleasant time here, Baghdad is much safer than Mosul, we can go out, wear what we love without fear, walk and enjoy the warm weather. I love Baghdad and I wish I can stay here forever! I may not be able to write often, I have very limited spare time, each day we visit relatives or go shopping so I don't use the computer very often these days... I feel extremely happy that I'll be celebrating my 17th birthday in Baghdad.

Havana, February 4

The rejection of what is different, of what is foreign, has a flip side that is equally discriminatory and humiliating. The strange "endophobia" dis-

"Sunshine"

Gaza, January 24. The boys clapped and sang to pulsating music. They played games and shouted. In the Jabaliya refugee camp, near where some 40 people were killed by Israeli mortar fire earlier this month, today was the first day of school since before the war, and 1,000 homeless people had been removed from the building so that classes could begin. Even then, normal school-work had to wait. A team trained in trauma and group activities was running the assembly, and after the singing, there was a play devoted to how to handle dangerous materials, like shell parts, still in or near homes. Later, each pupil described what had happened to him and to his friends and family in Israel's 23-day war.

Yoani Sánchez

played in excluding what is similar, in denying equal rights to one's own compatriots, is common in the streets of this island. Among the most intense impressions that the city of Santiago de Cuba left me is precisely that of not being able to enjoy the same services as foreign tourists. Located on a corner of Céspedes park is a modern office of the telecommunications company Etecsa, where you can send a fax or use the Internet. Now, the latter is only possible when you prove that you were not born in Cuba or that you have been settled for many years hundreds of kilometers from this country. I learned this when I went in and saw the interrogating faces of the employees as they looked at my clothing, trying to detect if I was a foreigner or a simple national. As I am skilled in the art of sneaking through the narrowest cracks, I spoke a mix of English and German, so they sold me a card to access the web. I sent last Sunday's post from there as I noted how they denied an Internet connection to various Cubans who came in. Without arguing, with a simple "access is only for tourists," they prevented my fellow citizens from sitting at the computers that were free at the back of the room. One who was especially upset protested. He said something like, "This is a lack of respect," and unable to continue pretending to be German, I made a small correction: "This is another lack of respect, one more in an already long list." The next minute they asked me to leave the premises.

Zimbabwe. Children are rushing across the South African border on their own in a journey made dangerous by thieves and rapists. With their nation in a prolonged sequence of crises, more unaccompanied children and women than ever are joining the rush of desperate Zimbabweans illegally crossing the frontier at the Limpopo River. What they are escaping is a broken country where half the people are going hungry, most schools and hospitals are closed or dysfunctional and a cholera epidemic has taken a toll in the thousands. Yet they are arriving in a place where they are unwelcome and are resented as rivals for jobs. Last year, Zimbabweans were part of the quarry in a spate of mob attacks against foreigners.

Mosul, Iraq, February 8

"Sunshine"

I had the best mid-year holiday ever in Baghdad, the weather was fantastic and Baghdad has be-

El Auja border crossing, Egypt. France sent tech-

come much safer than before. We spent the time with our relatives and neighbors, we also did a lot of shopping, and in the mornings we cleaned the house, washed the curtains, cleaned the walls and organized the storage rooms. We did many things that my grandparents couldn't do. Anyway, I'll tell you now about my diary.

Thursday (January 22). We arrived Baghdad after seven hours, the delay was about two hours near the Baghdad gate, but the road was really safe, no more armed men, dead bodies and mines in the street. My dad's cousin joined us and spent two days with us. At noon we went to uncle S's house. Uncle had to leave Iraq, it was very painful to see the house empty. Uncle S is my grandpa's best friend who left Iraq suddenly, he brought the house keys and asked my grandparents to sell the house and all of his possessions, and it was so hard for my grandparents to sell their best friend's house. I kept walking through the house, in each corner of the rooms they had beautiful memories. I remembered the times I visited them and how much fun I had, and prayed uncle S will come back with his big family because I miss them so much. [...]

Friday (January 23). In the afternoon we did some shopping in my favorite place, Al Roubaee street. I had lots of fun, the buildings were awesome, and that gave me hope because months ago this street was burnt and destroyed, but now it looks great, the owners have fixed their shops and people have started to go out.

Saturday (January 24). We visited my mom's aunt and had a good time there, she kept talking about her sons who left Baghdad, and her grandsons whom she misses a lot... it is so painful to see

nical equipment to help Gazans draw water from the ground. The Swiss sent blankets and plastic tarps. Mercy Corps, a relief agency, sent 12 truckloads of food. And all of it, including dozens of other trucks carrying sugar, rice, flour, juice and baby formula, sat in the hot sun here going nowhere. This normally quiet commercial crossing between Egypt and Israel has been turned into a parking lot of stalled, humanitarian aid, and in the city of El Arish there are even greater quantities of food, clothing and essential supplies, sitting, waiting and baking in the sun. "All our lunchmeat, it's all going to go bad," said Mr. Abdullah, whose tractor-trailer loaded with food and blankets sat in a line outside the stadium in El Arish for 24 hours without moving. Two of the main problems have been the short window for supplies to pass and Israel's decision to let few trucks go through, officials and volunteers here said. But another problem has to do with Egypt's being unprepared to meet strict Israeli packing requirements, which would allow the goods to be passed

Iraqi families dispersed, but I pray our loved ones will come back one day. [...]

Tuesday (January 27). In the morning another neighbor visited us with her two-year-old son, we had a great time, and in the afternoon we did some shopping! At noon we went to our neighbor's house and had coffee with them, at noon we visited our relatives and I taught my mom's uncle how to use the Internet. I kept repeating over and over and wrote all of the steps in a copybook so that uncle never forget them.

Wednesday (January 28). We had a delicious lunch, we ate a famous Iraqi dish called *simach mazkoof*, it's the Iraqi way to prepare fish. In the afternoon we went to a playground, my brother and sister had a great time, the games were really nice and the yard was crowded. It was great to see that people have started to feel safe, go out and come home at 10 pm or so, because a few months ago the situation wasn't good, people used to hide in their houses and didn't go out except for necessary things.

Thursday (January 29). We went to a nearby store to buy juice, and then we celebrated my 17th birthday. I feel awesome, I hope I'll achieve many things this year. My biggest dream is to have a high average and go to the college I like, and also publish a book, and I hope my country will be safe again and that God will continue to protect us. Now I am almost an adult, but I still can't vote. [...]

Saturday (January 31). Election day, my grandparents went with the neighbors to vote, and in the evening we invited our neighbors to have supper with us, we had a nice time. What makes Iraqi society great is that we share the good and hard times with each other, educated people never pay atten-

through security scanners and onto Israeli trucks for delivery to Gaza. "The trucks get to Auja and they sit," said Ahmed Oraby, head of the Red Crescent office in El Arish. "Many trucks that left are now coming back. They don't take anything." "I have been sitting here for three days, and before that I was in Arish for four days," said Sayed Ahmed Sorour, seated in the cab of a truck hauling clothing and blankets. "Nobody is telling us anything. Not Egypt. Not Israel. Nobody explains to us why we are stopping here." An Egyptian state security officer said there did not seem to be any rational explanation for how the crossing worked. He said he and the other officers simply waited for the Israelis to tell them how many trucks to let in, and they complied. By 5 pm, when it was clear that Yasir Hussein was not going to get to deliver his goods, again, he and some other drivers laid down a blanket, warmed some water on a small gas burner and shared small glasses of tea. Mr. Hussein said he was hauling a load of food donated by the Swiss and had been sitting at the gate for six days.

tion to castes or religions, because we are all Iraqis. The neighbors who visited us were Shiites, Kurds, Christians and Armenians, and we are like one big family. My Armenian neighbor said “did you know that al-Hakim’s [leader of Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq] yes-men arrested 350 guys so that they won’t participate in the election and neither will their families? My friend who’s Sunni is hiding in our house, we thought it would be safer for him to stay with us. Badir’s army took his laptop as well as \$2000, thank God they didn’t kidnap him, his brother was killed a year ago, and his mother is in Syria now”. In hard and good times, the Iraqis unite, you see, when the situation becomes dangerous for Sunnis, for example, the Shiites protect them, when the Christians were threatened, the Muslims protected them and asked them to hide in their houses. Many politicians forced people to choose them; some gave people blankets and other stuff if they swore to choose them! Or they just threaten people, “if you participate in the elections we’ll kill your sons”. Many people didn’t find their names at the election centers, or their names were at distant centers! My grandparents and dad in Mosul had to go to three election centers till they found their names. My grandparents insisted on walking no matter how far they had to walk, people in Mosul were really afraid that the Kurds will take over Mosul, which would be a disaster, and I mean by that the Kurdish politicians who have threatened the Christians.

Sunday (February 1). We visited our friends and talked about the elections, then their daughter-in-law came with her son who has autism, God be with her. He keeps running around and destroy-

“We are not moving, and no one is saying anything,” he said. “We are just trying to help.” (New York Times, January 27)

Baghdad, February 5. The Da’awa, a Shi’a religious Party of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, was the overwhelming winner of Iraq’s provincial elections, the first official results show.

ing everything he sees; the mother, who has a MSc in dentistry, couldn't take it anymore and started to cry a lot, my heart broke, in Iraq there aren't any experts that can help or even provide consultation. At noon my mom's uncle and aunt visited us.

Monday (February 2). We did some shopping and I bought a really nice purse, then we had ice-cream at my favorite ice-cream shop, called "Laymoona". Also on that day my mom's aunt's husband passed away because of the bad medical care in the Iraqi hospitals. He died after an angina attack, his family took him to three hospitals but their emergency units could not provide any aid because of the shortage in everything, one of the hospitals had no cables for certain equipment!

Tuesday (February 3). We visited my dad's aunt in the morning to have coffee with them, and her three neighbors joined us; one of them is going to emigrate, she was talking about how hard it is to leave their house, but they must do so, all the neighbors felt extremely sad to know that she's leaving. One of the things I love about neighbors in Iraq is that we are very close, in the morning neighbors have coffee together, without any formalities or affectation. if a neighbor is sick, every day a neighbor will cook for her or even do housework for her; neighbors go shopping together. My grandma says that she couldn't tolerate and get through the hard times without her neighbors, and my neighbor said to me, "without your grandma I'd be dead by now from sadness, I couldn't tolerate living without my daughters and son without your grandma's support". In the evening we had dinner at our neighbor's house, we had a great time, and their son and I worked on the computer. [...]

