

When the Rhetorical Situation Calls Us Out: Documenting Voices of Resistance and the Making of *Dreams Deferred*

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Preface

In 2009, Jennifer Hitchcock and her husband, Vernon Hall, traveled to Israel and the West Bank with a \$600 Canon camera to find and capture the voices of Israeli and Palestinian nonviolence advocates and activists. Their objective was to challenge the dominant narratives of violence, terrorism, and oppression perpetuated by the mainstream U.S. media, and *Dreams Deferred: The Struggle for Peace and Justice in Israel and Palestine* documents voices of nonviolence activism as an alternative to such narratives. In the following article, Jennifer takes us behind the camera to explain what compelled her and Vernon to make their documentary, why they made the choices they did, and how they went about making their first feature-length documentary. Theirs is a story that illustrates the rhetorical power of do-it-yourself activism in response to a deeply felt call to action.

—Kathleen Kerr, *Virginia Tech*

Introduction

To slip through the razor wire is to challenge the system. To slip through the razor wire is risky, whether you are trying to slip contraband in—or make it visible to the rest of the world. And to slip through, under, or around razor wire with language—written or verbal—I suggest, is the work of social justice and a growing number of scholars in composition and rhetoric who are motivated by such issues and the possibility of change.

—Tobi Jacobi “Slipping Pages Through Razor Wire:
Literacy Action Projects in Jail”

After a long and confusing ordeal getting on and off different buses and figuring out which line we belonged in, we finally approached our last point of contact with Israeli border control before entering Jordan via the Allenby Bridge. As I approached the young female Israeli officer, I was still practicing my Christian-pilgrim cover story in my head. But she didn't ask me to explain the 30+ mini DV tapes or ask why we needed the tripod and wireless lapel mics if we were only tourists. She didn't even look in the camera bag. I had been careful to keep record of what was on each tape in a separate location so no evidence of our time in the occupied West Bank would be obvious unless someone actually watched one of the tapes. Once we passed through security, we boarded our last bus across the Jordan Valley no-man's land. When we stepped off the bus on the other side in Jordan, I breathed a sigh of relief. We were lucky. After spending over a month in Israel and the West Bank making a documentary about peace and justice activism, we had gotten out of Israel without any of our tapes or equipment getting confiscated—a regular occurrence for many peace activists. I was relieved to finish the first part of the project, but now I was faced with the daunting rhetorical task of figuring out how to edit my 30+ hours of footage.

Tobi Jacobi's words about the difficulties of literacy work with prison populations reminds me of some of the problems my husband and I faced making a documentary about peace and justice activism in Israel and Palestine. Jacobi faced obstacles like risky border crossings, the lack of safe space, and the unstable prison environment, all of which can complicate efforts to publish and circulate underrepresented

voices. While producing and directing *Dreams Deferred: The Struggle for Peace and Justice in Israel and Palestine*, we had to overcome similar obstacles—both material and rhetorical—in order to bring activist voices of resistance to a wider public. Our primary objective was disseminating the voices of Israeli and Palestinian peace and justice activists, but explaining *how* and *why* we decided to make a documentary about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹ gets more complicated.

While my husband's background in architecture helped prepare him for the more artistic and technical aspects of making a documentary, my master's study in Rhetoric and Composition was often on my mind as I planned interview questions, selected which clips to keep or discard while editing, and composed informative pages about Israel/Palestine for our website. It wasn't until Kathy Kerr interviewed me about our intentions for this project that I was motivated to intellectualize our reasons and goals more fully. To analyze our rhetorical goals and address *why* we chose to make this documentary, I must first discuss the nature of the rhetorical situation as I see it. To what were we compelled to respond in the form of a documentary? As Lloyd Bitzer says, "rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem" (5). And in making this documentary as discourse in response to something, what were we hoping to achieve rhetorically?

To flesh out our answers to these questions, I will describe both the internal and external rhetorical situations to which I felt obliged to respond. I will also explain our rhetorical intentions, how we tried to achieve these goals through the content of the documentary and its companion website, how successful I believe our attempt has been so far, including our do-it-yourself (DIY) distribution efforts, and why we remain hopeful for a future resolution to the situation despite the political complexities that serve as major obstacles to peace and justice in the region. Ultimately, even though much of this article will discuss our motivations and intentions for the project, the point is really not about us at all. It's about bringing the voices of Israeli and Palestinian activists who struggle every day for peace and justice to a wider American audience so these voices can finally become part of the discourse.



