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A Newsletter of the Friends World Program at Long Island University's Southampton College

Confidence-Building in the Middle East

Andrea Weissfeld
Middle East Studies Major - North American Center

September 28th 2000. Unlike most days, this was the beginning of the demise of the latest peace process in the Middle East, and of my fading confidence in it. That was the day Ariel Sharon, Israel's Defense Minister, decided to exercise his muscle by walking on the Temple Mount ground claiming that that sacred area could never be divided. It would have been divided in the peace process that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat discussed in a summer meeting at Camp David.

Yet on that day in September I was in Jerusalem learning about the stunt through an English-language news station, CNN, this while I was less than 15 minutes away from the site itself. Class was about to begin that morning at the Friends World center in the German colony in Jerusalem. However, people sitting around the television in shock delayed the class. I was no more shocked than by any other incident that had ever happened in Israel, and no more so by a man walking up on an area I had visited many times, but I was shocked by the fact it was already on the news.

It is always a bad sign when anything is documented on international news before people in the area even know about it. Yet, even at that point, my confidence was intact because spouts of violence happen. I knew all this was more of a reaction to the politician Sharon, himself, and not a new conflict, but I was very much mistaken.

I spent the weekend of Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, the New Year, in the old city of Jerusalem. I prayed in the area where in previous days conflict was continuing. However, my prayers were not offered in silence, but against the background of Israeli soldiers' rubber bullets flying around, and were cut short. I had to move, because stones were being thrown over

the Temple Mount onto the Wailing Wall, where I was. I knew in my heart, though, that the violence would not spill into the next weeks of Jewish and Muslim holidays, that it would end before the following week.

However, the conflict was not short-lived. That "tradition" had been broken and it flowed into the next week, and the week after, growing worse and worse. The burial hole of past problems was resurrecting itself, creating new monsters. The

peace process was disintegrating, and more problems were to follow.

The students were now told by the professors to take much precaution when going around town. They were getting over-excited, fearful that war would erupt. I was living away from the school, in the center of Jerusalem, and had to take the most precaution, aside from the students living in the old city itself. I was told where not to go, and not to take the city bus. Though I had previously lived in the Middle East and knew how

to take care of myself, I was becoming disturbed by all these new commands. I became more despondent because of the other students, hearing their frantic talks about a country they had only been introduced to a month earlier. Although even then, I never swayed from my view that the violence would end, and that people could get back to business as usual — until we were evacuated from Jerusalem.

We left Jerusalem, as recommended by the school because Jerusalem had become "too dangerous." Now, when I saw images on the television, and being away from there, my confidence began to suffer. I started to see the Middle East as outsiders would have seen the situation. When we left for Turkey, on an area studies trip, and even when I went back to the United



The Wailing Wall, Jerusalem

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Letter From The Dean

Dear Friends,

Greetings from Southampton, where it is a challenging time for those of us involved in international education. My first few months as Interim Dean have been full of discussions with students, parents, alumni, faculty and staff on the purpose and value of the Friends World Program at this particular time. After much thought and self-reflection in very difficult circumstances, we have all reached the same conclusion: The goals of the Friends World Program now seem more relevant than ever. We cannot allow these recent acts of violence and terrorism to deter us from continuing to pursue our goals of global citizenship and international understanding.



With this in mind, the Friends World Program is exploring a number of new initiatives which will strengthen our identity as a program committed to studying "the most pressing human problems" while greatly increasing the options available to students in our four-year program. First, and most importantly, the curriculum of the new first year program has been designed around the mission statement and contains a number of experientially based courses covering global issues, global history and cross-cultural study. Second, building on his work with Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Chris Penny at the European Center will head up a new one-year program in Peace and Reconciliation beginning September 2002. Third, both World Council and the Council of Overseers have approved a student initiative proposing a traveling Peace and Reconciliation Program (PNR) modeled on the Comparative Religion and Culture Program. In this traveling program, students will spend 10 weeks each in South Africa, Northern Ireland and Vietnam studying different approaches to reconciling opposing sides in racial, religious, and international conflicts. We will begin seeking external funding for this program immediately, with the goal of a September 2003 start date. (The Council of Overseers was especially pleased with the student presentation of the PNR program and has enthusiastically endorsed many of these new initiatives - and the new direction of the program — in a recent letter to Dr. David Steinberg, President of Long Island University.) Fourth, the center in Costa Rica is developing a program in Ecological Issues which will explore the political and economic dimensions of environmental issues in the first semester and then turn that focus to the study of indigenous people and conservation in the second semester. Fifth, the South Asian center is developing a one-year program in Alternative Health and Sustainable Living which will build on their traditional offerings in these areas. Finally, Jane Green in London has proposed a one-semester program in "Theatre and Social Change" based on the work of Augusto Boal in Brazil. While each of the centers will continue to offer students the option of designing independent programs with the help of a faculty mentor, students will now also be able to enroll in one of these more structured programs for a semester or a year at a time. I hope you are as excited about these changes as I am.

