STRIVING FOR PEACE THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF GENOCIDE AND WAR

Personal narratives of genocide and intractable war can provide valuable insights around notions of collective identity, perceptions of the "enemy," intergenerational coping with massive social trauma, and sustainable peace and reconciliation. Written in an accessible and narrative style, this book demonstrates how the sharing of and listening to personal experiences deepens understandings of the long-term psychosocial impacts of genocide and war on direct victims and their descendants in general, and of the Holocaust and the Jewish–Arab/Palestinian–Israeli context, in particular. It provides a new theoretical model concerning the relationship between different kinds of personal narratives of genocide and war and peacebuilding or peace obstruction. Through its presentation and analysis of personal narratives connected to the Holocaust and the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, it provides a deep exploration into how such narratives have the potential to promote peace and offers concrete ideas for further research of the topic and for peacebuilding on the ground.

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STRIVING FOR PEACE THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF GENOCIDE AND WAR

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This book is dedicated to all peoples, wherever they may be, who know what genocide and war are, and work tirelessly to make our world a safe, healthy, and caring place for all of us.

Contents

Preface

This book is about the kinds of personal stories that people share in relation to genocide and intractable war. We explore the psychosocial implications of these narratives connected to their personal and families' lives and/or to members of their community and society. We discuss how elicitation and analysis of such narratives can be used in psychosocial research that aims to understand the long-term and complex effects of genocide and wars on direct victims and their descendants, in general, and of the Holocaust and the Jewish–Arab/Palestinian–Israeli context, in particular. However, we do not stop there. We further investigate the central role different narratives can play in processes of peacebuilding, between former and present-day enemies, or in the escalation of hostile and toxic relations. At the center of this endeavor stands our conceptual model, which consists of four main modes of personal narratives of genocide and war. In brief, these are narratives of: (1) distancing; (2) victimhood; (3) ambivalence/paradoxes; and (4) embracing the other while remaining in one's pain.

The model is based on Julia's – the first author's – thirty-five years of psychosocial research and peace and social justice activism connected to the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict – and to Elad's – the second author's – experiences as a social worker with Holocaust survivors, and in narrative interviewing and analysis. Furthermore, this book is also an outgrowth of both authors' life experiences – as Jewish-Israelis – that connect us to the Holocaust and to the Jewish–Arab/Israeli–Palestinian conflicts.

Before delving into the foci noted above, however, we wish to present ourselves by each sharing three personal stories. Each story reflects the three arenas – the Holocaust context, the Israeli–Palestinian context, and the relationships between Jewish-Israelis with opposing political orientations – developed in this book. These stories aim to help you, the reader, begin to gain a sense of who we are and our approach to the topics explored throughout the book.

Julia: German Students Living in the Commune Scared Off Their Jewish-Israeli Guests

In the late 1990s, I co-taught a university seminar with Isolde, a colleague from Hamburg, on the long-term psychosocial effects of the Holocaust on German and Jewish-Israeli young adults. The students were mostly either children or grandchildren of Holocaust survivors or perpetrators, and so the seminar was emotionally charged. We first hosted the German students in Israel, and a number of months later traveled to Germany to complete the exchange experience. In Israel, the students hosted their counterparts in their rented apartments or in their parents' homes. The feedback from this experience was amazing: The Germans talked about the very warm welcome they were given, and how the students and their families made them feel like close friends. All of this deeply touched them. Therefore, as our trip to Germany approached, we heard from the students there how excited they were to be able to "repay" their gracious Israeli hosts.

After we landed and began to reconnect, the German students took their guests to their residences. Everyone appeared happy with the arrangements as they left for their first evening with their hosts. I was staying with Isolde in her beautiful apartment.

Anna and Marie lived in a commune and were hosting Orna and Gili,[1] who had shared their homes with them in Israel. The German students were excited to introduce them to their cooperative kind of life. This was not only a personal preference, but also reflected their social-economic-political ideology.

