As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ari Shavit of Israel’s leading daily newspaper Ha’aretz spent three days in New York interviewing Edward W. Said in the summer of 2000. In this interview, which was—in Said’s words—“eminently fair” and accurately reproduced in print throughout Israel—he traced the events surrounding the 1947–1949 expulsions of nearly 800,000 Arab inhabitants in an area known simply as “Palestine,” culminating in the birth of Israel.\(^1\) He also stressed the necessity of acknowledging what so many are pained to admit: the existence of nearly three million people, currently living under military occupation, who share among themselves the “Palestinian” identity, an identity that—while continuously contested—represents a suffering and tragic dispossession that stands at the very heart of the present Middle East conflict.

In this interview with Shavit, which could never have appeared in an American paper, Said made a prediction: until the Palestinians were recognized by the Israelis as equals, and embraced as such, no workable solution would emerge to the 64-year death struggle. As he stated in another interview, “Human beings are very stubborn. It takes a slow seeping into the consciousness that the other side is not going to go away. Thinking that the Palestinians are going to simply give up if they are brought to their knees is foolish because they’re not [going to give up].”\(^2\)
The continued cycles of violence and occupation, the effects of which occasionally find their way into the American taxpayer’s consciousness through television images, often have a numbing effect; solutions to the underlying causes of such images seem wholly unrealizable. In Said’s mind, an Israeli-Palestinian binational state remained the one last prospect for peaceful coexistence. In reflecting upon Edward Said’s life over the last several years, I’ve continually returned to two somewhat enigmatic statements that Said made during that interview with Shavit: “The only true follower of Adorno . . . I’m a Jewish-Palestinian.”

Along with Erich Auerbach, Adorno was Said’s prototypical exile: someone who was never part of anything for very long and was perhaps most at home on a plane, always in and out of activities and places. Said’s restlessness and discomfort with either a programmatic politics or an unreflective group allegiance fit quite nicely with the exilic image of Auerbach composing his *Mimesis* without the proper textual resources in a besieged Istanbul or of Adorno fleeing Nazi Germany for the safety of America to establish the New School for Social Research.

Said seemed always to reject the comforts and easy solidarity of the group, seeking instead the complexities and shades of grey that emerge in solitude and through fits of dissatisfaction with the status quo. As a Palestinian working in the very finest Jewish critical-intellectual tradition, Said could indeed claim the “Jewish Palestinian” appellation for himself.

As a Jewish Palestinian, Said wrestled with the clear dialectic between repression and resistance that animates interactions between the Israeli government and the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza: a dialectic between the powerful and the powerless, the occupiers and the occupied, and those who inflict humiliation and those who are continually humiliated. Said continually wondered what actuated someone such as the late Israel Shahak, the great Israeli defender of Palestinian civil rights, and continues to actuate solitary Jewish thinkers, like Noam Chomsky and Norman Finkelstein, to