I would like to close with a special word of thanks to the Council of Overseers for their support and guidance during this transitional year. We have had very regular contact over these past few months. They have been a constant source of informed advice and compassionate support.

All the best in the year to come,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads "Robert Glass".

Robert Glass

Interim Dean, Director of Comparative Religion and Culture
Friends World Program of Long Island University

Taiwanese Smiles

Sharon Akers

Comparative Religion Program

What I notice most here is the smiling. I was walking along a busy road that borders the wall of the front gate of Fu Jen University the other day when a girl walked hurriedly out of a shop and almost collided with me. In that brief moment when we glanced at each other - where there could have been an awkward 'excuse-me' or even petty glaring - we smiled. Looking into her face, I saw the most radiant smile I have ever seen, a smile that could warm the hardest heart. I felt privileged that she had graced me with it. We ended up in step for a few moments and she turned to me and spoke:

"Hello," she said. "I do not know you but you just gave me a smile, thank you."

I was astounded. My smile could not have been anything in comparison to hers. In fact, I think it had only been in answer to hers and here she was thanking me! We talked for a little while as we walked. I answered her questions about where I was from. She answered my questions about the bouquet of flowers in her arms. (They were for her boyfriend). Then we went our separate ways. We continued on our original paths with no change of course, not even exchanging our names. Yet the course of our respective days had been changed, brightened.

The Taiwanese people's smiles do not seem to be surface level. The generosity that one can often see in a smile infuses their actions as well. On another not-so-bright day, I went for a long walk in the gray of monsoon, passing through the crooked sidewalk-less streets of Shin Chung, the suburb of Taipei containing Fu Jen University, past every imaginable sight and smell. Before heading out, I was walking only a few steps from one campus building to the next in the pouring rain when a girl - this time with an umbrella rather than flowers - again fell into step with me. She held the umbrella over me, making it clear she was offering its protection. She asked where I was headed so that she could keep me dry on the way. On my way back to campus that day - now completely soaked - yet another person offered me the same courtesy of an umbrella.

There is trust in a smile, and, it seems, trust in a smiling culture. When you smile at someone's child here and even intrude further to photograph that child, parents do not look at you as if you were a pervert as people sometimes do in the West. Instead, they tell their child to face the camera and smile back. The parents grin at you as well, happy that you also appreciate their family.

Another day I saw a whole family on a scooter and upon noticing my gaze seemed confused that I would look twice at them. Then the corners of their mouths went up, changing their blank looks into return smiles. You are greeting them happily or happy about life, not showing your unending



Taiwanese Smiles CRC Fall 2001

amazement that so many people (of so many sizes!) could fit on a scooter. They think that you are smiling to them rather than at them, and then, because you realize this and there is a moment of communication, you are!

The smiles hint at a level of trust beyond greetings. I saw comforters airing out and being sunned on parked motor scooters in the middle of the road. No one guards them. Not every bicycle on campus has a lock. People's living rooms are open to the street. I have yet to witness a fight or even a situation that seems tense enough to escalate into one. I may be exaggerating but it seems as though for every 3,000 looks of open curiosity and acceptance I receive here, I get one of suspicion. This is not a ratio that I would encounter in the West.

Is it the prevalence of Buddhism here that makes it this way? Are people really taking to heart the enjoyment of each moment and the connectedness of self to everyone else? Do people just like foreigners here, or, perhaps, just simply find us funny? Maybe they know we are Americans and feel sorry for us or wish to show their support because of September 11. It could be the supposed cultural taboo about showing negative emotion. On the other hand, it may be that because there are so many people these types of manners are essential in order to co-exist. Perhaps this lesson was learned here a long time ago.

Perhaps it is a combination of all of these explanations. It would be nice to know. The rest of the world might learn from it.