Gaza, February 15

I am constantly trying to get out of Gaza to continue studies abroad. Exit from Gaza is very difficult, it's a prison when the crossing is closed, especially the Rafah crossing. The news says that the new ceasefire will begin soon and for a long time between the parties, and this is good news, when the parties are given an opportunity to rethink and not to use the idea of war again. And give an opportunity for dialogue, peace, where the idea of violence led to the growing hatred between the two parties; therefore, we want to repair what has been destroyed by violence. We have a lot of work to build trust between the parties.

San Salvador, February 19

“Publishing your pictures on Facebook, Hi5, Myspace, etc. is fun, but try not to publish the ones from your last trip to Europe,” read a forwarded chain email that arrived in my inbox a few weeks ago urging me to take steps to prevent attacks and kidnappings. The person who sent it to me was careful not to leave the other addressees' names visible. That too is said to be dangerous. Perhaps the message was Mexican, since, although it was written in fairly standard Spanish, there were expressions from another context. Family members, friends, acquaintances and strangers all appear in my email account as senders of this type of message. I admit that I have forwarded some of these messages in order to warn of rape threats in the restroom of a shopping mall, the danger of using antiperspirants because they cause breast cancer,

“Peace Man”

Gaza, February 12. Just in time for Valentine's Day, Israel allowed the export of a shipment of flowers from Hamas-run Gaza for the first time in about a year. The flowers are destined for Europe.

María Tenorio

Kabul, February 17. The number of civilians killed in Afghanistan leapt by nearly 40 percent last year, according to a survey released by the United Nations. The death toll—2,118 civilians killed in 2008, compared with 1,523 in 2007—is the highest since the Taliban government was ousted in November 2001, at the outset of a war with no quick end in sight.

or the shocking story of a new kind of assault in parking lots. I'm conscious of the fact that I live in a city, a country, a region and a world full of danger. My experiences and those of others tell me this. They scream out and remind me. They tell me I'm not the only one who is vulnerable and afraid. What's more, I don't know how societies from decades and centuries ago felt, but the one I've had to be a member of suffers from an international syndrome of widespread fear; a fear of differences, a fear of making risky choices and a fear of fear itself. They say that talking on a cell phone causes brain tumors; that the water we drink is polluted; that hundreds of people were fired from a cable television company; that stopping at the head of the line at traffic lights makes us more vulnerable to attacks; that heating meals in the microwave is carcinogenic; that it will not be long before the crisis is overwhelmingly felt throughout the world; that spending a lot of time in front of a computer damages one's vision; that voting for such and such candidate will destroy the country. The rumor culture is effective at spreading fear. How can we cure ourselves of it? [...]

Milan, Italy, February 17. A Milan court handed down a ruling that would send the political establishments of many countries into a tailspin. It found the British lawyer David Mills guilty of taking \$600,000 in exchange for lying to protect the Italian prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi. In Italy, the ruling did not even lead the evening news.

La chéursa

by Raffaello Baldini

I m'è chéurs dri rugénd, mo mè a n capéva,
a n so s'i avéss la s-ciòpa, mo i curtéll
ò vést al lèmi léus sòtta i lampiéun.

Here

notes from the present

Running. They ran after me shouting, but I didn't understand. / I don't know if they had a gun, but the

Me ‘ndéva cmè un chèn brach e lòu tòtt dri,
 ò travarsè la piaza,
 pu a m so bótt te Baròun, mo dop la pòumpa
 a so tòuran perché’ e’ Ciód e a m so infilé
 ti pórtich fina Tiglio dal smanzài,
 ò imbòcch e’ lavadéur, ò pas la méura,
 da la Zóppa a so vnéu zò ma la Costa,
 pu tla Bósca, a so sèlt dréinta un curtéil,
 ò fat du rèmm ad schèli,
 a so vnú fura vsina la Massèni,
 a so chéurs vérs la Roca, me crusèri
 ò ciap d’inzò vérs e’ Pòzz Lòngh, e ò vést
 davènti mè tri quatar occhio’i curéva
 e i s guardéva di dri, i m guardéa mu mè.
 Te préim a n’ò capéi, a i vléa di quèl,
 mo a n mu n so tròv la vòusa, a n’arivéva
 a tiré e’ fiè.

Però mè u m pèr ch’i séa
 quéi ’d préima, quéi ch’i m déva dri mu mè,
 éun e’ va un puchin zop, un èlt l’à un brètt
 ch’a m l’arcórd, mo i córr véa, i n sta a sintéi,
 e’ pèr ch’i apa paéura, e mè a i dagh dri,
 ò paéura ènca mè, mo cm’òì da fè?
 a m putrébb farmè què, e se pu a m sbai?
 s’a m férm e quéi di dri i m’è madòs?

From *La nàiva*, poems in the Romagna dialect, Einaudi, Turin, 1982, pp. 49-50

*knives / I saw the blades
 glinting under the street
 lights. / I was going like a
 hunting dog with all of
 them behind, / I crossed the
 square, / then dived into the
 Baròun, but after the pump
 / I went back through the
 Ciód and slipped into / the
 arcade as far as Attilio the
 corn merchant, / turned into
 the washhouse, passed the
 town walls, / from the Zóppa
 Gate came down to via
 Costa, / then into the Bosca,
 I jumped into a courtyard,
 / climbed two flights of steps,
 / came out near via Massa-
 ni, / ran towards the Castle,
 at the crossroads / I headed
 down towards Pozzo Lun-
 go, and saw / ahead of me
 three or four who were run-
 ning / and looking back,
 looking at me. / Not under-
 standing then, I wanted to
 say something, / but my
 voice didn't come, I couldn't
 manage/ to get my breath.
 // But it seems to me they are
 / the same ones as before,
 the ones that were chasing
 me, / one limps a bit, another
 wears a beret / that I re-
 call, but they run off, they
 don't stop to listen, / it seems
 they're afraid, and I chase
 after them, / I too am afraid,
 but what do I do? / I could
 just stop here, but what if
 I'm wrong? / if I stop and
 the ones behind are on top
 of me? (trans. Barbara Mc-
 Gilvray)*

Mosul, Iraq, February 21

I was very busy with studying, I had a lot of subjects to study. Two weeks ago, our friend (the blogger *Baghdadentist*) visited us, he came to Mosul for a couple of days, we had a very nice time.

“Sunshine”

*Jerusalem, February 20.
 Benjamin Netanyahu, the
 Likud Party leader, was
 chosen to form Israel's
 next government.*

Last Friday, I celebrated my birthday with three of my best friends in a gorgeous café, my mom's co-worker organized everything for my birthday, and he did a great job. We celebrated by candlelight, and I loved every moment of my birthday. My friends and I were amazed, he made very nice surprises for us, and played my favorite songs. It was great to see my friend Y, I hadn't seen her for more than a year, also my other two friends Z and M joined us with their family. It was a good occasion for my parents to meet their family, my mom had a lot in common with my friends' mom (she is a professor), and their brother was a very funny guy, they are a very nice family and I hope they'll visit us often. I wanted the celebration to last forever; it is definitely "the best 17th birthday ever", as everyone said.

Last week, I was preparing my homework, and I got a message from my friend saying "no one will go to school tomorrow, the headmistress's assistant got an alert from the terrorists through a phone call that there'll be a battle near the school". My friend said, "warn everyone you know". I kept calling my friends and everyone I know at school, I felt upset and old painful memories came back, from when we didn't go to school because of the dangerous situation.

So when the headmistress's assistant received the warning, she went immediately to the governorate asking them to take serious action to ensure the students' safety and the policemen's as well, but you know what, they just said "ignore it, and the students must attend school". They didn't do anything about that! It is crazy! My friends and I didn't go to school for a couple of days, but then we had

to attend school again, we can't stay home forever. Besides, the whole country is dangerous, it won't make much difference if we stay home. The situation was very bad, every day about two cars explode, one of them was near a high school in Mosul! I wonder if the schools have become a target for the terrorists!

I am under a lot of pressure in these days; I'll have nine lectures after school this week! It will be hard, but I'll give 100% of my energy.

Jerusalem, February 27

Rita Presepi

Friday afternoon is not the best day to be in Jerusalem; at two o'clock, Shabbat begins, the streets empty out, and most shops close their shutters. Nevertheless I decide to take a stroll downtown; Ben Yehuda Boulevard, usually full of music and life, is almost deserted; a few people pass by looking like they're in a hurry; scattered little groups walk along slowly, murmuring in low voices.

Dusk is now falling, and I'm about to head home when I am approached by a person who looks ominous to say the least, something between Count Dracula and a character out of a Viking epic. A tall, lanky man, wrapped in a flowing black coat, with the round fur hat of an Orthodox Jew on his head and two long coils of reddish hair emerging from it; he looks at me with meek azure eyes.

He says something in Hebrew that I don't understand, I answer that I'm Italian and only know English. "We sit?" he asks in shaky English. "Ah, ok" I answer, gesturing towards the bench in the middle of the street. "No, not here... people can see us," and without even looking back at me, he ducks

Washington. President Obama announced that he would withdraw combat forces from Iraq by August 2010 and all remaining American troops by December 2011.

into one of those dark alleyways that branch off of Ben Yehuda. "People can see us? What on earth?" I ask myself, as I follow his flapping black coat incredulously.

We arrive at the dark entrance of a dilapidated building and he starts to walk up the stairs, which are sticky with dirt. "Come on," he says; I look at him and have to admit that his dark figure in the gloom of the stairwell almost reminds me of some opening scene from a horror movie... I summon up my distrust of strangers, weak as it is. "But do you live here?" "No," he answers, sitting down on a step halfway up the flight and taking out a cigarette. "You see, Orthodox Jews aren't allowed to smoke on Shabbat..." and he hands me the pack and lighter.

In his broken English, he tells me he was born and raised in Germany and has been living here in Jerusalem for two years now with his family. He's twenty-seven, like me.

We hear footsteps at the top of the stairs. "Shit!" he exclaims, and jumps to his feet, throwing away the half-smoked butt. We hurry out of the building and make our way to a secluded inner courtyard where no one can see us. M. lights another cigarette and offers me one.

I want to find out more about his life. "So you Orthodox Jews..." I start. "I'm not Orthodox, I'm an atheist..." I'm slightly taken aback. "But... in what sense?" "Well, I don't believe in God, but my family is Orthodox. They don't know I'm an atheist, they'd kill me." His meek gaze avoids mine, wandering off into the darkness of this nook that the smoky streetlight over us can't seem to illuminate.

Once again we hear voices approaching. With a nervous grin, M. flees with his half-smoked cigarette towards another dead-end alleyway, where hidden from prying eyes, he throws away the butt and lights another.