Background, Myths, and My Rhetorical Situation

Indecipherable commands emanate from a Border Police jeep's loudspeaker to reinforce what Noor had already told us: it was now curfew—AGAIN. We would have to stay put until curfew was lifted, which could be anywhere from a few hours to the whole day and following night. So until then we were stuck inside Noor's uncle's home in the northern West Bank village of Jayyous. We had come to attend the weekly Friday demonstration against the Israeli separation barrier that had annexed most of the village's farmlands in 2002, and we wanted to get some footage of the popular protest here for our documentary. But there would be no demonstration that day because the Israelis had decided to impose curfew during the Friday prayers and before the nonviolent march and demonstration were to begin. We had experienced our first curfew the night before, so we were getting a small taste of what life must be like for residents of Jayyous and many other villages in the West Bank, where curfews often shut everything down without warning.

My husband was the other half of our two-person crew, but the project was initially my idea and stemmed from a personal interest in the subject, on which I had done extensive research. Thus, much of the original motivation for the project came from me and was based on my evolving understanding of the situation. I was raised in a Christian Zionist home by a father who taught me that God gave the land of Israel to the Jews, who also happened to be the protagonists of the Bible. I believed then, as many Americans do, that the Jews deserved their own state in their historic homeland because of the traumas they suffered at the hands of the Nazis in Europe. And I didn't understand why those Palestinian terrorists hated the Jews so much. This last belief wasn't a result of my father's teachings but, rather, was inculcated in me as I consumed many years of mainstream U.S. news and entertainment media. The U.S. media is biased on many issues, and this is certainly one of them.²

It wasn't until a few years after finishing my bachelor's degree that I first had an inkling there was more complexity to the situation. I saw a documentary about the history of Israel that was partially funded by the Israeli government. Even though the film had a strong Zionist bias, a few factual details surprised me and challenged some of my views of the issue: Jews began immigrating to Palestine decades before WWII, Palestinians lived on most of the land back then, and, most surprising of all, Jewish terrorists blew up the King David Hotel during the British Mandate period, killing scores of British officials. In my very limited understanding of the situation up until that point, I had always believed that only Palestinians used terrorism and that the Israeli Jews, like the moral United States, always reacted in self-defense and only waged wars with the best moral intentions. Up until these realizations, I had believed the same myths about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that continue to dominate most mainstream American media sources.

Edward Said suggests that the U.S. media perpetuates myths about Palestinian violence and Israeli victimization. To illustrate this situation, he describes the results of a poll on Americans' views of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from watching U.S. news coverage, especially in the years after 9-11 and during the Second Intifada. Said notes, "so successful has Israeli propaganda been that it would

seem that Palestinians really have few, if any, positive connotations. They are almost completely dehumanized,” and “with neither history nor humanity, media representations of Palestinians show them only as aggressive rock-throwing people of violence” (101, 103). These mythical representations of Palestinians described by Said dominated my views of Israel/Palestine for many years.

Some of the common myths about Israel/Palestine, including that Palestinians are terrorists and their resistance to Israeli policy and the occupation is simply a manifestation of anti-Semitism, are especially difficult to dispel because they have been created and naturalized by decades of biased media coverage and public relations rhetoric on behalf of Israeli policy. One common myth about the founding of Israel mentioned by two Israeli activists in our documentary—Ruth Hiller and Maya Wind—is that the land of Palestine was largely unpopulated prior to the arrival of Jewish immigrants, whose hard work “made the desert bloom.” In *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan*, Steven Salaita argues that some of Israel’s founding mythology was even borrowed directly from American mythology, including mythologies related to dispossessing the native inhabitants (3). As Roland Barthes says, when myth represents events and objects it “purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact” (143). It is these types of myths that I began to question for myself and that I sought to dispel through our documentary. Of course, Palestinian terrorists do exist, and Zionist immigrants did accomplish some pretty amazing things in Palestine, but for the media to deny Palestinian humanity and gloss over the historical and continuing Israeli dispossession of Palestinians does not serve to bring Israelis and Palestinians any closer to peace and reconciliation.

