

My father and my mother are Iraqi Jews, who emigrated in the 1950s to Israel, which had been declared an independent state in 1948. They met and married in Israel.

I was born in 1963.

In 1967, when the Six-Day-War broke out, the war in which we conquered what is referred to as the 'Occupied Territories' - I was four years old. I remember the sirens, signaling that we had to go into the air-raid shelters. I remember our upstairs neighbor Aliza who, out of solidarity with her son who had been drafted into the army, refused to come down to the basement of our building. She insisted on staying all by herself in her blacked-out apartment.

After the war, we, the Jewish people of Israel, were euphoric about our victory. In kindergarten we had been told that we, a handful against so many, had repulsed the attack and conquered our Arab enemies.

We were taught to be proud of our victory and to look down on our conquered enemies.

A new identity of Israeli Jews, born in Israel, emerged: The `Sabras`, Israelis who can protect themselves, are brave and heroic, and different from their parents who are mostly Holocaust survivors.

As children, we sang patriotic songs. The radio played Israeli folk music that expressed the lively `Sabra` character of the new state.

But my parents' radio played other songs as well - in Arabic - their native language.

Farid El Atrash and Umm Kulthum sang songs in Arabic, the language of 'the enemy', songs whose meaning I did not understand.

My parents spoke both Hebrew and Arabic.

When they did not want me to understand they spoke only Arabic with each other.

I was confused.

And ashamed.

"My parents are Arabs!"

"Why do they speak Arabic with each other?"

"Maybe they are spies?"

I tried to surprise them, to catch them, in the act of using their Morse-code machine, sending signals to the "enemy", giving away state secrets.

"And what if I would really catch them sending signals?"

"But they are my parents! They love me!"

“And if they find out that I betrayed them?”

“Whom shall I be loyal to? My parents? The state?”

“No one!”

This personal conflict has existed within me for years. Fear, aggression and anxiety find their expression in my frequent dreams. Unfortunately, this nightmare became reality for all of us, Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Them and us.

Us and them.

Two peoples on a small piece of land,  
each side armed with its historical and moral rights.

Turning our common paradise,  
into existential hell.

I pray that my people and the Palestinian people will overcome this conflict and find a way to live peacefully with one another merging East and West.

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Eytan Shouker, artist and initiator of the “Pen-Pal Project”

Tel Aviv, Israel

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