We talk a little longer, but it's late, he has to go. He gives me his phone number, but has no way to write down mine: on Shabbat Orthodox Jews can't carry their cell phones around. "Ok, I'll text you so you have my number too," I tell him. "Ok, thanks, but after Shabbat."

He's about to go, then turns and hugs me. In the silence I can hear his heart beating wildly. "You know, Orthodox men aren't allowed to hug a woman." I don't know why, but I have no trouble believing him. I watch him walk off and disappear into the darkness. Alone. The bands of his black coat flap as if waving goodbye one last time.

I start to head back home along Jaffa Road, but a voice stops me in my tracks. "Excuse me..." I turn around: it's a young man in jeans and a leather jacket, who looks Arab. In broken English he asks if I'd like to have a drink with him. The cafés are all closed, in a convenience store we buy a beer and a Coke.

His name is J., he's twenty-seven, like me. Like M. His family is from Hebron, and he's been living for several years in Jerusalem, where he works as a busboy in a Jewish restaurant. "I have no problem with anybody," he keeps telling me. "Jews, Palestinians, English people, Italians, they're all the same to me, so why do the Jews hate me so much?"

We walk along. J. offers me cigarette after cigarette as he tells me how hard it is to live in a society where whatever you do, you're considered a second-class citizen.

I get the impression that he must have had a few too many beers that afternoon; as a matter of fact, at one point he suddenly stops, undoes his pants—“sorry”—and starts peeing at the edge of the sidewalk. I turn away, almost amused; nothing in this place surprises me any more.

Just then, a Jewish family passes by, all dressed up, a father with two kids, probably headed to the synagogue. They almost brush against him as he’s wrapped up in what he’s doing. I’m dumbstruck to see their gazes pass right through him as if he were invisible, almost as if he didn’t exist. I would have preferred a look of reproach on their part, irritation at seeing a person piss in the middle of the street. Instead, nothing at all, as if there were nothing odd about an Arab behaving in an undignified fashion in a public place. Are we surprised to see a dog doing its business in the street?

At this point I’m almost home, it’s late. J. stops here and turns back, his hands stiff in his pockets.

The evening is cool and quiet, and I have the sensation of walking through a parallel universe, in one of those odd dreams, full of absurdities and contradictions, that we try to give a logical meaning to when we wake up. What stays with me is the absurd sweetness of the two people I met today, their lives so different, yet linked by the same vast solitude. So far away, so close.

Home again, I walk up the steps, coughing from the many, far too many cigarettes I’ve smoked.

Mosul, Iraq, March 4

“Sunshine”

After a busy, busy week “as usual”, many exams, homework, and lectures after school, I feel exhausted. Only two weeks left and then we, the

Alagoinha, Brazil. A 9-year-old girl of just 79 pounds in weight and height of 1.33 meters, from the lower-

students of the 6th class, will stay home... For sixty days to study to be ready for the ministerial exams, the average we get will determine the college we'll attend. The students who get the highest marks will be able to choose the college they want, the lower marks they get, the less choices they have. Anyway, I am doing my best, and I know in my heart that no matter what college I'll attend, it'll be the best for me, but I still feel nervous these days, because I keep studying, and attending lectures, and still have about 1/3 of the curricula left! When our sixty days of hard work begin, I'll have more time to study, concentrate, and make sure I understand all the subjects that I didn't understand completely.

This week I didn't go to school for two days, the situation wasn't good and the roads were closed. I've already made a schedule for my daily routine in the sixty days, I'll study very well, but I don't want to harm my eyes, health, or lose my mind! So I'll spend twenty minutes a day playing sport, fifteen minutes for reading my favorite book, *La Tahzan* (it means "don't be sad"), which gives me strength and makes me relax, I'll use Internet once a week, write a post when I can, and do my favorite hobby, which is writing for ten minutes before I go to bed. I feel much better when I express my feelings, I love writing poems in Arabic, and lately I have had so much passion that I could write a long poem in ten minutes! [...]

middle class and a poor area, complained to her mother of severe stomach pains. They went together to a health unit, where they discovered the girl was 15-weeks pregnant, expecting twins. Only then, the girl confessed to her mother that her stepfather had been raping her and her older sister, aged 14, for the last 3 years. The stepfather has been detained and has admitted sexually abusing the girl since she was 6 years old. After much opposition from the Catholic Church, a legal abortion was performed. Brazilian law bans abortion except in cases of rape (up to the 20th week of pregnancy), and when there is risk of death for the mother. Supported by the Vatican, the archbishop of Olinda and Recife excommunicated the mother and the medical team responsible for the operation. The girl was spared, as Catholic Church law says minors are exempt from excommunication. The archbishop, however, did not excommunicate the stepfather, and declared that "a graver act (than rape) is abortion, to eliminate an innocent life."

Beit Sahour, Palestine, March 8

Mazin Qumsiyeh

Driving from Beit Sahour to Birzeit yesterday, I was listening to a program on Radio Falastin titled "Wala Budda LilQayd An Yankasir". The term is

a verse from a poem that roughly translates that “the chain is destined to be broken”. The program is a lifeline for the nearly 13,000 Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails to hear from their families outside the prison walls. Since visitation rights are routinely denied or highly restricted, family members call in and have three minutes to say something on air. For those prisoners who have access to radio, it is a way to hear and connect with their loved ones.

I listened for nearly one hour to impassioned messages and harrowing stories. All the voices I heard were of women. One woman started her message by saluting women prisoners on International Women’s Day and specifically mentioned one leading prisoner, a friend of hers whom she shared a prison room with the year before. She went on to encourage all prisoners to be steadfast. Then she directed her message to her husband, still in prison. Saying encouraging words, “I know you are strong and you can withstand what they do to you,” “I believe in your spirit yearning for freedom and justice,” etc. She states that she is sorry that she is unable to visit this time because the authorities told her that it was a Jewish holiday of some sort so visits are stopped for this week. Another woman started with questions that will get no answers perhaps until the next personal encounter: “How is your health?” “How is your spirit?” “How are they treating you?” “Are you eating well?”. She then put her five-year-old child on the phone who said “I miss you daddy,” and “don’t worry, my mom puts on her seat belt and drives slowly.” Another women tells her husband not to worry about the family, they are all doing fine, and to just take care of himself, then passes the phone to her mother-in-law

Baghdad, March 9. A suicide bomber driving a motorcycle laden with explosives blew himself up in the busy early morning hours near the police academy, killing 28 people, including 5 police officers, and wounding 57, some of them seriously.

who tells her son something along these lines: “How are you my son Mahmoud? Inshallah [God willing] your health is good. Inshallah your spirit is good. Inshallah you will be returned to us safe and sound. Your father’s funeral went well. Everyone in town came. He died fifteen minutes before I arrived back home... (here she breaks down crying and the announcer gently encourages her and says “Allah yirhamu,” and then she continues...) He died fifteen minutes before I arrived home from visiting you. Everyone was there, everyone took care of him. I pray to God every day to bring you back to me. I had you and your father. I need you, my son. I miss you, my son...”

That call made me cry, and I turned the radio off for a few minutes as I gathered my thoughts. But I turned it back on to hear a few more. They were young women, old women, and a daughter of ten who spoke with more poise and articulation than most adults and recited a poem that she had written.

Sderot, Israel, March 11

“Hope Man”

It’s been almost three months since the war in Gaza ended. My friend Peace Man is still in Gaza. Once every couple of weeks the Rafah border into Egypt opens for a day or two and some people are let through. Peace Man has not been able so far to get permission to leave since Israel will not allow any Palestinians out, and Egypt is making it extremely difficult. The people of Gaza are still stranded in this unbearable situation. During the first month after the war, rockets continued hitting Sderot and the region. For almost two months we have had relative quiet. Only occasional rockets are fired from Gaza, and Israel seems to be holding its fire and not operating in Gaza. Many Israelis hoped

that the war would bring quiet. Now that the war has ended, no one believes the quiet will hold. It is just a matter of time before the next escalation. We are at a similar point to where we were before the war, only with thousands more killed injured and hopeless. Our life has settled back into a rather calm and normal life. We are however always on the alert that the quiet may end at any time. As before, Israel and the Palestinians are not working together on a real, long-lasting solution for the situation. It is not clear if and what the new Israeli government plans to do regarding the situation in Gaza, however from the public statements made both by Netanyahu (the prime minister) and Lieberman (the minister of foreign affairs) the policy of the new government will be even less hope-inspiring than the previous one. So what can we hope for? Well, maybe for human compassion, person-to-person connections, civil initiatives, people on both sides that keep up the ties of humanity even in these desperate times. Looking at the big picture brings much sorrow and despair. Looking at day-to-day life with all the small and amazingly beautiful humanity it contains gives me hope and allows me to move on.

With the shepherds

Here

notes from the present

Last November I got a phone call from Ravenna. “Hi, Laura. This is Piergiorgio. I’m here with Kris-

Laura Zanetti

tin. Tomorrow afternoon I'll be in Trento with a shepherd from Hebron. We've organized a small conference on Palestine with Humanity Together [<http://humanitytogether.wordpress.com/>] and Hafez is going to speak about his experience. Can we meet up?"

For two seasons, in the summer of 2002 and 2003, Piergiorgio had worked as a shepherd in Montalon, a legendary *malga* [Alpine summer pasture] in the Lagorai mountains, before moving on to Palestine as a peace volunteer, but with Alpine pastures always in his heart.

We arranged to meet in Trento, in a coffee bar not far from the Cathedral, in the town centre: Piergiorgio, his pregnant wife Kristin, Hafez Huraini, and me. Hafez spoke English fluently and had deep intelligent eyes, moving warily in his lean face. "Don't worry, Hafez," I told him. "Here you won't find the terrible settlers of Daniela Weiss who poison sheep and cut down olive trees, or the army soldiers who destroy houses and irrigation systems. Here in Trentino it's local politics that, in a bloodless but deceitful way, is killing genuine sheep farming and destroying the old rural landscape."

Hafez, his eyes wide open in surprise, started telling his story: "The place where I was born was called Garratin. It was razed to the ground in 1948, when the State of Israel was created. So we built another village, At-Tuwani, and more villages were established south of Hebron, once a vast pasture land and now, after the Oslo agreements, part of the area C under complete Israeli control. The land is our only means of livelihood. We live off sheep farming and agriculture. Most of us are shepherds: thirty shepherds tending 1400 sheep and 350 goats, and struggling to survive after the settlers poisoned

several hectares of pasture land with barley grains boiled in fluoroacetamide, a rat poison banished by the WHO in all countries but still permitted in Japan and Israel. In 2005, after a number of flocks were poisoned and a hundred sheep were killed, we discussed how to fight against the violation of even the most basic human rights by Israel. The aim of Israel's occupation is to trigger off an escalation of tension to lead the shepherds to react violently. We realized that, so we've organized forms of non-violent protest along with our Israeli friends, either individuals acting on their own or pacifists belonging to various organizations."