The next morning, as Isolde and I were approaching the campus, we came across Anna and Marie, and Orna and Gili, who were standing on the street corner and, literally, screaming at one another. Anna and Gili were in tears, and a crowd had gathered. Isolde and I, who had no idea what had happened, tried to understand what was happening. We managed to learn that in the middle of the night, Orna and Gili had left the commune and moved in with Karl – another student – because, according to them, they could not bear the thought of remaining in the commune. Orna and Gili told us that if Karl couldn't host them for the entire stay, they would stay in a hotel. Karl told them that they were welcome to stay as long as they wanted.

What had happened to cause such a crisis?

[1] All the students' names in this narrative are pseudonyms. Moreover, we concealed some details in order to ensure privacy and confidentiality of the group participants.

According to what we learned from Orna and Gili, in the commune people walked around nude, there were no doors on the bathrooms, and people wandered in and out of all the bedrooms (there were either no doors or they were always left open). The Israeli women became highly agitated: They had no privacy, and felt completely exposed and endangered in a house full of nude Germans . . . They were upset that Anna and Marie had neither prepared them for what they would find, nor given them a choice to stay there or not. Thus, they felt they were being coerced into being "guests" in a place that frightened them. Moreover, it is important to note that this was Orna and Gili's first trip to Germany. Indeed, Gili (the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors) had stated the day before: "I'm overcoming my great fear to come to Germany."

The German women, who had wanted to host these two Israeli students, were deeply hurt. They felt insulted and angry that Orna and Gili were "unwilling to try something new." They had opened up their home but been met with rejection. This was the background to the crisis.

It took a few days for things to calm down, even though this incident continued to have repercussions for the encounter: There were Germans who thought that Orna and Gili had insulted Anna and Marie, and "should" have stayed, while others sympathized with them. Moreover, all but one Israeli thought that the German women had placed the two Jewish-Israeli students in an insensitive, impossible situation. I tried to explain to Anna and Marie that *just being in Germany* was a huge step for Gili, and to some extent for Orna as well – this was the "something new" that in and of itself was very frightening for the women. Therefore, the women's feelings and decision had to be respected. Anna was angry with my explanation, saying: "Just because you don't approve of my lifestyle doesn't give you the right to judge me or how I live."

I found that my message was not getting through to Anna, and that my personal thoughts about the commune (I had no opinion about it whatsoever) had nothing to do with what I was trying to convey. If a guest feels threatened and unsafe, you can't make her stay. Certainly not in one's home country, and certainly not in the case of a granddaughter of Holocaust survivors visiting Germany . . .

Julia: When a Jewish-Israeli and a Palestinian Tried to Connect (and Somewhat Failed), a Nazi's Son Offered His Help

In 2000, I became a member of the TRT – To Reflect and Trust – an encounter group, established by the late Dan Bar-On in 1992. This

group first brought together descendants of Nazi perpetrators and Jewish Holocaust survivors to share and reflect upon their personal and family histories and stories with one another, in order to try to live better with the traumas of this horrific past. After meeting for six years and developing a model of personal storytelling for dialogue between members of these two groups, in 1998 the TRT invited former/present-day enemies from Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel, and South Africa to join their work to see if their model was relevant for other contexts of political violence. I joined the group as part of the Jewish-Israeli contingency.

One encounter stands out in my memory. We were in Londonderry/Derry,[2] Northern Ireland in 2002, and meeting for the first time after the outbreak of the Second Intifada (late September 2000). When I told my story, I ended by sharing my concerns about my youngest son, who would be enlisting in the Israeli military the coming year. Given that I was a peace activist, opposed to the occupation, as well as an Israeli citizen by choice (I had made *aliya* from the United States[3]), I was torn between my political beliefs, my feeling that Israeli army service was normative and important, and deep worry for my son. I was afraid that one day he would be stationed in the Occupied Territories, faced with situations that were morally, psychologically, and physically frightening.