During my Master’s of English program at Virginia Tech from 2005–2007, I became acquainted with Palestinian-American and Jewish-American students, several of whom were willing to share their stories and views with me. One of my Jewish friends was a rabbi’s son and had a brother who had chosen to become an Israeli citizen. My friend had traveled to Israel a few times and seemed

to be torn between Zionism and his liberal criticisms of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians, which he saw as clearly wrong. A Palestinian friend's parents had immigrated to the U.S. after the 1967 war and the beginning of the Israel occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. I was shocked by her descriptions of how Israeli policy made it impossible for her American family to visit their land in the West Bank.

Talking with these friends and watching a few compelling films and documentaries about the issue, including *Paradise Now* and the Academy-Award nominated documentary, *Promises*, inspired me to read more about the history and current status of the issue. Through my own research, which included regularly reading the Israeli and Palestinian press in English—especially *Haaretz* and *Ma'an*—I discovered that Israeli and Palestinian nonviolent resistance to the occupation had been going on for years in different forms but had been largely ignored by the U.S. press. I had heard people ask why Palestinians didn't follow the example of Martin Luther King Jr. or Gandhi, and yet I was reading about many Palestinian activists who had been struggling for years using the model of nonviolence. I was surprised to read about the creative acts of nonviolence that took place during the First Intifada in the late 1980's, including nonviolent protests, marches, boycotts, tax refusals, and many other inventive methods. When Israel closed the Palestinian schools in the West Bank during the uprising, Palestinian teachers volunteered to teach groups of students in Palestinian homes, and when the markets were closed, they started community gardens and distributed vegetables to local residents. It was true that violent attacks on the Israeli military and even suicide bombings became more frequent during the Second Intifada after 2000, but why did we only ever hear about Palestinian terrorism on the news?

I also learned about the many Israeli activists who were fighting back against their government's policies and working in solidarity with Palestinians to end the occupation. Young Israelis were serving prison time for refusing to fulfill their compulsory military service in the occupied territories. And Israelis from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) were standing in front of

Israeli government bulldozers to prevent them from demolishing Palestinian homes that were built without the required permits—because Israeli bureaucracy refused to give them in the first place. Then these Israelis worked together to rebuild demolished Palestinian homes. I wanted to meet some of these people for myself and hear what they had to say since I saw their actions and beliefs as the best hope for future peace and reconciliation.

This was all part of the rhetorical situation for me: I felt compelled to do something—to help bring the voices of these activists to a wider American public in order to raise awareness about the existence of Palestinian and Israeli acts of nonviolent resistance, to expose viewers to some of the on-the-ground realities of the occupation, and, hopefully to dispel some of the myths about the conflict that I believe serve as obstacles to peace and justice in the region. As many of the activist writers say in Diana George’s “The Word on the Street: Public Discourse in a Culture of Disconnect,” I also was seeking to “set the record straight” and present some alternative voices that had been largely silenced by the mainstream corporate media (10). And as an American, I felt compelled to try to push the U.S. government to use its leverage with Israel to promote a just resolution to the conflict and end the occupation—or at least stop subsidizing it with over \$3 billion American tax dollars per year.

My desire to effect social change outside of the composition classroom also connects with discussion in the community literacy movement about the role of public rhetoric, scholar activism, and the extracurriculum of composition. I agree with Susan Wells’ description of how many compositionists feel about public rhetoric outside the classroom: “we feel guilty for our absence from the public; we suspect that it has been usurped by political functionaries and spin doctors” (152). This is especially true of the debate around Israel/Palestine. In “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” Ellen Cushman calls for scholars to be agents of social change through activism and participation in public discourse (7). My desire to take action outside of my role as a teacher also echoes Anne Ruggles Gere’s call for social agency through cultural work—the extracurriculum of composition. While I may not have decided to embark on this project

because of these entreaties from community literacy composition scholars, I feel validated that they argue in support of such work.