"So that is what led to the creation of the South Hebron Hills Committee?" I asked. "Yes. All of us living in the area formed a non-violent movement of hill shepherds: the men take the flocks to pasture while the women do the milking and make cheese."

So what was originally meant to be a brief meeting turned into a very interesting ethnographic study. I got a full insight into the Palestine milk issue and realized that there are many similarities between sheep-raising down there and other sheep-raising experiences in the Fertile Crescent. I learnt the beautiful history of a thousand-year-old cheese with a taste reminiscent of Mediterranean aromas, animals, craftsmen's methods and ancient tools. I found out that the small cheeses made of goat and sheep's milk are not wrapped in polyethylene film but in small pieces of rough cotton cloth which will preserve the precious cheese paste as far as the Yatta market, near Hebron.

I also found out that cheese in Palestine is made by the women. Led by Fatma, an elderly and skilful dairywoman who hands down the centuries-old

craft of cheese making, they are collectively known under the sweet name of El-Hallabat, or cheese women, and are not so different from our Lagorai *malga* women who do the milking and then turn the rich-flavoured milk into precious cheese while their men tend the herds and flocks.

And seeing Hafez's face finally open up into a happy, amused and hopeful smile when his mother was mentioned, I thought of how ninety years before the Lagorai mountains had to face a situation which in Palestine has been an extremely painful everyday reality for decades, and how it was the shepherds and their animals who restored the springs, reopened the pastures, rediscovered the spiritual value of an ancient food.

So my proposal to Hafez, Piergiorgio and Kristin is to ask the Alpine shepherds to show their solidarity to the shepherds of Hebron in a petition to be sent to the State of Israel, asking for the Hebron Hills cheese to be protected as an enduring symbol of a land which deserves to have complete and lasting happiness.

Mosul, Iraq, March 12

“Sunshine”

I spend most of the time these days studying, I stay up till 11 pm and wake up the next day at 6:30 to go to school. I am not getting enough time to sleep, and my face looks tired, but I know these days will pass, but the result of my studies will not fade away, so... I can sleep later.

The situation this week has been very bad, many car bombs have exploded, we hear shooting the whole time, many people have been killed or injured, and many roads have been closed. I spend

more than an hour trying to find an open road on my way from school to my house, I arrive exhausted, with a red face and killing headache. After I take a nap for an hour to rest, I have physics or chemistry lectures at home, after that I do my homework while I listen to slow music, and my favorite songs... (I like Whitney Houston, Blue, West Life, George Michael, Shania Twain, Josh Groban, and too many others to mention; I also like country music a lot, and I listen to Arabic and some Iraqi music.)

In spite of the unbearable situation, I feel very optimistic and positive this week, because I didn't listen to the TV or radio news at all, whenever someone starts to complain about the situation and hard life I go away, when I feel stressed a little bit I put on headphones and enjoy my new MP4, I read at least one page of this gorgeous book (*La Tahzan*, "don't be sad"). I try to create good things instead of waiting for good things to happen to enjoy myself and everyone around me. [...]

Milan, Italy, March 17

Dear Maria and Claudia, I'm glad the left-wing party won in your country. I just heard about it on the radio. They talked about something very important for Salvador. You must also be happy, right? Bye, Massimo

How is it not possible to be happy? What we have longed for has been bestowed upon us. To put it better, we have achieved it. Now the heart beats all together at a different rhythm. Thank you for being with us, Claudia

An e-mail exchange between **Massimo Parizzi**, **Claudia Hernández** and **Maria Ofelia Zuniga**

San Salvador, March 15. Mauricio Funes, the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front's (FMLN) candidate, won the presidential election achieving an absolute majority with 51.23% of the popular vote. He is the first FMLN

Hello, Massimo! Thank you very much for your greetings! What could I tell you? It has been one of the most important and happiest days of my life. On Sunday night my whole self was excited. Amongst hugs and exultation I did not know if I had to laugh or cry. It has been so many years of struggle, so many people have given up their life fighting for this moment: finally the people have been listened to.

This night so many faces, so much of pain and such injustice have all passed through my mind and finally we have taken a new path. We are aware that these are difficult moments and we have a lot of work to do. But listen Massimo, this could only be compared to 16th January 1992 when the peace agreements were signed and for the first time after centuries of repression we could go out on to the streets and show “our red hearts” without any fear of being shot point blank.

The elections on Sunday marks the beginning of a new chapter. The times of post war period has concluded and we take up the true path of reconstruction, reconciliation and pardon. On 24th March we celebrate the 27th martyr day anniversary of Archbishop Romero, who died defending the people from their oppressors. Today, for the first time we can recall him and so many others who gave up their lives for this cause knowing that the dawn they have been dreaming is now finally possible. On 15th March, the Salvadorean people overcome their fear and have voted for hope.

Thank you Massimo to know that and to celebrate it along with us. And well, definitely in my opinion too “something very important” has taken place in El Salvador. With lots of affection and my heart full of joy, Maria Ofelia

party leader not to have fought in the civil war. He competed against the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance's (Arena) candidate Rodrigo Ávila, a former deputy director of the National Police. The election marks a turning point after two decades of rule and four presidents from Arena. Backed by the business elite, the Nationalist Republican Alliance pushed for a hard line against the guerrillas during the civil war, in which some 75,000 people died and an estimated 8,000 disappeared, mostly at the hands of right-wing death squads and the military, which was supported by the United States. Mauricio Funes was himself touched by that violence: his brother was killed by security forces leaving a 1980 protest. The FMLN, which became a political party with the end of the civil war, and is led by many of the same commanders who laid down their weapons with the 1992 peace agreement, is now the largest party in the Legislative Assembly. The Funes government will take office June 1.

Jerusalem. In the two months since Israel ended its military assault on Gaza, Palestinians and international rights groups have accused it of excessive force and wanton killing in that operation, but the Israeli military has said it followed high ethical standards and took great care to avoid civilian casualties.

Now testimony is emerging from within the ranks of soldiers and officers alleging a permissive attitude toward the killing of civilians and reckless destruction of property. The military's chief advocate general ordered an investigation into a soldier's account of a sniper killing a woman and her two children who walked too close to a designated no-go area by mistake, and another account of a sharpshooter who killed an elderly woman who came within 100 yards of a commandeered house. When asked why that elderly woman was killed, a squad commander was quoted as saying:

“What's great about Gaza—you see a person on a path, he doesn't have to be armed, you can simply shoot him. In our case it was an old woman on whom I did not see any weapon when I looked. The order was to take down the person, this woman, the minute you see her. There are always warnings, there is always the saying, ‘Maybe he's a terrorist.’ What I felt was, there was a lot of thirst for blood.”

The testimonies by soldiers, leaked to the newspapers “Maariv” and “Haaretz”, appeared in a journal published by a military preparatory course at the Oranim Academic College in the northern town of Tivon.

Amir Marmor, a 33-year-old history graduate student in Jerusalem and a military reservist, said in an interview with “The New York Times” that he

was stunned to discover the way civilian casualties were discussed in training discussions before his tank unit entered Gaza in January. "Shoot and don't worry about the consequences," was the message from the top commanders, he said. Speaking of a lieutenant colonel who briefed the troops, Mr. Marmor said, "His whole demeanor was extremely gung ho. He said in this operation we are not taking any chances. Morality aside, we have to do our job. We will cry about it later."

One of the soldiers' testimonies involved the killing of a family. The soldier said: "We had taken over the house, and the family was released and told to go right. A mother and two children got confused and went left. The sniper on the roof wasn't told that this was ok and that he shouldn't shoot. You can say he just did what he was told."

Some 1,300 people were killed in the Gaza war. Israel lost about 10 soldiers, some because of fire by its own forces.

At-Tuwani, Palestine, March 25

Here I am, once again muffled up in heavy blankets, in the only moment of true relaxation that I have during the day. It's colder than I expected, the sun's rays are only just tepid, the puddles and the shoots of grass suggest that, at last, some rain has fallen here as well.

When I left the village for Italy, at the end of February, I left behind low temperatures, a stove burning and stony pastures. Now, one month later, the wind is still biting but the temperature range during the day has decreased and the hills are scattered with light patches of green.

Alice

Jerusalem, March 24. A deeply divided Labor Party voted to join the governing coalition being formed by Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister-designate and the leader of the conservative Likud Party. Mr. Netanyahu has already reached coalition agreements with the nationalist party Yisrael Beiteinu, led by Avigdor Lieberman, and with the ultra-Orthodox Shas.

N. and K. had invited us to dinner and we were happy to accept as K. is one of the best cooks in the village when it comes to making *maqlube*. This is a typical dish prepared with rice, thin spaghetti broken into small pieces, cauliflower, boiled chicken and spices, accompanied by a sheep broth soup. It's delicious, a special dish made only on feast days, since meat here is not eaten every day.

While we are waiting for dinner, little Adam, four years old and the youngest of four children, entertains us by making funny faces, martial art moves and doing an improvised belly dance. As with many children of his age, there are moments when he wants to be the centre of attention and enjoys our interest, alternated with moments of acute shyness when he avoids other people's looks and laughter, hiding behind his mother's back.

Then he has the brilliant idea of showing us his new toy and proudly takes out of the wardrobe a plastic machine-gun that's bigger than he is. This "powerful" weapon makes him feel so strong that he starts fighting against us *ajaneb* (strangers). All children go through a phase when they play war or are fascinated with tanks, but here this has quite a different effect on me. The toy weapon he's holding starts emitting sounds and red lights as a metallic voice cries "Fire!"

Then the show begins, with Adam promptly casting the parts: one of us is the settler, one the shepherd, another the volunteer holding a video camera, and he is the Israeli soldier (the strong one who wins). The scene leaves me speechless. His parents' choice has been one of non-violent resistance to the Israeli military occupation.

Polyphony of nostalgia

Stories from Ecuadorian migrants

Here

notes from the present

To my people **Carla Badillo Coronado**

Ex-pat. Ex. Estrangement. Out of the Earth's entrails. Disembowelled: re-birthed. You won't worry the foreigner. So. You. You. You. Those who you are not. You know. You all know. We are beginning to know. How it is. How it is, the soul of the foreigner. The stranger. The induced. The intruder. The fugitive. The vagabond. The wanderer.