When I finished, one of the Palestinian members – a colleague with whom I had worked for a few years – said that I was "hypocritical. You say you believe in peace and are against the occupation, but you allow your son to go to the army and support him. You shouldn't allow him to enlist." I was taken aback and said something like: "But what can I do? He'll be eighteen and an adult, and he has the right to make up his own mind. I can't stop him – I can't physically sit on him and keep him at home." One of the German participants, a son of a high-ranking Nazi who had been hanged for his crimes against humanity, attempted to gently help. Dirk tried to get my Palestinian colleague to listen to the story I had shared, including my inner conflicts, without being judgmental. He asked the Palestinian member:

> "What would you do if your son came home and said: 'Papa, I want to be a suicide bomber? How would you react?'"
>
> "No such thing would happen."

[2] Protestants in Northern Ireland call the city Londonderry; Catholics call it Derry.
[3] Literally "ascent" – Jewish immigration to Israel.

"Well let's say hypothetically it did. What if your son said that he believed that he had to avenge his people and was going to become a suicide bomber? What could you do?"

"I would stop him. I wouldn't let him go. I would bar the door. No such thing would happen."

I cannot say that this episode had a "happy end." My Palestinian partner continued to believe that I was hypocritical, and that he was moral. Perhaps he was at least partially right: By not doing more to try to convince my son to refuse military service, I was encouraging him to be a soldier. Even though that reflection of my shared experience did not go as well as I had hoped, my Palestinian colleague and I continued our conversation not only that day, but over a number of years. Moreover, even though we haven't met face-to-face for a few years, we remain in touch on Facebook and "catch up" with one another via colleagues. And when we did meet a few years ago at a conference, we gave each other the strongest hug.

Julia: No Room for Other Voices in Sderot and Otef Aza

In the spring of 2019, my friend Marc and I – both members of Other Voice – an Otef Aza peace organization that calls for a negotiated end to the violent hostilities between the Hamas and Israeli governments,[4] and is concerned about Gazan citizens' rights and the dire humanitarian crisis they face, alongside our concern for our fellow Israeli citizens – were invited to a meeting of representatives from grassroots groups from the region. The organizers wanted to establish a coalition that could apply pressure on Israeli leaders to stop ignoring the unbearable plight of Otef Aza residents. Given that, at the time, this war had been raging for nearly twenty years, the organizers were looking for a strategy that could end this ongoing trauma. When we arrived at the meeting, we introduced ourselves to the evening's moderator, and she appeared glad to see we had come.

After refreshments and mingling, the moderator invited the organizations' representatives to come up to the main table, where each one had a sign with the name of their group. We started moving toward the table when we realized that there was neither a sign for Other Voice nor a chair for at least one of us. I tried to get her attention and ask where our sign and chair were, but she was busy getting the meeting started. At some point,

[4] *Otef Aza* literally means the Gaza Envelope – Israeli communities near the border with the Gaza Strip.

I managed to get her attention to try to figure out what had happened. After all, Other Voice *had* been sent an invitation to participate and she *knew* we had arrived.

After all the representatives who *had* been given signs and chairs had finished speaking, all of the participants were asked to divide into groups to discuss different aspects of the proposed collaboration. We finally managed to speak to the moderator and the official head of the gathering, who agreed to give us three minutes to speak, thankfully via a microphone, to all the participants, who had meanwhile split into their groups. I briefly presented our work, trying to get people's attention above the din of voices, moving chairs, and so on. I ended by saying that the only "red line" that Other Voice had was that the solution to the hostilities should be a nonmilitary solution, since we saw war as only creating more destruction for peoples on both sides of the border. We were interested in being part of this local coalition and were glad to have an opportunity to join such an endeavor. We did not demand, or even expect, that other groups focus on the Gazan population, as we do, since we understood that this was often extremely difficult for Israelis to do, especially for those who live near the Gaza Strip and have been terrorized by rocket attacks and deadly fires for years.

Even though we were allotted less time to speak than the other representatives, and even though we had to speak from the floor when many people were no longer listening or looking our way, we were immediately met with anger and opposition. "How can you care about the Gazans? They're trying to kill us. We're not here to hear about their suffering. We're the victims here." The emotional temperature was rising in the hall and Marc and I understood that our presence was very disturbing, at the very least, for most of the attendees.