Globalization and Genetic Engineering

Sage Ludeman

Latin American Center

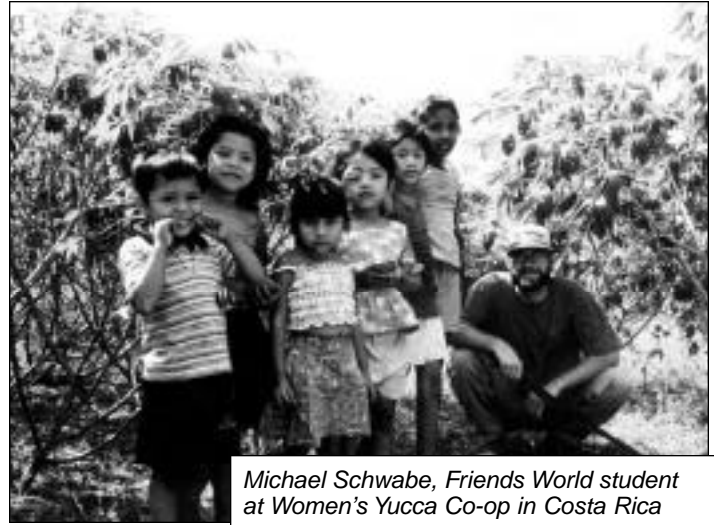
Humans have been manipulating the properties of organisms for hundreds of years. Cross-pollination creates the pear-apple for example, a fruit that is the shape of an apple and has the skin of a pear. Plant grafting attaches the bud or shoot of one plant to a host plant, which accepts the new appendage as its own. Grafting is often done for visual appeal such as is the case with Japanese cherry trees that have a variety of blossom colors which are abundant where I live.

Within the last 25 years a new form of manipulation has been born, commonly known as "Genetic Engineering." This differs from anything done in the past because it gives us the power to change the DNA structure. What is genetic engineering? To understand what it is first one must know what the basic make-up of an organism is. Every organism is made up of thousands of cells, and within each cell is a nucleus where all the genetic material is held. This material is packaged together in what are called chromosomes. Each chromosome connects to the next, creating a strand of chromosomes called DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). DNA is what creates the traits that make one organism different from another. It can be thought of as a coding system or place where information is stored. My DNA gave me my blond hair and determined the size of my feet. The reason genetic engineering is so named is because scientists take genes from one organism and place them into another or simply rearrange genes in one organism.

In other words, they examine the strands of DNA in an organism to find which chromosome/gene has the desired trait and when it is found the gene is broken off from the DNA strand and placed into the strand of a foreign DNA. The host organism takes in the new information and its DNA is altered, creating a whole new organism that would have never been produced by Mother Nature. The problem with cross-pollination is that a plant carrying both the positive and negative characteristics would be created, but with genetic engineering it is possible to create a plant with only the positive values.

Plants such as soybeans, maize, rape (what canola oil is made of), wheat, sugar beet, and chicory have been made resistant to herbicides. This means that plants can be sprayed and only the weeds will die. A similar thing is done for insect resistance. Plants such as maize, corn, and potato have also been modified to carry insecticide inside them so that when the bugs eat their leaves they die. There are also tomatoes that ripen on the vine but don't turn soft so they can be shipped across the country without being bruised. Since all these plants no longer have a natural gene combination one concern is that they may cause allergies when eaten.

It should also be mentioned that genes can be exchanged across species. This means that a gene from a fish can be put



Michael Schwabe, Friends World student at Women's Yucca Co-op in Costa Rica

into a potato! If someone allergic to fish eats a modified potato, causing an allergic reaction, he or she would have no way of understanding what the cause was because labeling of genetically-altered foods is not required now or done. There is also the question of moral rights. A vegetarian would not want to eat any produce that contained animal genes. Others, with religious concerns, might object to humans playing God.

One of the major genetic engineering players is a mega corporation known as Monsanto, one of the largest producers of GMO's (genetically modified organisms). Originally a chemical and pesticide company, Monsanto is also heavily involved in patenting seeds and producing numerous genetically modified products, the best known being "Roundup Ready" corn, soybeans, rape seed, and cotton containing an herbicide that has been injected into their embryos. The farmer who buys this seed can spray his field with Roundup herbicide and kill everything but the desired crop. Thus, the farmer becomes dependent on Monsanto's seed every year because GE seeds do not reproduce live ones; the farmer can only buy Roundup, so Monsanto makes quite a profit.