Cristina Peri Rossi, *The State of Exile*

No, but why these tears? This city does not deserve these tears. Let's go, hold on to my back and get ready to fly really high, because this carpet we are sitting on is going to take us far, far away, on the wind.

Alfredo Pareja Diezcanecco, *The Quay*

1. Alonso

Migration. Migrant. Ant. Laborious black spot. Dark. Spot among thousands of spots. Silent. Migration. Exodus. Ex. Left behind, the banquets of our land, the strangely named delicacies. Left behind, the fried food, the *ceviche*, the roast. Left behind, the *llapingacho*, the *encebollado*, the *chugchucas*. Left behind, the *manguera* soup, the *ayampaco*, the *yaguarlocro*. Left behind, the *humita*, the *tamal*, the *pristiño*, the *quimbolito*. Left behind, the *motes de San Juan*, the *papas de la María*, the *tripas de la Vicenta*, the *morochos del Pintado*. In Gringoland or Spain there are no tama-

rillos, capuli trees, or *arazas*. There is no *chulpi* corn or *tostado*. Oh corn, thousand-year-old treasure, pre-Hispanic coin, grains of gold. In these lands everything is prepared. Prepared. Prepared. Prepared. Everything in boxes and cans. And no-one gives you anything extra for your purchase; no-one gives you that little something else. Because everything is prepared, closed, packaged, crammed in. And you have to fill your belly with bread and water. White bread, very white. Aryan bread, nearly, nearly tasteless. Not like we used to make in our wood-fired oven, back in Ecuador on the Day of the Dead. Ah, bread *guaguas*, nicely browned, filled with brown sugar or molasses, served with a cup of *Colada Morada*. Not here. The bread here—even if it has something on it—tastes of yeast that is whiter than white. Bread, the cheapest of things. Bread for hamburgers and bread for sandwiches. And a Coca-Cola, of course, ahhhhh, the spark of life (What life, whose life, of how many, until when?). My name is Alonso Chicaiza, but only in this room. Out there I am *Panchito*. That's apparently what we Ecuadorians are called in Spain. Panchitos. Smurfs. Ponies. It's because we are short and tanned, apparently. Are you from Ecuador? Then you're my namesake. I am a *pan-chito* who buys bread, lots of bread, everyday. And a Coca-Cola, of course, so that I don't feel so alone. The black water bubbles are the only ones that jump and dance and get excited. Only the sound of the gas talks to me. I know this turbid water is a lie as well, a filthy lie, but I drink it, I drink it all up. And I am not Alonso or Panchito anymore. I am only the sound of a burp, echoing round and round this empty room.

2. Carla

In other lands—indifferent to the pleasure of our first cries—time will never be the same again. Never. It will be swift, like a bloodthirsty knife, or slow, insupportably slow, like an inmate's life sentence. Time flows differently when any frontier is crossed. Some of us go out into the world in search of questions and answers, eager for new horizons, stories and knowledge. Nobody made me move out of my country for a while, but wherever I go I always take a piece of Quito with me and the possibility of return.

But what about the others, those who didn't have the choice, those who left for survival, those who don't know whether they will ever go back? The Seventies. Chile, Argentina, Nicaragua, El Salvador and so many others staring down the barrel of dictatorship. What about those who were exiled: the Colombians who come to Ecuador, pushed out by the thunderous sound of bullets fired by who knows who. A death is a death. And an abandoned corpse on the banks of the Putumayo river takes but a few days to disintegrate; then the naked bones are left, without a uniform, neither FARC, nor paramilitary, nor army, just mouldy and forgotten bones in the middle of the frontier. What about the exiles and the refugees from the Middle East, where the nightmare never ceases? A promised land full of lost souls seeking peace. War is part of human nature, proclaim the sons of Heraclitus, while the more apathetic turn on televisions that show bombs and missiles destroying entire cities, as if it were a video game.

There is also another type of exile: those who were not obliged to leave their country by war, dictator-

ship or any other armed conflict. What of those who are pushed out by another type of aggressor: poverty. Work. Work. Work. There is no work. Pay. Pay. Pay. There is no pay. Entire families unable to cover the basics: health, food, education. Just the basics. What of those for whom there is no better solution than to flee to another country, to a large one, full of opportunities and dreams and promises and big companies and big names. Oh, faraway cities of the first world, save us, take us in, we fear dying and the deaths of our children. Migration seems to be the solution. As well as a lottery. Migration becomes a lottery. To be lucky is to get there alive if you have no papers, if the human traffickers don't eliminate you on the way. You'll get there, my friend. But first you will sell your house and soul to the devil to pay the smuggler, whom others call Saviour. It's a risk. But that's the game. How much are you willing to bet when the stake is you? Fulanito lost everything during the five-day bank holiday of '98. Everything. Lucrecia has four babies and is alone: her husband left her soon after the dollarization. Alonso is in Spain, he is a systems engineer but got a contract in the construction industry in Valencia. María was a first-year teacher at a small law school in Manabí, she now cleans toilets in New York offices. She sends almost everything she earns to Ecuador, to her mother, who now raises her two children. Pablo has done well: he set up a bakery in Madrid and managed to get his family integrated. José is now more "Spanish" than the Spaniards themselves. Roberto set up an Ecuadorian restaurant in the heart of Rome. It seems like there is a whisper on the streets: We must get out, get out,

get out. But where? I have a neighbour in New York who can help you, Charito. I have a cousin in Zaragoza, Octavio. My husband is doing well in Europe, he has his papers already. Lot-te-ry. People are afraid, but they risk it, because their fear is not madness, it is reality.

Their fear, as Urbanyi would say, is the displaced fear of all of us.

3. Internal Impact

“Continued migration to the United States and the massive exodus to Spain have amplified Ecuador’s role within the global economy as an exporter of people (in addition to other prime materials) as well as an importer of remittances. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that these remittances increased from less than 100 million dollars in 1994 to 840 million in 1998 (IMF, 1999), and the Central Bank of Ecuador estimates that the remittances will reach \$1.32 billion by 2000 (Banco Central, 2000). If these figures are relatively accurate, remittances have become the second most important source of income from abroad, just behind petrol exports. As emigration changed from a predominantly regional phenomenon to a national phenomenon, households throughout Ecuador entered a migratory economy, with the subsequent dependence on remittances, a situation that households in Azuay and Cañar have been in for more than a decade. Even so, this type of economic dependence should not be so lightly condemned; migration in search of economic opportunities is nothing new, and remittances provide opportunities for people who have been excluded from the Ecuadorian economy.” (“Ecuador Debate”, 54, December 2001)

4. María

Nobody knows what a migrant goes through. Oh, Miss, I came here legally but you need to be very brave to be able to face a new, very hard and limited way of life. Anything to bring up my two children. My mother is ill and from here I can also help with her medicine. There are many Latinos here in New York and there is quite a big Ecuadorian community. I have already been here four years but things aren't so good now. I don't know whether to go back and then try to go to Spain. In Murcia, I know a former colleague from the school I used to teach in. Oh, Miss, those times were so strange, but my pay didn't stretch to anything and on top of that, the economic crisis got worse and we were fired at a moment's notice. I know I'm missing part of my children's childhood, but if I didn't work here, it would be impossible to take care of them. It's hard but you can't just lie down and die. You have to carry on. But I miss my family so much. I miss my little beach, my beloved Manabí. There's no country like your own. We'll see what happens. We're in a crisis here as well. It's not like it was before. Even the gringos are being fired. Perhaps I could go to Spain, to take care of some old person; they say work like that is well paid. We'll see what happens. Though from what I heard, it's now harder to get a visa in Spain than it is in the USA. We'll see what happens, Miss, we'll see what happens.

5. Carla

I'm in Madrid and in a few minutes I'm going to travel to Logroño, where my good friend, Spanish actor and scriptwriter Pepe Perez, is waiting

for me. The man from Peru helps me with my suitcase and walks me to the coach. We say goodbye as good friends. I watch him walk away. There he goes: the Peruvian, the neighbour, the Latino, the brother, the migrant, the self-exile, he with who-knows-how-many-nicknames. The dark-skinned man, the different one, to whom a very white Spanish woman once said as she touched her skin: “Look—this here is white skin. In your country you may be dark-skinned, but here you are just another black man.” I think about all of those who have to go through the same thing. About all those who are looked upon with suspicion.

6. Another Ecuadorian dies due to racism

An Ecuadorian immigrant, José Sucuzhanay, was brutally attacked by four African-Americans who beat him with an aluminium bat and then abandoned his body, believing him to be dead. The victim was driven to Elmhurts hospital in Queens, where he died from a fractured skull. Authorities are still looking for the attackers. The International Ecuadorian Alliance has called a press conference to denounce this new spate of racist attacks against Ecuadorians.

7. Rubén

I arrived in Zaragoza a year ago. Thankfully, I came with all my papers in order and with a contract at a local transport company. I’m doing well as a driver. I’ve been lucky enough to find good friends. Now I live with a friend who is also from Azuay. We split the bills for the flat. But when I first arrived, I shared an apartment with six other people and I really couldn’t stand it. Above all because it’s a question of survival here. They had dif-

ferent habits to me and we argued a lot. But I'm settled now. I think I'm only going to stay until my contract is up, perhaps two years more, at most, if they renew it. Then I'm going back. It was only necessity which made me leave. No-one understands the infinite solitude of a migrant. And you can't trust anyone because sometimes they just take you for a ride. Or rather I find it strange that you spoke to me when you realised I was from Ecuador. Watch, look how the passengers stare: an attractive girl speaking to that individual. Take good care, Miss, and have a safe trip. I will stay here fighting the fight. Luckily, I'm doing well, I have to admit, I am doing well. Oops, what was the street you told me to let you know we were passing? By the way, if you need to make a call you can use my mobile.

8. Carla

I am in the depths of the Great Big Metro of the Great Big City, waiting for the Great Big Train, while I listen to the Great Big Choir of deformed voices of the people on their way to nowhere. On the corner, a man with a long beard opens the Bible and reads out a passage from Exodus: "And thou shalt not oppress a stranger: for ye know the heart of a stranger, since ye were strangers in the land of Egypt." Nobody listens to him. The old man does not exist. Everyone walks by, pushing each other, insulting each other. I watch him from my bench as I wait for the Great Big Train in the Great Big Metro of the Great Big City. Rats squeak among the rails. Their squeaks do not shock anyone, everyone has got used to them. There is an advert stuck to the wall:

THE USA IS GIVING AWAY 55,000 VISAS
TO IMMIGRANTS

The US government is offering 55,000 visas (green cards) to immigrants in a new lottery. This gives you, your spouse and your children the permanent right to live and work in this country. No loss of your current citizenship. Free information. Type or write clearly: your name, address and country of birth and send it to: Green Card Information (Dept. ELC-201) 902 Wilshire Blvd., # 224. Los Angeles, CA.