At the end of the evening, the moderator announced that everyone would be receiving an email with details about the next meeting, in which we would continue working on establishment of the coalition. We did not receive that email, or the next one. We talked to one of the other organizers, who told us that they must have had the wrong email address. We gave them our email addresses (again). And our phone numbers. We neither received emails nor were we added to the WhatsApp group. We tried one more time and were told by a different organizer that they were very sorry for the mistake. She promised to update our information and add us to the email list and the WhatsApp group, even though they had been given all that information three times. By this time, we had gotten the picture. We somehow still hoped

to have our voice – even if it differed from all the other voices – included in this local coalition.

We're still waiting for an email and to be added to the WhatsApp group. It's been over four years.

Elad: Talking to a Neo-Nazi on the Sidewalk

In 2016, as a student at Sapir College, I participated in a course on racism, nationalism, and nonviolent action. This course included a student exchange with German students, during which we hosted them for a week and a few months later we traveled to Germany, where we engaged in different discussion groups and educational tours. During one of those tours, when a few of us were having a conversation outside, a German man came over to us and started talking to us. Asking where we are from, we told him we came from Israel. He introduced himself as a German who belongs to the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany) party, a right-wing party known for its extremist discourse and racist beliefs. Some even define it as a neo-Nazi party. The man had many tattoos and I noticed one of them was a swastika. At this point I felt very uncomfortable as I realized that, for the first time in my life, I was facing a German who enthusiastically supports what his ancestors did and was probably inspired to restore the glory of his country, striving for it to become an empire and rule the world.

Our conversation continued, and we began talking about the Holocaust. He claimed that Germany had lost the war, but the Holocaust had never happened. I was amazed by his answer, and though I felt fear and loathing I felt that I had an opportunity to be exposed to a different discourse, one I had never heard before. Consequently, I asked him, "In that case, what do you think about Hitler?" He replied: "Hitler was a good politician for Germany. Unfortunately, he made some mistakes, which caused Germany to lose the war." I was completely shocked by his answer. But this terrible statement also made me realize something: Although the Holocaust took place beyond any doubt, each individual has their own narrative, and their own perception of reality, even if it completely opposes mine.

As for my German colleagues, they shared with us their fear that parties like the NPD are amassing more power and legitimacy. As a Jew, I felt after that encounter that another Holocaust, as unrealistic as it may sound, might just happen again one day.

Elad: Face-to-Face and Facebook Encounters: How Can I Trust Palestinians That I Meet?

A few years ago, just as I finished my BA in Social Work, I was informed about a seminar being held by FAB (Friendship Across Borders), an NGO that conducts encounters between Israelis, Palestinians, and Germans, in order to meet, share personal narratives, and become "peace carriers." My academic studies created a reflective process, which made me ask questions regarding beliefs and dogmas, which I have carried all my life. Therefore, I felt this seminar might be an opportunity to answer those questions. That is why even though a friend of mine canceled his participation, I decided to participate.

On my way to Beit Jala,[5] as I was passing the military checkpoint, I comprehended the step I was taking and was filled with excitement. At this point, it is important to note that I had never met Palestinians face-to-face before. When I arrived at the encounter, I met some of the Palestinian participants. I remember a feeling of embarrassment as I was trying to understand their state of mind coming to the seminar. As the seminar went on, at times I felt harsh feelings of anger and frustration as they shared their personal and national narratives. Those narratives were pretty much opposed to mine, and included serious accusations toward me and the other Israeli participants.

During the seminar, we had many workshops and educational tours; one of them was extremely meaningful for me. As we were touring the Gush Etzion areas, a few Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers came over to us, asking us to move from where we had stopped for a conversation. Of course, we agreed. At that moment, I felt the need to shake their hands, letting them know I thank them for guarding the area. One of them refused to shake my hand, and it hit me like a ton of bricks. I then realized that he considered me a "traitor," who voluntarily came to speak with the "enemy."