But why me? Why do I have a right to enter this conversation? Why was this my rhetorical situation and not someone else's? I am neither Jewish nor Palestinian. Agreeing with Donna Haraway and Higgins et al., I "dismiss claims that the identity of the speaker confers a special access to truth" (Higgins et al. 30). In fact, being an outsider and not having a personal ethnic connection to the people or the land could even give me some beneficial emotional distance. As an American, my tax money and elected political leaders continue to support Israel's occupation, and the U.S. remains Israel's number one sponsor—reasons which some would argue obligate me to do something. I also did my homework to analyze the history, context, and issues involved in this conflict and rhetorical situation. As Higgins et al. describe, I conducted my own "discourse analysis of key texts and discourses in play," which helped me to "identify key problems and stakeholders, challenges to their deliberating together, and potential sites and strategies for intervention" (15). In addition to my knowledge of the situation, I also had the ability and privilege to take several months off from teaching to travel there and actually make a documentary. While several documentaries on the conflict already existed, including a few on nonviolent resistance, I believed that I could make a documentary that presented the situation in a unique way. This part of the rhetorical situation, for me, was an internal pressure to follow my thoughts and beliefs with actions. And how could I expect to prepare my composition students to be active participants in our democracy, as many in Rhet/Comp argue we should do (George 6), if I wasn't an active participant myself?

Thus, part of the rhetorical situation was internal. If I didn't do it after devoting significant mental energy to thinking about the project, then I knew I would regret it. As Bitzer explains, one way someone can recognize a rhetorical situation is by recalling "a specific time and place when there was an opportunity to speak on some urgent matter, and after the opportunity was gone he created in private thought the speech he should have uttered earlier in the situation" (2). He goes on to describe how "many questions go unanswered and many problems remain unsolved; similarly, many rhetorical situations mature and

decay without giving birth to rhetorical utterance” (6). If I decided not to make the documentary, I knew that the missed opportunity would bother me for years to come.

In addition to my own personal experience with documentary work, I was aware that documentaries have great rhetorical potential to help effect social change. In their discussion of the rhetorical function of documentary photographs, Lucaites and Hariman argue that documentary photography can “reflect social knowledge and dominant ideologies, shape and mediate understanding of specific events and periods (both at the time of their initial enactment and subsequently as they are recollected within a tableau of public memory), influence political behavior and identity” (38). Gregory Starrett also discusses how visual documentary photographs “can be used to mobilize collectivities...images became the medium for transnational political contests in which opposing groups mobilized by projecting onto those images fundamental values: purity versus idolatry, heritage versus fanaticism, injustice versus innocence, cynicism versus responsibility” (399). There are many examples of documentary films that have ignited discussion of important but previously overlooked issues, including *An Inconvenient Truth* and *Super Size Me*, just to name a few.

So for me, the exigency of the rhetorical situation was the festering and, I believe, perpetually misunderstood Israeli-Palestinian conflict and ongoing Israeli occupation supported by my U.S. tax dollars. It is a discourse that supports the status quo and drowns out the many voices of peace and justice. The exigency was also my own internal calling to take action and support social change. My challenge, however, was figuring out how to tackle this daunting task rhetorically.

The Problem of Objectivity

After meeting with our Palestinian contact in the West Bank village of Beit Sahour near Bethlehem, we had to return to East Jerusalem via the nearest Israeli checkpoint. It was almost 10 pm, and after our taxi dropped us off, we were left alone outside of a warehouse-sized building. Upon entering, we found ourselves in a narrow circuitous metal corral, much like those at an amusement park or what I imagine one would

find in a slaughterhouse. These metal corrals got even narrower as we approached the steel door with a red light above it. We couldn't see anyone, but we could hear disembodied female voices echoing from an unseen part of the building. We shouted "Shalom! Shalom!" to try to get someone's attention until, finally, the red light above one of the doors lit up, and a female voice instructed us to enter Door 3. Once inside the small metal room, the same invisible female Israeli soldier instructed us to place our backpack on the x-ray conveyer belt, at which point I saw her through a window into an adjoining security room. She told us to show our passports, and we were able to exit. When we turned to look back at the checkpoint and Separation Barrier through which we had just passed, we saw the giant poster hanging on the wall, welcoming us into Jerusalem: "Peace and Love," it proclaimed.

With such a complex, contentious, and polarizing issue as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, how could we possibly be objective? I knew that being "objective" was impossible because, by their nature, documentaries are always rhetorical. Certainly a documentary on this heavily debated subject, where even the basic historical facts are in dispute, could not achieve objectivity in the eyes of all parties. I also had no desire to impose a false objectivity or balance that sought to represent both sides equally because much of this type of pretense would include views that have already been well represented in mainstream U.S. media. Trying to show "both sides" in this way could give the false impression that it is a conflict of two equal sides, when, in fact, Israel holds almost all of the power and control.