In the middle of this Great Big Army of transients, two men and a woman stop in front of the advert. They look like Latinos. I see their eyes light up. All three of them take out notebooks and write down the details. The old man with the long beard keeps reading verses on the corner. I am still sitting in the depths of the Great Big Metro. While I wait for the Great Big Train, I open at random Cristina Peri Rossi's poetry book, *The State of Exile*. Page 62:

Barcelona 1976

Exile is spending our last
four pesetas on a metro ticket to go to
an interview for a job which later
they don't give us.

9. Pablo

I have been living here in Madrid for many years. I run my own business: this bakery you see right here. My grandfather was a baker, a really proud one. I studied law. But hey, that's life. I had to come here and I started from practically zero. Now we have two more shops. It was a big sacrifice but it has been worth it. We earned what we have

with dignity, in a country which opened its doors to us. We are honest, decent and hard-working people. We have many friends from our own country. Sometimes we get together, but just for a laugh. I've heard that sometimes Ecuadorians are known for being drunks. I don't drink, but you have to realise that those who do are drowning in sorrows, many are up to their necks in debt, many still haven't found a job and many haven't seen their wife and kids in years. When you are far away from your country you become stronger on the outside, but more sensitive and alone on the inside. Imagine just how broken up you feel when, with your aching wound, they put on a song by Julio Jaramillo. Thank God I'm fine. It would be difficult, returning to Ecuador. It's not that I don't want to, but if I did go back, what would I do? I got all this going with my wife. My kids go to school here. And the most important thing is that we are together. Do you know how many families have fallen apart due to migration? Not ours. Ours is still together. And with my wife, I am teaching my children where they came from. They are being educated so that no one underrates them. They know our history. Personally, if you forgive me for saying so, I don't like those Ecuadorians who arrive here and immediately try and speak like Spaniards. With the lisp all over the place, where it should and shouldn't be. And when they return to Ecuador they speak with all the typical Spanish accents, quirks and phrases. I am who I am; I don't try to be someone I'm not. I am a hard-working man who likes this country because it gave me the opportunity to do well. But I will never forget the country of my birth, that beast, that paradise that is Ecuador, if

only there were none of those damn corrupt politicians. Although they tell me now that things are getting better. Could it be? Tell me that it is.

10. Carla

It is 8 in the morning and my friend, the writer Neeli Chercovski, calls me up to show me round another neighbourhood of San Francisco, California. The neighbourhood is called the Mission. It is one of the neighbourhoods with the biggest art scenes, along with North Beach (the Italian quarter and cradle of the Beat Generation), with the difference being that there are many Latino communities in Mission. When you walk down the streets you find Argentinian, Bolivian and Mexican shops and businesses, but above all, you find authentic public art galleries. Murals that have a truly particular beauty and an impressive social content. I doubt anyone could remain indifferent in this area. On the corner, a stairway offers a glimpse of a couple of artists. I say hello and ask them where they are from. One is Venezuelan and the other Ecuadorian. I congratulate them on the mural they are painting. Images of the Museum of Modern Art I visited the other day with Mark come to my mind. It made the same impression on both of us. Except for a few pieces, the majority was a big pile of *nothing*. I still have the image, for example, of a toilet placed in the main room. It's incredible that in the name of modern art, you can place on a pedestal and behind glass something that represents who-the-hell-knows-what. I think about the artists from my country: painters and sculptors with pieces worthy of being shared with the whole world. But there it is, brand new and absurdly empty: a toilet, in the middle of the exhibition. A white toilet, the throne

of the absurd, which actually proves to me that most of the contemporary art is in deep shit.

11. Another Ecuadorian dies due to racism

In the early hours of last November 9th, an Ecuadorian named Marcelo Lucero was beaten up by a gang in Patchogue, Long Island. One of the gang members had a sharp weapon and used it to stab Lucero in the chest, killing him instantly. The Speaker of the New York City Council, Christine Quinn, indicated on Monday that the attack on the Ecuadorian immigrant in Brooklyn was an explicitly xenophobic act.

12. Luis

My name is Luis. I am Ecuadorian but I have been living in Murcia for three years. I'm screwed. This month I lost my job and now I can't send any money to my family. I was a builder. I lasted longer than my other colleagues. They were fired because the economic crisis is getting worse and worse here in Spain. It has even made a few construction companies go bankrupt. Jesus Christ, I don't know what to do, I'm screwed, I'm screwed. (Luis is one of the 3.1 million unemployed in Spain at the end of 2008. This figure is an historic record and one million more than the previous year, according to the country's Ministry of Employment. Of this figure, 410,000 are immigrants like him, which means that there are more than 200,000 more unemployed foreigners in the country than last year.)

13. Carla

Phoenix. 10:30 am. I am writing this poem while I travel to Albuquerque on a Greyhound bus.

Progress

I'm riding in a bus
from Arizona
to New Mexico.
Among the passengers
various Latino migrants:
three Mexicans
two Ecuadorians
one Peruvian.

I listen to their conversation
from my seat:
full days' work,
from Monday to Monday,
holidays, replacements,
overtime.

In the distance I see a cargo train passing,
hundreds of cars full of commodities.
One of the migrants remains sleeping.
Next to him a white man
points to the train with pride:
"There goes our economy," he says.
"That train's the portrait of our progress."

The phrase resounds in my head.
The guy doesn't know that his economy
is also traveling on this bus
and that the most human portrait of progress
is embodied in the exhausted
and parched face
of the one who's asleep at his side.

14. Attack on Ecuadorian woman in Spain

She was left semiconscious and badly wounded.
María José, a thirteen-year-old Ecuadorian adoles-
cent, was tricked into going to a deserted area of

Colmenarejo, a town about 37 km from Madrid, where she was brutally beaten. “Kill her, kill her!” was the expression heard in between the laughter on a video shown by the Spanish television channel, Antena 3. The images show a young Spanish woman named Belén kicking and punching the entire body and even the head of the other minor, who remains lying on the ground. (“El Universo”, August 1, 2008)

15. Carla

I am in a Valencian café along with two of my Spanish friends, Viktor Gómez and Miguel Morata. We are talking about migration. They tell me that in their country there are mainly Moroccans, Romanians and Latin Americans, with Ecuadorians leading the list of the latter. Viktor and Miguel are two brainy guys with big hearts. We talk about cases of racism. They remain quiet for a moment when I ask them what they call us Ecuadorians. I sense that they are also hurt by everything that migrants have to go through. They tell me that my countrymen in particular are very closed off. They form their own groups and don’t integrate at all into Spanish society but they aren’t known for being mafia types, unlike other groups of migrants. They tell me that even the gypsies look down on them as they see them as competition for informal jobs and commerce. They contemptuously call them “pony-payos” (non-gypsy ponies). The pair tells me that Valencia is one of the cities with the highest number of Ecuadorians. It even houses one of the headquarters of one of the strongest organisations for Ecuadorian migrants: The Rumiñahui association, whose mission, according to the entity’s spokesperson, consists of improving the quality of

life of Ecuadorian migrants. It begins with a first place to stay, the formalisation of their legal situation in Spain and the delivery of all necessary legal and labour information. Also, it aims to facilitate access to training, public health, education and housing, thanks to a coordinated effort with other social organisations and syndicates. It channels cooperation projects towards the development of Ecuador. These are aimed at less fortunate organisations and agricultural communities and their objective is to meet basic needs through the search for low-interest loans, the creation of micro-businesses and small industries which generate job opportunities.

16. Carla

It was a different situation, it's true. I needed money for a camera. Photography is one of my passions. I found work in one of the pizzerias in the Big Apple. Bravo Pizza, in Greenwich Village, right in the middle of Lower Manhattan. I had accepted a job at the till, and at that point my English was still a work in progress. But I had the best co-workers. They were mostly Mexicans and Ecuadorians. I had to handle numbers and strange words. How was I to know, back then, what "mushrooms" meant? And the final price on the order depended precisely on the quantity and types of ingredients. But my colleagues decided to help me by putting codes on the boxes. That way, I didn't even have to worry about asking the client what was inside. My colleagues passed me the boxes with the code on top. One "x" meant three dollars, two "x"s extra ingredients and so on. I will never forget how ingenious they were just to help me. On more than one occasion I got into trouble for standing up for

them, but I didn't care. I couldn't tolerate someone raising their voice at them. I couldn't stand it.

17. Octavio

I'm not going to lie to you. I also felt the urge to go to Spain, out of necessity, of course. But for one reason or another I have been postponing the attempt. I think that deep down it's me, making excuses not to go. Here in Quito, I'm a guide at the Cochasqui Pyramids and you saw how I talk to the visitors about this country and its history. Actually, I'm a business administrator, but I'm finished with that sort of thing. Who knows if that was my destiny? As a boy I travelled all over the place with my father, even to Columbia, because he was a salesman. But when I started to get more and more interested in our history and cultures, I was further south, on the Ecuadorian coast. I fell in love with the ceramics from the Valdivia culture, one of the oldest in South America, and how the natives depicted the Venus, the female. Later, I came here to Quito. And I started to teach myself a lot. That's why, when anthropologists and professors visit, I can answer them with confidence. I can also show them my love for the teachings of our ancestors. You've seen how I explain to the gringos about how the Quitu Caras had a highly advanced technology and how, thousands of years ago, they already knew how to determine the true middle of the world, there in Catequilla. What about the French geodesic mission? Nothing, the Frenchies got it wrong, our natives did not. You have seen how I explain to them about how our indigenous people built a type of natural refrigerator to keep food fresh, when there wasn't even electricity, drinking water or the most basic of in-

ventions. I tell the gringos that thousands of years ago, the Runas built a no-frost fridge with their wisdom and with what they had to hand. The gringos laugh and take photos but I know that really, they understand what I am talking about. And when Spanish people come here, I take them round the Ethnographic Museum where there are a couple of houses made from adobe and *cangahua* earth, low houses. Of course, they say that they are homes for Smurfs. But I tell them: they are not low because of the indigenous people's stature. No. The reason is that the house and family were thought of as the centre of all, and there was a unique respect for that nucleus. That's why anyone visiting the house was obliged to bend down as they went in and this type of bow was a greeting of profound respect. The Runas thought of everything, everything.