This experience shocked me and raised many questions regarding the gap between my efforts to communicate with Palestinians and the negative image that this often has among Israelis. Those questions remained open throughout the seminar. However, as time passed by, I created some good relations with some of the Palestinian participants, and even added a few of them as Facebook friends. I left the seminar feeling good and proud of my

[5] Near Bethlehem in the West Bank.

efforts to challenge my fears and difficulties with meeting and listening to Palestinian narratives.

Nevertheless, I felt that a seminar that lasts for a few days is definitely not enough to minimize these gaps. Moreover, as time went by I was exposed to different content that the Palestinian participants shared on Facebook, which was filled with hate and violence toward Israelis and Israel. Before taking any stand, I tried to learn from them what made them act like that, talking so differently than they had in the seminar. Failing to gain such an understanding, I felt a great wall being built between us all over again, and sadly came back to what my father used to tell me: "If you really want to know what is the true Palestinian narrative and what they really think about us, you should go ahead and see how they talk among themselves, not with Israelis." Unfortunately, today, more than ever, I feel he is right.

Elad: Civil War between Jews and Jews?

These are tough times in Israel. Everywhere you turn, people are addressing the dramatic judicial overhaul the government is trying to enact. Ongoing protests with hundreds of thousands of people, some of which include violent clashes between protesters and the police, are happening throughout the country on Saturday evenings. The biggest demonstration takes place in the center of Tel Aviv.

Since its establishment, Israel's population has been diverse, containing ultra-Orthodox, national-religious, and secular Jews who emigrated from different areas of the world, as well as Muslim and Christian Palestinians who remained in the country and became citizens after the Arab–Israeli war in 1948. As a result, there has always been a delicate balance between Israel being a state that emphasizes its Jewish nature and a country that emphasizes democracy. As a result of recent statements and actions taken by the Israeli government, many people feel that this balance has been broken, expressing great fear that Israel will lose its democratic character, leaving the extreme right-wing government and Knesset with immense power.

Having the need to acknowledge the other side's narrative, I decided to read and learn how supporters of the judicial overhaul perceive the legislation and their self-perception as "the majority of the nation, as the recent election proved." After being exposed to their emotions and opinions, on social media and in conversations with acquaintances, I came to a realization that these others perceive Israel in a completely different way than I do. One of them, a good friend of mine, stated that he believes

the main problem is the way in which the media broadcasts the government's steps, misleading people and, through that, causing chaos in the streets and on social media. He was sure of the benefits that the government's actions will have in the future, and asked for patience before jumping to any far-reaching conclusions regarding Israel's future. Moreover, he perceived the recent legislative proposals as legitimate, given the fact they were taken by the incumbent government: From his perspective, they represent historical corrections which should have taken place a long time ago, ones that will be beneficial for Israel.

It was difficult for me to hear one of my best friends supporting what I believe could be a disaster, in terms of political, economic, and social matters. Our discussion represents what I perceive to be one of the greatest difficulties in building peace: the ability to put aside the debate regarding the "facts" and our perceptions of reality while being able to listen carefully to the story being told by the person in front of us, with all the differences between us. Therefore, at the end of that debate, we respectfully agreed to disagree, safeguarding our friendship. However, I have also heard many close friends, and even family members, claim that the current situation is harming their relationships. Therefore, I believe that friends and family members should avoid debates concerning the recent events.

As the violence and hatred increase, I have become aware of fears that we may be on the verge of a civil war. While working on this book, I delved into knowledge about different intractable conflicts in the world, including our own Israeli–Palestinian one. However, I never imagined that I would be living in a country wracked by such a dramatic conflict between Jews and Jews – one that affects daily life and that threatens to affect it more so in the future. But now it's here. At this point, I hope that there will soon be a compromise between the two sides.

What Will You Find in This Book?