Even if, as a director, I want to strive for objectivity, I have to select what to include and what to leave out—and for a 68-minute documentary about a situation as complex as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I had to leave out a lot, boiling over 30 hours of footage down to just over an hour. Regarding the filmmaker's responsibility to tell the truth, James Linton observes, "this question inevitably leads us into the objectivity-subjectivity controversy: can and should documentary filmmakers make films that are impartial, balanced and unbiased?" (18). Linton outlines this debate, beginning with a description of the journalistic model of documentary filmmaking:

It is incumbent upon the documentary filmmaker to present ‘both sides of an issue’...given the nature of the filmic medium as highly selective, the argument runs that the filmmaker displays bias whether he is aware of it or not, and he abrogates his responsibility if he fails to recognize that fact and deceives himself and the viewing public...As a result, the filmmaker is required to recognize his biases and make them known to the audience. Finally, others would take the argument further still, and claim that, given the fact of bias and the relative merits of the positions with regard to any particular issue, the filmmaker has a responsibility to advocate particular positions or points of view—in effect to take a stand...If one chooses to work with subjects of greater social significance, for example, the question of giving emphasis to particular perspectives (as opposed to equal treatment to “both sides”) may become more crucial...the responsibility to take a stand may vary directly with the significance of the subject involved. (18)

Paula Rabinowitz argues that documentary is necessarily political because “the connection between the rhetoric of documentary film and historical truth pushes the documentary into overtly political alignments which influence its audience” (119).

Rather than trying to present a false objectivity, our choices of interview subjects reveal both our bias and our one attempt to present multiple perspectives on the issues: we only interviewed peace and justice activists, and we interviewed a roughly equal number of Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Our focus on the nonviolent peace and justice movement, which is obvious from both the title and the first few minutes of footage, makes it clear that we were not trying to present a wide range of perspectives about many aspects of the situation. I wanted to highlight the voices and actions of this activist community, but I also saw no reason to rehash some of the arguments and perspectives that would already be familiar to American viewers from mainstream media coverage of the issue and that might simply reinforce the standard myths. While the activists we interviewed represent a small segment of the Israeli and Palestinian publics, I believe they are a very important and too-often overlooked segment, especially in U.S. discourse on the issue.

To get a full picture of the many complex issues that underlie the conflict and function as obstacles to peace and justice, audiences would need either a *Shoah*-length film or series of films, or they would need to undertake additional study on their own after seeing our documentary. Through the selected questions I asked interview subjects, I was able to insert discussion of some of the broader issues that underlie the conflict—fear, terrorism/resistance, control, nonviolence, etc.—as told with the voices of Israeli and Palestinian activists. The documentary only briefly introduces audiences to some of the bigger issues involved so that, hopefully, people might be interested and motivated enough to learn more. Rather than getting bogged down in potentially polarizing details such as the status of refugees, Jerusalem, future borders, etc., and risk the documentary becoming too long to be watchable or useful in classrooms, we decided to stick to peace and justice activism with some brief discussion of important broader issues, leaving the details for the website.

One place where I did make a genuine effort to achieve objectivity was in crafting the informational titles found throughout the film that explain the historical context and background of some issues. I hadn't originally intended to include these explanations, just as I hadn't intended to include any subtitles. But when people who viewed early rough cuts of the documentary said they couldn't understand what some interview subjects were saying or were confused about some aspect of the historical background or context, we decided it was most important for audiences to be able to understand and contextualize the information, even if it slightly infringed on our artistic intentions. When I wrote the explanatory titles, I strived for very precise and objective language that would be difficult for reasonable people on either side to dispute and that provided some minimal but necessary context for people who don't already know much about the situation—our primary intended audience represented by most Americans.

Letting our Subjects Speak for Themselves

Issa the B'Tselem field researcher from Hebron gave us a very eye-opening tour of his city. Home to the burial site of Abraham and holy to both Jews and Muslims, this contentious city has seen violent clashes between Palestinians and Jews since the British Mandate