18. Carla

One of the Ecuadorian products which I have found abroad most often is the banana. Even here in Rome, I have seen dozens of "Made in Ecuador" boxes in greengrocers and shops. People pay a high price for them. And to think that they hardly cost a few cents in Ecuador. I don't know how to get other varieties. Either you can't find them or they are considered to be exotic fruits. Ha! Exotic fruits which we eat every day in my house: silk bananas, baby *orito* bananas, green *maqueños*, yellow *maqueños*, *maduros*, plantains, Dominican bananas, etc., etc., etc. How exciting to see these bananas from my country, right here in Italy's capital. But, on the other hand, it makes me angry. You see, you only ever see boxes from the magnate, Álvaro Noboa, and his company. PREMIUM BANANAS with a stamp below it which reads Chiquita. Packed for

and distributed by Chiquita International, Ltd. Bermuda. Product of Ecuador. But who are the workers who slave away, cultivating, taking care of and harvesting those damn bananas? How much do the workers earn in the famous Chiquita company?

19. A time for defeats and victories

“I decided to go back and that was it. Nothing or no one could stop me. I found all the buildings asphyxiating. The place I worked was a cage, a narrow and badly lit cage which I had to share with other animals, just as desperate as me, equally hungry for freedom. Some of them greedy and perverse, others corrupt to the core. My only escapes to happiness were in the bright eyes of my children and in the nest-like body of my wife. But even with them, the stress often arose when I arrived home defeated, empty and with an infinite desire to destroy everything, to destroy myself. Homesickness couldn’t have been the only cause of my desperation. Nor could it have been the city or the job or the human misery of those around me. Those were just the times I had to live in. It was the indelible mark of defeat. I was one of those who lost the war, one who doubted. I was, of course, luckier than Gustavo, who is now a *desaparecido*; or Juan Carlos, who was clubbed to death; or Francisco, who lives in poverty; or Diego, who lost his mind from so much distress and is now trapped in some rest home for madmen. But I was also less lucky and less shameless than the Gorlitos and the Patricks, those *criollo* yuppies who were associated with Juan Carlos’ murderers, Gustavo’s executioners and with the exploiters of Francisco. With the winners of the war, in fact. [...] But I was ready to go back. I had to face life once again. I had to go back,

I needed to go back. I couldn't spend any more time reminiscing, breaking my soul with so much misery, because I was running the risk of dying bitter, frustrated, exiled, plagued with insomnia and trapped in my curses. Going back was a necessity. To retake the floor, recover my voice, recover the capacity to express my ideas and dreams, to convert the word into a weapon once more and with it, avenge the death, poverty and madness of my brothers. I needed to put aside the temporary commodities, the bourgeois securities, the fear. Especially the fear; my own fear and the fear of others, the fear of my wife and of my children. Fear of return, of the unknown and of the well known. And here I am, sir, resolute, more resolute than ever to carry on the fight, even if it kills me." (From *The Queen is a Trap*, by Galo Galarza)

Beijing, March 26

Even before I left China in 1992, I had had a fascination with working in a Chinese restaurant in the US. That seemed such an essential American experience for any Chinese immigrant, at least according to such popular novels as *Beijinger in New York* and *Manhattan's China Lady*. Soon after I arrived in Miami for graduate school, I began searching for a restaurant where I could fulfill my dream of illegal unemployment (those of us on student visas were not allowed to work off-campus). Job listings were plentiful in Chinese-language newspapers, but transportation was a drag—the medical school where I studied was in Civic Center, an area of concrete hospitals and research institutions far away from everything else. An hour of zigzagging through the city on a bus later, I landed

Hao Wu

Quillaga, Chile. During the past four decades here in Quillagua, residents have sometimes seen glimpses of raindrops above the foothills in the distance. They never reach the ground, evaporating like a mirage while still in the air. What the town did have was a river, feeding an oasis in the Atacama desert. But mining companies have polluted and bought up so much of the water, residents say, that for months each year the river is little more than a trickle—and an unusable one at that.

in a stately hotel right on the beach with a posh Chinese restaurant on the first floor overlooking the ocean. The manager needed help. I needed my experience. So it was a deal. Coming out of the restaurant after the interview, it was getting dark. I saw the high-rise medical school building not too far away, so I decided to walk straight ahead to take a shortcut home. The buildings became sparser and street light dimmer as I walked. Bums in rags asked for change. I did not dare not to comply. Soon I found myself standing in front of a block of low-rise apartments, all dark except for a lone street lamp coloring the buildings yellow. Shadows of human figures leaned against the buildings, raced on bicycles, and hustled around. The scene reminded me of my childhood when kids used to hang out on street corners after dinner. Then it dawned on me that I was in an inner-city neighborhood, and those figures were not my buddies but idling black people. Oh, all the horrible stories I had heard about American inner cities! My feet went weak. The medical school building looked as far off as when I started the shortcut home. Suddenly several kids appeared from nowhere and pushed me to the ground. Before my adrenaline had time to rush, they snatched my leather portfolio and raced away on bicycles. "Go find your help!" They left their laughter behind. I stood up and trudged on, my head spinning. Where to? The street lamp was far behind. There were only echoes of footsteps in the dark street. "What are you doing here?" A window opened above me and a black woman in her twenties stuck her head out. "Don't you know it's dangerous here?" I said that I was lost and robbed. She asked me to come upstairs. I could not move my feet—A black woman in an inner-city neigh-

Nowhere is the system for buying and selling water more permissive than here in Chile, experts say, where water rights are private property, not a public resource, and can be traded like commodities with little government oversight or safeguards for the environment. Private ownership is so concentrated in some areas that a single electricity company from Spain, Endesa, has bought up 80 percent of the water rights in a huge region in the south, causing an uproar. Some economists have hailed Chile's water rights trading system, which was established in 1981 during the military dictatorship, as a model of free-market efficiency; Fernando Dougnac, an environmental lawyer in Santiago, said that "market can regulate for more economic efficiency, but not for more social-economic efficiency." Quillagua is in Guinness World Records as the "driest place" for 37 years, yet it prospered off the Loa River, reaching a population of 800 by the 1940s. A long-haul train stopped here—today the station is abandoned—and the town's school was near its 120-student capacity. (Today there are 16 students.) That prosperity

borhood, would she rob me blind like the others? Before I could decide whether to run or not, the woman came down holding a little girl. “Why are you walking in this neighborhood?” asked she. I explained my shortcut. She shook her head. “Let me drive you home,” she insisted calmly. She did not say much during the ride. The little girl studied me in the car seat. I studied her mother behind the steering wheel: her skin was of the color that could easily dissolve into the night, a color that until then had been strange, almost intimidating, to me; yet she was there helping a complete stranger get home safely. I wanted to apologize for having hesitated to accept her help. “I hate those guys too,” she said. Since then, I have learned to use the term “African Americans” instead of “blacks.” I made African-American friends in business school and celebrate holidays with inner-city families. I have learned to appreciate the kindness in all of us despite our drastically different skin colors and upbringings. This American experience of mine, it began on that night.

first began to ebb in 1987, when the military government reduced the water to the town by more than two-thirds, said Raul Molina, a geographer at the University of Chile. But the big blows came in 1997 and 2000, when two episodes of contamination ruined the river for crop irrigation or livestock during the critical summer months. An initial study by a professor concluded that the 1997 contamination had probably come from a copper mine run by Codelco, the world's largest copper miner. (New York Times, March 14)

From “War”

by Franco Buffoni

Clashes famines epidemics massacres
Arms trafficking tax havens money laundering
Terrorism on a planetary scale.
My Father sent me
To a date with history

Here

notes from the present

With shields and paraphernalia,
And I send you
Refugees to the station
Among the soldiers arguing
Over rations for those left. [...]

Flesh-and-blood ghost of history
That has haunted me since childhood
In lodges clubs academies cafés
Where decorations of gods, goddesses and seasons
Personifying virtues
Victories cities states religions urge us on
From the stuccoes, if I describe you it is to consign you
To the silence of my memory.

Contributors and translators

Here

notes from the present

Alice (pseudonym), was born in Ravenna, Italy, in 1977. In 2001 she first took part in volunteer projects abroad, working in a family-like residential care facility of the Association Pope John XXIII in Russia. In 2007 she left to work in Israel-Palestine as a volunteer worker for *Operazione Colomba* (Operation Dove), a civil peace corps (www.operazionecolomba.org). Her diary page was translated by Claudia Ricchiari.

p. 84

Carla Badillo Coronado was born in 1985 in Quito, Ecuador, where she still lives. She's a writer, a director and a performer of traditional dances. Her texts come from the blog *Mujer en tierra firme* (<http://www.mujerentierrafirme.blogspot.com/>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. Her diary page was translated by P. Clayton D. Causey, and her text, "Polyphony of Nostalgia" (except for the poem "Progress", translated by Jack Hirschman) by David Burrows.

pp. 28, 86

Johanna Bishop 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 the diary pages by Lidia Campagnano (December 29) and Rita Presepi, and the poems by Franco Buffoni.

p. 109

Franco Buffoni, originally from Lombardy, Italy, lives in Rome. He is the author of many poetry collections, two of which have been published in English translation with parallel text: *The Shadow of Mount Rosa*, Gradiva, New York, 2000, and *Wing*, Chelsea, New York, 2007. His texts published here come from *War*, Mondadori, Milan, 2005. They were translated by Johanna Bishop.

pp. 58, 106

Sebastiano Buonamico lives in Milan, Italy. A graphic designer and a photographer, his photographs have been shown in several exhibitions. He is the author of the covers of this magazine. His text was translated by Corinne Colette.

cover, and p. 23

David Burrows (mail@dbtranslations.net) was born in London in 1981 and has lived in southern Spain for over five years. He is a freelance translator of Spanish to English. He translated the diary page by Maria Ofelia Zuniga and “Polyphony of Nostalgia”, by Carla Badillo.

Lidia Campagnano was born at Verdello (Italy) and lives in Rome. For 17 years she was an editor for the Italian newspaper “Il manifesto”. Her diary pages come from the blog *Scrivo con la matita* (<http://scrivoconlamatita.splinder.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them. They were translated by Johanna Bishop (December 29) and Karen Krieger (January 7).

pp. 6, 46

P. Clayton D. Causey (drmusic@sc.rr.com) lives in his hometown of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, USA. He is a musician and freelance writer-translator from Spanish and Portuguese into English. He has translated the diary page by Carla Badillo Coronado.

Corinne Colette lives in Rome. She has been a translator from Italian to English for many years, and in this issue has translated the text by Sebastiano Buonamico.