This book has three main parts. Part I has five chapters. In Chapter 1, we introduce definitions, characteristics, and uses of narratives in academic research and in real-life encounters between former or present-day enemies, in contexts of genocide and war, especially in relation to the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This chapter presents an overview of master narratives and their impact on personal narratives of the long-term implications of genocide and war. We further present the use of personal narratives in archival survivor testimonies and truth commissions, and in research of massive social-political trauma, with a main, though not

sole, focus on the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The chapter ends with an overview of the use of personal narratives in peacebuilding and reconciliation endeavors, mainly (though not only), in the aforementioned two contexts.

Chapter 2 explores conceptualizations of collective identity and relationships with the enemy, notions that also influence and are influenced by personal narratives of genocide and war. This chapter presents empirical and theoretical conceptualizations that reflect the interplay between collective identity and a number of issues, including intractable conflicts/political violence and understandings connected to being a victim or perpetrator of political violence, especially in the contexts of the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Chapter 3 explores psychosocial coping with stressors of genocide and war. We discuss three major approaches to long-term, intergenerational coping with genocide and intractable conflict that include societal beliefs that "help" people live with intractable war. Our main focus is on the Holocaust and the Israeli–Palestinian case, which influence generations of Germans, Jews, Israelis, and Palestinians. Chapter 4 focuses on conceptualizations of sustainable peace and reconciliation and the issue of dialogue, which can foster and strengthen peace in the contexts of genocide and intractable war. Here, we not only discuss the main principles of peace, but also present some examples of groups working for such peace. Chapter 5 presents our conceptual model of four main modes of personal narratives of genocide and intractable war, as well as their connections to processes of sustainable peacebuilding and reconciliation endeavors, or to peace obstruction processes, between former and present-day enemies.

Part II is comprised of three chapters. Chapter 6 presents examples and analyses of personal narratives connected to the Holocaust context. Chapter 7 delves into the context of the Jewish–Arab/Israeli–Palestinian conflicts, and Chapter 8 explores the context of Jewish–Jewish relations in Israel, focusing on people who have opposing national/social-political ideologies and/or different religious belief systems.

Part III includes two chapters that conclude and synthesize the first two parts of our book. Chapter 9 focuses on ideas connected to research on the long-term psychosocial impacts of experiences of genocide and/or war, reflective of our conceptualizations and prior research in this field. Here, we offer different lines of research that have the potential to increase our knowledge in this complex field. Chapter 10 focuses on implications for on-the-ground sustainable peacebuilding processes. We offer some concrete ideas for eliciting personal narratives of people whose lives are tied to

genocide or war, when engaging in processes of reconciliation. Here, we address issues that challenge peacemakers, based on our theoretical model and prior experience in the field.

In closing, we wish to make one final point. The topics and contexts we address in this book are harrowing and depressing, and reflect the traumas that have been suffered by millions of people. Nevertheless, it is our hope that the voices and insights which we share help you see that while the past and the present do not give us much to smile about, we have it within us to bring about the change that will make our world better.

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We would like to extend our deep thanks to our dear colleague and friend, Dr. Shoshana Steinberg, an expert in psychosocial aspects of conflict resolution and intergroup dialogue, for her careful reading of this book and her very helpful comments throughout the writing process. She helped us clarify our thoughts and consider ideas that were worth developing. We would also like to thank Mario Schejtman, the founder and executive director of Challenge, an Israeli NGO that promotes conflict transformation within the Israeli and Palestinian arenas, for reading and commenting on a number of chapters. As an experienced and sensitive practitioner, Mario provided us with important insights concerning how our book could contribute to activists working on the ground. For this help from Shoshana and Mario, we are grateful.

This book is an outgrowth of thirty-five years of experiences, research, and peace and social justice activism. It draws on an uncountable number of discussions, interactions, and encounters with people from across the globe who have experienced genocide and war. Their personal stories of their horrific experiences – experiences that no human being should have – provided the multilayered background of this book. We cannot name all of these brave people here, but we extend our deep acknowledgment to all of them and continue to hope for the wellbeing of them and their loved ones.