period. After Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 War, radical Israeli settlers began illegally taking over buildings in the Hebron's Old City, and about 500 reside there today. In the 1990's as part of the Oslo Accords, the city was divided and remains one of the most salient examples of the occupation, frequently invoking the Apartheid analogy from many foreign visitors. After passing many Palestinian shops and homes welded shut by the Israeli military for nebulous "security reasons" and going through several checkpoints within the Old City, we walked through the cemetery above Shuhada Street, at which point Issa had to leave us to meet someone else. "As a Palestinian I am not allowed to walk on Shuhada Street, but you can walk back that way to the Old City," Issa informed us. Despite my anxiety that Israeli police might confiscate our footage if they suspected why we were there, we decided to try Shuhada Street anyway. After only a few minutes of walking along the street that otherwise only Jewish settlers and other non-Palestinians were allowed to travel, an Israeli Jeep approached us and stopped abruptly next to us. A uniformed Israeli curtly asked, "What religion are you?" Caught off guard by the question and assuming that "Muslim" was the wrong answer, I hesitantly replied: "Christian?"

One reason that *Dreams Deferred* avoids the heavy-handedness of some other documentaries on the subject is that we tried to keep ourselves and our personal opinions out of view as much as possible and instead let interview subjects present their own ideas. As Linton argues, "some sort of trade-off has to be effected between presenting a point of view, and allowing one's subjects to 'speak for themselves' and one's audience the freedom to come to their own conclusions" (19). This idea of letting subjects tell their own stories rather than appropriating their experiences or focusing primarily on critical-rational discourse also comes up in community literacy scholarship. Higgins et al. discuss the importance of accessing the experiential "situated knowledge" and eliciting "critical incidents" or "carefully contextualized accounts of how people actually experience problems" from different stakeholders (19, 21). This discourse mirrors our decision to include personal stories of several Israelis and Palestinians in which they describe life under occupation and formative life experiences that helped spur them to become activists. One memorable example from our documentary that viewers often mention is Ali Abu Awwad's compelling story of becoming a nonviolence activist after his brother's death at the hands of Israeli

soldiers. Through shared grieving with Israelis who also lost loved ones to Palestinian militants, he overcame his anger and was able to see the shared humanity and loss of both peoples. In their discussion of situated knowledge, Higgins et al. also help articulate some of the reasons we wanted to interview grassroots activists rather than experts who have studied the conflict. They describe situated knowledge as “a rich experientially-based resource for interpreting and problematizing familiar abstractions and stock solutions to problems that have not yet been fully understood” (19). By revealing situated knowledge and describing formative personal experiences, our interview subjects help audiences understand the conflict in a way that reveals the complexity of the situation and humanizes both peoples.

One recent example of a documentary project that suffered rhetorical weakness and charges of appropriation because of its strong visible presence of the director and its tendency to come off as too heavy-handed was the *KONY 2012* short by the advocacy non-profit Invisible Children (IC). While in graduate school in 2006, I saw the first film about child soldiers from IC, *Invisible Children: The Rough Cut*, and it made me consider making my own documentary because the filmmakers appeared to be novice idealists with little filmmaking experience who were able to go to Uganda with only determination and relatively inexpensive equipment and create a low-budget documentary—that had inspired college students across the country to become actively engaged in stopping the Lord’s Resistance Army’s abduction of children. I had similar critiques of their first film as those frequently cited in response to *KONY 2012*—especially that the director(s) were too much a part of the film and that the issue was presented as an oversimplified version of the white-savior theme, especially in *KONY* as the director explains to his blond four-year-old son why Joseph Kony is such a “bad” man. Despite its weaknesses, IC’s earlier documentary project helped me see the potential for amateur documentaries to inspire action, which became especially clear as I witnessed Invisible Children student groups spring up on many college campuses in 2006 and 2007.

IC’s documentary work also enabled me to envision some of the things I didn’t want to do with my documentary, which is one reason

why my husband and I chose to stay mostly out of the edited project and leave the focus on local activists instead. Had IC's work been presented in a less personal, more complex and realistic way, it may not have been as popular with young people, but it may have been more rhetorically effective in the long run, inspired more long-term productive action, and avoided some of the critical backlash *KONY 2012* received. Aside from a few instances when our voices can be heard asking a question or we briefly pass in front of the camera, the only time that one of us appears on camera in *Dreams Deferred* is toward the end of the feature-length version in the last section of Bil'in footage when my husband crouches down and fearfully exclaims that a bullet had "whizzed right by us." In this moment, the fear in his voice is indistinguishable from that of the other activists present at the protest that day. We later learned that one week after we attended that protest in Bi'lin, American activist Tristan Anderson was critically wounded when an Israeli soldier shot a high-velocity tear gas canister at his head at a similar protest against the separation barrier in the nearby West Bank village of Nai'lin. In the past few years, several Palestinians have been killed at popular protests by Israeli tear-gas canisters, rubber bullets, or live fire.