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 many books, among them: *Israel and Palestine: Out of the Ashes*, Pluto Press, London-Sterling, Va., 2002; and *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Tex., 2004.

p. 32

Gabriella Fusi was born in 1949 in Milan, where she still lives. She has collaborated with the magazines “aut aut” and “L’ottavo giorno” on “realized Socialism” issues, with a special interest in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. Her diary page was translated by Claudia Ricchiari.

p. 52

Ashwin Goud, a freelance translator of Spanish to English, lives in Spain. Here he has translated the emails by Claudia Hernández and Maria Ofelia Zuniga (March 17).

Laila El-Haddad, born in 1978, is a journalist and divides her time between the United States and Gaza. She has a son, Yousuf, and a daughter, Noor. Her diary pages come from the blog *Raising Yousuf and Noor: diary of a Palestinian mother* (<http://a-mother-from-gaza.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish them.

pp. 5, 6, 8, 18, 22,
30, 48, 53, 54, 57

Hao Wu, born in 1974 in Chengdu, Sichuan, lives in China. He is a documentary film maker. His di-

ary page comes from the blog *Beijing or bust* (<http://beijingorbust.blogspot.com>). We thank him for allowing us to publish them.

p. 104

Claudia Hernández was born in 1975 in San Salvador, where she lives and teaches creative writing. She has published several collections of short stories. Her e-mail (March 17) was translated by Ashwin Goud.

p. 81

Jack Hirschman was born in 1933 in New York City and lives in San Francisco. A poet and social activist, he has written more than fifty volumes of poetry and essays. In this issue he has translated Carla Badillo Coronado's poem "Progress" (in "Polphony of Nostalgia").

"Hope Man" and **"Peace Man"** are friends. The former lives in Sderot, a small town near Gaza on the Israeli side, the latter in Sajaia refugee camp in Gaza. Their diary pages come from the blog *Life must go on in Gaza and Sderot* (<http://gaza-sderot.blogspot.com>).

pp. 19, 49, 66, 76

Karen Krieger (kkrieger1948@gmail.com) was born in the United States and lives in South America. A free-lance translator from Italian into English, here she has translated a diary page by Lidia Campagnano (January 7), and the e-mail by Massimo Parizzi (March 17).

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Barbara McGilvray lives in Australia. For many years she has been translating from Italian into English and visiting Italy whenever possible. Here she has translated the poem by Raffaello Baldini.

Rachel McRoberts is a trained translator and anthropologist living in San Diego, California. Here, she has translated the diary page by Yoani Sánchez.

Miguel Huezo Mixco was born in 1954 in El Salvador. He's a poet and essayist, and participated in the Salvadoran civil war (1981-1992). His diary page, translated by Carol Pawley, comes from the blog *Talpajocote* (<http://talpajocote.blogspot.com>). We thank him for allowing us to publish it.

p. 31

Domenico Palazzi was born in Ravenna, Italy, in 1984, and now lives in Nuvoletto, near Cesena. He is in Kosovo as a volunteer worker for *Operazione Colomba* (Operation Dove), a civil peace corps (www.operazionecolomba.org). His diary page was translated by Claudia Ricchiari.

p. 26

Massimo Parizzi was born in 1950 in Milan, Italy, where he lives. A translator, he is the founder and editor of this magazine. His e-mail (March 17) was translated by Karen Krieger.

p. 81

Carol Pawley (carol@markint.com.br) was born in 1979 in São Paulo, Brazil. She has lived and studied in the USA and currently lives with her husband in Harrogate, UK. She is a full time translator. In this issue, she has translated the diary page by Miguel Huezo Mixco.

“**Peace Man**” and “**Hope Man**” are friends. The former lives in Sajaia refugee camp in Gaza, the

latter in Sderot, a small town near Gaza on the Israeli side. Their diary pages come from the blog *Life must go on in Gaza and Sderot* (<http://gaza-sderot.blogspot.com>)

pp. 19, 49, 66, 76

Rita Presepi was born in Cesena, Italy, in 1982. She has been alternating periods of seasonal work in Italy through volunteer work abroad. She is currently volunteering in Israel-Palestine for *Operazione Colomba* (Operation Dove), a civil peace corps (www.operazionecolomba.org). Her diary page was translated by Johanna Bishop.

p. 70

Mazin Qumsiyeh, associate professor of genetics 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 published *Sharing the Land of Canaan: Human Rights and the Israeli-Palestinian Struggle*, Pluto Press, London-University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2004.

pp. 59, 74

Claudia Ricchiari (claudiatic@libero.it) was born in Palermo in 1971. She works as a freelance translator with a special interest in art and literature. Here she has translated the diary pages by Gabriella Fusi, Domenico Palazzi, Alice, and the text by Laura Zanetti. Her translations were edited by Carole Greenall, CioL.

Liza Rosenberg (mashehu_mashehu@yahoo.com), 40-years-old, was raised in Schenectady, NY, and has been living in Israel for 17 years. She lives in Karkur with her husband and their son, and works as a technical writer in a hi-tech firm. Her page was originally written for BBC World Service radio, and it aired on *The World Today* programme. We thank her for allowing us to publish it.

p. 55

Yoani Sánchez was born in 1975 in Havana, where she lives. Her diary page, translated by Rachel McRoberts, comes from the blog *Generation Y* (<http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony>). We thank her for allowing us to publish it.

p. 60

“Sunshine” was born in 1992 and lives in Mosul, Iraq. “I have many dreams and ambitions,” she writes. “I wish that one day they become true. I want to be an engineer or a pharmacist in the future. My mom always support me to accomplish my ambitions. Computer and Internet are my life and what I do in my spare time, but if we don’t have electricity, I spend my spare time reading, writing, listening to music, and doing some handmade work.” Her diary pages come from the blog *Days of my life* (<http://livesstrong.blogspot.com>).

pp. 16, 49, 60, 61,
68, 73, 80

María Tenorio was born in 1968 in El Salvador. She is an editor, and teaches academic writing at university level. Her diary page, translated by Lauren Marston-Hindi, comes from the blog *Talpajocote* (<http://talpajocote.blogspot.com>). We thank her for allowing us to publish it.

p. 66

Laura Zanetti was born in 1949 in Telve di Val Sugana, Italy. He lives between Verona and Telve. She is involved with issues related to the protection of the pre-alpine environment. She’s an ethnographer, a journalist and writes poetry. Her text was translated by Claudia Ricchiarì.

p. 77

Maria Ofelia Zuniga Platero was born in 1973 in San Salvador, where she lives. Her diary page, translated by David Burrows, comes from the blog *Esta boca es mía... Enchufados estamos donde*

estemos... (<http://estabocaesmia-mo.blogspot.com>).
We thank her for allowing us to publish it. Her e-mail (March 17) was translated by Ashwin Goud.

pp. 15, 81

Subscription

Here

notes from the present

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Last issues

Number 19 (June 2008), "borders" - back cover: The Ortigara frontier; Cuba's boundaries; the border between Iraq and Syria; the frontier between Serbs and Albanians in Gorazdevac, Kosovo; the frontier between Sunnites and Shiites at Al-Hassa, Saudi Arabia; the boundary of SOS Central Station, in Milan; the Rafah border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt; borders in the Schengen Area; the border between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. - "Our homeland is the whole world / our law is freedom / and a thought. . ." (Italian anarchist song, 1904) - "Crossing frontiers; loving them, too, since they define a reality, thus rescuing it from vagueness" (Claudio Magris) - "On the map - a place's exposed / . . . / The land is split - a pole ax / Is the border pole." (Marina Tsvetaeva) - **contents:** diary pages from Cuba, El Salvador, Syria, Gaza, Ukraine, Kosovo, Saudi Arabia, the United States, Italy, France, China, Russia, Palestine; *Borders*, by Laura Zanetti; *Departures I*, and *Departures II*, by Yannis Ritsos; *The stranger*, by Marco Saya; *Always on the other side as well*, by Claudio Magris; *If the air was free...*, by Mario Rigoni Stern; *False directions*, by Giorgio Caproni; *Rafah*, by Laila El-Haddad; *On the map - a place's exposed*, by Marina Tsvetaeva; *The world of yesterday*, by Stefan Zweig; *To cross the border*, by Ryszard Kapuscinski.

Number 20 (November 2008), "memories" - contents: *Memories*, by Massimo Parizzi; *Tangiers, my birthplace*, by Jihane Bouziane; *The house where I was born*, by Maria Granati; *Progress and memory*, by Jacques Revel; *The fullness of memory*, by Giorgio Morale; *The art of oblivion*, by Andrea Inglese; *As autumn falls*, by Giovanni Quessep; *Palestinian ruins*, by Jonathan Boyarin; *Remembering our Nakba*, by Rana Qumsiyeh; *War is a state of mind*, by Uri Avnery; *Let's keep an eye on our humanity*, by Massimo Parizzi; *From Palermo to Milan*, by Attilio Mangano; *My first disappointment*, by Renata Borghi; *Light and shadows*, by Marina Massenz; *History begins in reverse*, by Marco Saya; *November 4, 1966*, by Laura Zanetti; *I was twenty*, by Nives Fedrigotti; *The personal sense of history*, by Oksana Kis; *My yesterdays*, by Maria Ofelia Zuniga; *Addirittura*, by Johanna Bishop; *But with my camera...*, by Veronica Khokhlova; *Old memories*, by Hao Wu; *The memory of contemporaneity*, by Roberto Bordiga

Number 21 (March 2009), "human fellowship" - back cover: "At the end of the battle, / and the combatant dead, a man came toward him / and said: "Don't die; I love you so much!" / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Two approached him and repeated: / "Don't leave us! Be brave! Return to life!" / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Twenty, a hundred, a thousand, five hundred thousand, came up to him, / crying out, "So much love and no power against death!" / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Millions of persons surrounded him, / with a common plea: "Do not leave us, brother!" / But the corpse, alas! kept on dying. // Then, all the inhabitants of the earth / surrounded him; the corpse looked at them sadly, moved; / he sat up slowly, / embraced the first man; started to walk. . ." (César Vallejo). Below: an abandoned car in an underpass of Milan's central station; someone has written on the window: "If I catch you sleeping in here I'll beat the crap out of you" - **contents:** diary pages from Gaza, China, Israel, Cuba, Italy, Ukraine and Russia, The United States, Great Britain; poems by Giacomo Leopardi, Marco Saya, T.S. Eliot, Jaime Gil de Biedma, César Vallejo, Ennio Abate; excerpts from "The New York Times", "CNN International", "La Repubblica"; *Notes* by Massimo Parizzi; a passage from a letter by Etty Hillesum.

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