Prologue: Prehistory, Today, and Tomorrow

We submitted our manuscript one month before our world came crashing down. For us, two Jewish-Israelis, life before October 7, 2023, is prehistory. As we enter our fourth month of this war, our reality is one of endless pain and deep sadness, existential fear, anger and hatred, trauma, uncertainty, and disbelief.

I (Julia) live in Kibbutz Urim. My community is in the Eshkol Regional Council, in the western Negev. This Negev region, nicknamed *Otef Aza* ("The Gaza Envelope") shares a border with the Gaza Strip. Since 2001, our area has known too-many-to-count wars, military operations, and rocket attacks. While the Hamas and Israeli governments were never willing to engage in a peace process, none of us imagined the brutality that the Hamas and the Islamic Jihad unleashed on us on that Black Saturday. On the other side of the border are our neighbors: approximately 2.3 million Palestinians. These neighbors are caught between craggy boulders – Israel and Egypt, which have sealed their borders from this population for years, leaving them with no way out and no future – and a hard place – the fundamentalistic Hamas regime, which, since 2006, has ruled them with an iron and frightening hand, doing little to nothing to improve their lives.

In other words, we are two civilian populations living precarious lives. The past decades robbed all of us – here and there – of the hope of attaining a safe and good future.

At 6:30 a.m. on that Black Saturday, those of us near the border awoke to relentless air raid alerts, booms, and shots. We received WhatsApp message after WhatsApp message: "Lock all your windows and doors. If you have a safe room, lock yourself in it. If you don't, hide in the safest spot in your house." As the rockets rained down on us, an estimated 1,500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists poured into Israel, from the air, land, and sea. They butchered babies, children, teens, young women and men, old women and men. They decapitated some

of their victims, burned people alive, and raped women. They took 240 civilian hostages (the most recent estimate, as of this writing [late January]), including grandparents in their eighties and babies. They came prepared with massive amounts of sophisticated weapons, destroying kibbutzim, invading moshavim, massacring young people in an outdoor music/dance festival, and roamed the streets of Sderot and Ofakim, overrunning homes and killing victims. On that day alone, the terrorists killed approximately 1,200 people, and wounded nearly 4,000.

In response, Israel's air force began bombing Hamas and Islamic Jihad strongholds in the Gaza Strip, which has also been accompanied by a ground invasion. However, since these organizations store their weapons in, and launch their rockets from, mosques, schools, hospitals, and civilians' houses, and due to the population density in that sliver of land, thousands of innocent Gazan citizens – of all ages – have been killed and wounded, with the numbers alarmingly increasing every day. The humanitarian crisis that characterized the Gaza Strip before this war has worsened: Most people lack water, food, medicine, and electricity. Close to 2 million Gazans fled their homes from the north and Gaza City, which were bombarded around the clock, in desperate attempts to find some small degree of safety and humanitarian aid in southern areas.

While we know how *this* war started, part of a long and bloody history, none of us know how and when it will end. Will Hezbollah become heavily involved, adding a northern front? Will Egypt, Jordan, and/or Syria come to the aid of Gaza? And what about Abu Mazen's fragile regime? Will Palestinian forces in the West Bank join the armed struggle? The bigger questions focus on the part that Iran, the United States, and other nations will play in this war. Will October 7, 2023 go down in history as the day that World War III began, eventually claiming millions of lives around the globe?

While we lack answers to these questions, what we *do* know is that this war *will* eventually end. Those of us left standing – here and there – will then have to pick up the pieces. It will be our joint task to promote human dignity – here and there – something that we have failed at miserably thus far. When that day comes, we hope that the psychosocial understandings we present in this book will help us–them in our–their work toward a sustainable peace. The first step must include listening deeply to Palestinians' and Israelis' personal narratives of the horrors that we have faced. In order to move forward, we must learn what ordinary people

experienced, using their–our stories to help light our path out of this darkness.

We now turn to our book written in our "prehistoric" world. While we know that life – here and there – is no longer what it once was, we believe that our ideas fashioned in those distant times have relevance for the world in which we so desire to live.