There are many problems though. What happens when a genetically modified plant cross-pollinates with a regular plant?

What sort of impact will GMO's have on our bodies? Perhaps, because they contain a mutated gene, the same mutation will occur in the body and cancer will result. No one knows the answers to these questions and they are not matters that can be tossed aside to consider later after we have already contaminated the food chain.

Monsanto also makes a bovine growth hormone (Bgh), a synthetic copy of a naturally occurring hormone made by cows. Injected, it makes them produce more milk. Drug companies claim that Bgh "merely enhances a natural process," but it is not

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Our Community

Lauriel Schuman, North American Center

Here at the North American center of Friends World there is a spectacular community of people. 28 to be exact. We live together, eat together, have class together, and share our lives together. We all come from varying backgrounds and often differ in our opinions on life, but there is something incredible that connects us. On the surface there are our common interests, but beneath that there lies something much stronger; our passion for life, our commitment to greatness and our unrelenting pursuit to transform the world, however that may be.



We have been a community for less than two months and yet I have seen the support and compassion of a community unified by something much stronger than time. Over the last two months we have organized among ourselves to create a women's circle, an organic foods club, weekly student meetings, and daily activities. We have protested the required meal plan

on campus and have spoken out about the ineffectiveness of certain classes. We have marched in the

streets of Washington D.C. and New York to speak out for peace in a time when war is the word of the day. And we have done it together.

Each day I am surrounded by 27 of the most amazing people I have ever met, 27 strong, beautiful, thoughtful people who I know will all have a tremendous impact on the world in which it will never be the same. It is a blessing to be part of such a community.

The Shape of My Thoughts

Sarah Weintraub, Latin American Center

In Spanish the verb *esperar* means to wait, to wish, to hope, or to expect, depending on the context. I used to get frustrated with this verb and other words in Spanish that had many meanings. I was never sure if the person I was talking to and I were both interpreting the context the same way. And what if we weren't? What was I really saying? There are so many nuances and facets to words in both Spanish and English sometimes I don't think I'll ever know what I'm really saying. I've learned to love this about Spanish - to love that I don't know. Spanish is round and blurred and soft in my mind and on my tongue. When I speak Spanish I am forced to care less about expressing myself perfectly and to give myself permission to sketch out my meaning. When I'm speaking Spanish I become a less careful, less exact person. The more I speak Spanish the more deeply I notice how my language creates me. The shape of the language I use influences the shape of what I say, which, in turn, influences the shape of my thoughts and the shape of me.

Some of the words we use at Friends World are similar to *esperar* in that they have many meanings. For example in the last month I've heard people use the word *community* to express a group of friends, people working for a common goal, people who are at the same place at the same time, an ideal version of

human interaction and many other concepts. Every time we say "the Friends World community" we are referring to something different.

When I speak Spanish and use big, full words like *esperar* I become a bigger, more animated person. When I study at Friends World and use thick, layered words like *community*, *consensus*, and *social change* who do I become? One thing I've become here at the Latin America Center is the student representative/coordinator. Something in the things we do and the words we use here pulled a certain kind of person out of me. This me is organized, competent, reliable and a leader. Other students could see this certain shape that I emerged in and chose me to represent them.

Some days I feel like I am my roomy, outgoing Spanish-speaking self. Some days I feel like my opinionated, take-charge Friends World-speaking self. Tonight I am sleeping in tiny, isolated Playa Hermosa. It's almost dark and the rain is slowing from a pour to a drip. I am alone and calm and I don't know which of my many selves I am or want to be, which of my many languages I speak. I'll just wait here as colors fade into shades of gray. I'll wait here until I know who I am. I'll just wait, wish, hope, and expect.

“Dirty Snow that Refuses to Melt”

An Interview with Can Xue in Changsha, China

Laura McCandlish, China Center

While the Pulitzer Prize winning author Gao Xingjian’s “Soul Mountain” has been heralded for its probing introspective journey through the heart of China’s varied landscape and tumultuous history, there is a fiercely imaginative woman who has been spinning self-proclaimed tales of “soul literature” in China since the early 1980s. Formerly a tailor by trade, Can Xue (whose real name is Deng Xiao-hua) only began writing fiction seriously in 1983. Can Xue (translated as “the dirty snow that refuses to melt”) prolifically writes avant-garde short stories, novellas, novels and critical commentaries on writers who have influenced her Gothic magic, such as Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka, and Dante. Her first Chinese work was published in 1985 while the English translation of *Dialogues in Paradise*, Can Xue’s first collection of lyrical stories appeared in 1989, followed by two novellas, “Old Floating Cloud,” in 1991, and finally, “The Embroidered Shoes Collection” of stories in 1997.

