## Preface

The following contains the hurried notes I wrote down on my recent trip to Israel.

They were written in a hurry while I was packing down my office into boxes,and they lack a proper *Foreword* as well as a proper *Afterword.* I may later add those to a possible later edition.

The trip was my first, and maybe my last. It naturaly divides into two parts, the first lasting in time until May 8 concerns the conference and may be of limited interest to the general reader, the second lasting only a few days constitute the main content of the visit as well as the account.

Göteborg

June 2
1993

## A Note on the text

The following notes were written in a great hurry in the end of May, just after my return from Israel, and just prior to my visit to Nice about three weeks later. While I was writing I was also packing boxes in preparation for the move to the new mathematics building. In the fall I made some attempt at proofreading, but no attempt at any systematic polishing. Thus the text that appears here is essentially, with minor typographical corrections and occasional clarifications, the original, rough draft. But I have considered it preferable to keep the text as it was rather than to revise it completly, hoping thereby to preserve some of the initial freshness. Thus some passages might be offensive to some readers, I could have cut them out, or expounded on them; but keeping with my intention of meddling as little as possible, I let them remain, for better or worse, hoping that any offense that is caused is understood to be incidental and not intentional.

Partille

December 22 1993

## Preface

The following is a report on my trip to Israel in early May 1993. It was my first trip to the Middle East, and my second out of the North Atlantic Continents. As another exotic adventure I had looked forward to it for some time, and keeping to the adventorous spirit that goes with travel to exotic places, I wanted to some extent get off the beaten track.

Israel is one of the places where the First World meets the Third. Another one is South Africa. This inevitably heightens the sense of guilt that many westerners indulge in. And it makes for a polarization due to the conflicting interests that we who live well inside the borders of the affluent world are spared, and consequently find so appalling and ugly when we are confronted with it. However the situation of Israel is far more complicated morally than say that of South Africa.

First, and maybe foremost, the Jews were the supreme victims of the Second World War. Many of us hence see the Israelis as the straggling survivors of the Holocaust, once again threatened by extinction, holding on heroically on a narrow strip of land, surrounded by hostile Arabs who are holding the banner of anti- semitism high, are intent on driving the survivors into the Sea. This perspective of the situation was definitely the one I had a quarter of a century ago, when the Arabs seemingly just were about to do that. And also the identification of the Israelis with the victimized Jews is a very essential part of the Israeli identity, in fact to some extent its *raison d'etre*.

Because on the other hand, the Israels are Westerners. Sophisticated, educationally and technologically, dominating poor and backward neighbours. Just another example of Western Imperialism. From this perspective there is a definite distinction between the hapless victimized Jews, and the supposedly arrogant, aggressive Israelis. A distinction between Jews and Zionists that the Arabs, for understandable reasons, have seized on enthusiastically.

Thus as fellow westerners, they have become objects of our self-hatred. And their victims, the surrounding Palestinians, have been subjected to much sentimentalization among us.

The truth is usually somewhere between. On one hand the identification between the Israelis and the victimized Jews is being seen through, also in Israel. The shadow of the exterminations should not be allowed to forever darken the vision and outlook of the Israelis. This means that they will stop to see themselves as refuges and hunted victims, clinging on to a narrow insulated land. Clearly a first step in any serious attempt at normalizing relations with their neighbours. On the other hand, their ongoing occupation of the West Bank, so deplored by Western intellectuals; although clearly not a source of pride and satisfaction, must be acknowledged as basically benign. True people are being killed by occupational forces, but in most cases if so accidentally, and never as part of a systematic extermination campaign, which has all too often been the case in recent history elsewhere. They are clearly no saints, on the other hand they are no devilish fiends, although sentimental propaganda tries to make them out that way.

I have no ties to Israel. My one sentimental attachment to it, is through the Biblical Stories I read and savoured as a child, which gives me, as everybody else in the Christian-Judean cultural tradition a kind of claim to its holy places. Regardless of the fact that literally those places are no longer holy to me in a technical religious sense. As I have mentioned above, my basic attitude, which I may share with most westerners, in spite of contradicting rethoric, is one of concern with a small and threatened population, with strong traditional claims (the Biblical Stories again) to a piece of land, forever threatened by numerous and hostile neighbours.

But of course the real fascination with Israel resided not in their Western comfort but in their Oriental discomfort. The cleft between the first and third world, which I somehow wanted to feel firsthand, true to the myth that real life is somewhere out there, away from our plush civilization.