I first stumbled upon “*Dialogues in Paradise*” just before departing to study with the Friends World Program of Long Island University at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou last fall. When I returned to China the following summer, I flew from Hangzhou to Hunan Province’s Changsha to witness Can Xue’s spark firsthand through an interview. Can Xue has lived in Changsha since her birth in 1953. By 1957, her father as head of the New Hunan Daily “anti-Party clique” was condemned as an ultra-rightist and both of her parents were sent to labor reform camps in the countryside. In the post-Great Leap Forward shortages by 1959, Can Xue’s entire family of nine lived in a cramped dark cell, suffering famine to the verge of death. When the Cultural Revolution commenced in 1966, her education permanently ceased after just completing primary school.

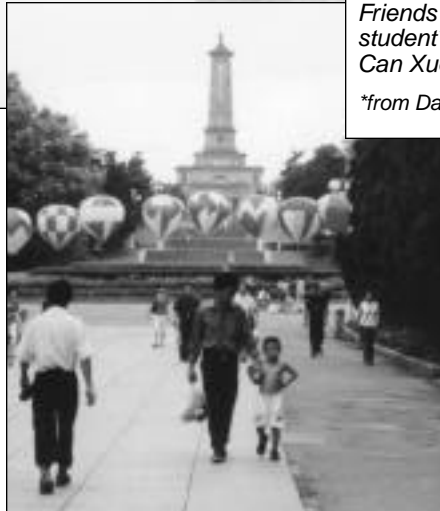
As I flew into Changsha that early morning, I was reminded that Can Xue, who clings to her individual artistic vision, ironically lives close to the heart of China’s great proletarian revolution, near Mao Zedon’s birthplace in neighboring Shaoshan. From the air, I noted Changsha’s plotted squares of gold, red clay, and green fields with the yellow dust that coats the land and clings to Can Xue’s fiction as a hazy reminder of the recent past. In my hour-long cab ride to Can Xue’s apartment on the west side of the Xianjiang River, I breathed in

the fading stinky sweat smell of Changsha, rotting slowly under the smog and dust but still exerting a vitality through the mesh of farmers and bike pedalers with some slight skyscrapers in the city center.



Laura McCandlish, Friends World visiting student* with author Can Xue

*from Davidson College



Can Xue’s street was teeming with a kaleidoscope of vendors selling gaudy fabrics, shoes and grocery affairs, with the standard boxed family restaurants and bicycles and carts streaming in every direction amid the occasional cars and cabs. I recognized the spirited

woman instantly from the sidewalk as she sheepishly smiled behind her thick-rimmed glasses. Though almost 50, she has a youthful spunk, beaming as

she shook my hand and greeted me in fluent English, though she humored my intermediate Mandarin attempts.

Her apartment was modest but spaciouly comfortable. We began the interview immediately, sitting down to tea with two men in the sitting room, one with a sleek pony-tail who serves as Can Xue’s agent/editor/designer. Can Xue’s husband, who took over their tailoring business so that she could write

professionally, was dutifully preparing an elaborate lunch in the kitchen.

After discussing some translations and criticism of her work, she said “My literature is soul literature, interested in the human soul, not the outside superficial world. I’m not interested in the politically superficial layer.” Can Xue’s focus is on the psyche, which has revolutionary implications given China’s previous artistic climate of socialist realism. She strongly aligns herself with Kafka and Borges, both whom have been included in the magical realist tradition. Can Xue admitted, “I’m not so concerned with national problems.”

The University of Iowa’s International Writing Program named Can Xue an honorary fellow and brought her to the U.S. in 1992 to speak at 50 colleges and universities, including Harvard and UC Berkeley. She also was able to spend time in New York with her translators.

She holds a high opinion of her unique place in Chinese literature, yet she maintains a balanced humility. She does feel some women writers are threatened by her style, though she is

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Dirty Snow that Refuses to Melt *(Continued from page 6)*

friendly with Wang Anyi, possibly the most popular woman writer in China now. Can Xue explained that her friend is popular “because she is safer in her writing, but I disagree with how she promotes traditional Chinese culture. It’s not necessarily a good thing to please everyone.” Rather than focus on the socio-political in her works, Can Xue prefers to write of the irrational, proclaiming that “no one else is writing like me in China.”

Rejecting the real world, she expels all outside forces to write of the internal soul world. “I believe if you want to change the world, you have to change your soul first,” Can Xue added enthusiastically. Expressing distaste for contemporary American literature, she added, “What I write dances from my heart. The writer fights with the self, but you can’t control yourself to write.”

When Can Xue writes, she imagines a person behind her representing the conscious-controlling reason whom she must combat. The government deemed her autobiographical piece, “Beautiful Day in the South,” to be subversive, but Can Xue argued that is just beautifully crafted literature. “The current government is an extension of much of the authoritarianism of traditional Chinese culture recreated. The leaders are like those

from ancient times, from 1,000 years before. It just keeps getting worse and worse.”

Can Xue emphatically subscribes to the belief that “there is another world parallel to this blunt reality, and this dream world is much bigger and deeper. The soul world is much more important than this realistic world. Chinese people connect to the spirit of the self. Self-realization has been an important concept from ancient times until today.” Can Xue blends aspects of Chinese culture with modern Western influences in her works. “My works are like a plant,” she explained, “my ideas grow up in the West but I dig them up and replant in China’s deep soil, a 5,000-year rich history. My works aren’t like those from the West or from China, but rather my own creation. Chinese culture is from my heart. I was born here, I live here. I don’t need to learn what is from my heart.”

Following the interview, Can Xue’s pleasantly domestic husband streamed from the kitchen with a steaming collage of dishes he set before us for a Hunan-style luncheon. Changsha is a city of many writers, yet Can Xue glimmers in the relative muted dust. Her gentle spark charms contagiously. This charm continued to exert its force on me as I skipped back to Hangzhou, star-gazing under the spell of Can Xue.

Globalization and Genetic Engineering *(Continued from page 4)*

natural.

Cows produce hormone amounts that are in agreement with what their bodies can handle. When these levels exceed normal amounts the cows’ bodies suffer from many different and serious types of stress.

Moreover, studies have shown that, as is the case with cows, humans can be adversely affected by an increase of this hormone with the likelihood increasing of women getting breast cancer and men developing prostate cancer. Then there is the question about the quality of the milk. Obviously if the cow is not healthy, the milk will not be healthy either.

Monsanto and other producers of GE seeds like DuPont, Syngenta (Switzerland), and Aventis (France) are prime

examples of the negative impacts of globalization. They sell products that are advertised as being beneficial to the public, but in truth they actually cause more harm than good. One of the factors of globalization is the privatizing of what was once government-owned. Only a few large corporations around the world control production of commonly used products and small businesses are disappearing. It is easy for me to feel hopeless after learning about the scary possibilities of GMO’s and the uncertainty of the future but I think the best way to attack the problem is to support the use of alternative products, not only by purchasing them, but also by supporting stores that sell them and by boycotting stores that don’t. Ultimately, though, I think the best way to make change is simply to educate.

Confidence Building in the Middle East *(Continued from page 1)*

States, I became even more disillusioned by the process. This was because I was now completely outside the situation. Having only the news to rely on, and knowing how the news sometimes portrays certain angles of the stories, I knew I was not getting the whole story. And this added to my discomfort.

Now betrayed by the whole picture of things, and by how the media was making the Israelis look, as a person who is for the Palestinian cause I felt I had to defend the Israeli position, because an insult to them was an insult to me for I related also with the Israelis because I am Jewish. That is the problem with studying this subject: No matter how dedicated you are to your opinions, if you are Arab, Muslim, or Jewish you tend to lean to

one side of the political center, especially when it comes down to this type of conflict. Yet, I still believe peace is possible in this region.

What I am constantly being asked is if my confidence has faded so much in the process that I believe peace can never happen. I believe that peace is possible, but it takes time and reparations from the last 14 months must be made before trust is restored enough to bring the parties together. Then, and only then will the peace process be successful. Until that time, I must wait for my confidence to be restored by both Israelis and Palestinians, by their confidence-building actions in the Middle East.

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