Restraining the Use of Emotional Appeal

When we went to the bus station in Tel Aviv to meet an activist with Anarchists Against the Wall who would give us a ride to the weekly protest against the Separation Barrier in Bi'lin, we expected a crusty young anarchist, but instead, we were greeted by a man nearing 70 and wearing a fanny pack. Ilan was kind enough to share his personal story with us for the documentary. He had been active against the Occupation since the 1967 war and had attended the weekly demonstrations in Bi'lin for four years, only missing a couple of Fridays for medical reasons. We had been warned by other more seasoned activists that the Israeli Border Police would start firing tear gas and rubber-coated bullets when the marchers reached the Separation Barrier fence, but we weren't prepared for the barrage that met us. Ilan, however, was prepared. We had made the mistake of putting on sunscreen that apparently reacts badly with the tear gas and causes additional burning around the eyes, while Ilan was wearing protective plastic goggles. When we got close the fence, the projectiles met us as predicted. These popular protests had been going on every Friday for about four years, so by this time,

it almost seemed like a pageant in which each side knew their cues and what to do when—except that the tear gas and rubber bullets were real.

Even though I wanted to avoid the overly emotional rhetoric of IC's work and that of many social and political documentaries, I knew that without some emotional connection with audiences, a documentary will almost always fail rhetorically. One reason I had chosen to undertake this project in the first place was because I wanted to visit the place I had only read about to see for myself how the Israeli occupation manifests in the daily lives of Palestinians. As soon as we crossed the invisible Green Line³ and the very visible Separation Barrier and began meeting Palestinians living under occupation, I experienced for myself the persuasive power and *pathos* of personal experience. While reading about the facts of the situation affected me on the level of *logos*, it wasn't until I actually met and got to know Israelis and Palestinians personally and shared tea in their homes that I became more emotionally invested in the issue. This is part of the reason that I returned to the U.S. feeling compelled to not only complete the documentary but also to get more involved and active by working with local Middle East peace groups and spending time lobbying my members of Congress.

One example of a potentially heavy-handed and emotional scene we decided to cut out of the final edit was footage from Jayyous of an Israeli soldier taking deliberate aim and shooting at a young Palestinian man who was suspected of throwing rocks at an armored Border Police Jeep—the only crime for which all of the curfews and harassment seemed to be justified. Even though the soldier was likely using rubber-coated bullets, this incident horrified us when we filmed it from a roof during curfew in Jayyous. But we ultimately felt that we couldn't include such footage if we were to avoid demonizing Israelis. Plus, we felt that young Israeli soldiers acted this way for similar reasons that American soldiers have behaved in disturbing ways and not because Israelis have a unique hatred for Palestinians. One of our Refusenik interview subjects, Peretz Kidron, describes how soldiers must dehumanize their enemies and those they are occupying in order to justify their orders and actions. This is a universal facet of war rather than something intrinsic to Israelis and Palestinians.

We also sought to connect with American audiences in a way that would humanize Israelis and Palestinians so they are no longer perceived as the “Other” by jaded and uninformed Americans. One way we tried to do this was by interviewing only English-speaking subjects. Even though I ended up resorting to subtitles for a couple of Israelis and Palestinians whose accents were more difficult to understand, all of our interview subjects speak English. This not only helps English-speaking audiences relate to them better, but it also gives our project the potential to reach Americans who don’t wish to put forth the effort to read subtitles. It was also a necessity for us since we didn’t have a budget for translating over 30 hours of footage from Hebrew and Arabic into English.

Though the documentary cannot replace a first-hand visit to the region, we wanted to give audiences the closest thing to their own tour of the West Bank and encounters with peace activists. Seeing the occupation and those who live under its dehumanizing shadow as they struggle against its injustice has significant potential to emotionally affect American audiences, even though we tried to avoid gratuitous use of emotional appeals. These first-hand on-the-ground interviews also elicit activists’ local situated knowledge and descriptions of critical incidents that Higgins et al. discuss. Higgins et al. also explain the rhetorical reasoning for including some activists’ personal narratives: “narrative also has a persuasive power that can help unfamiliar audiences identify with the teller’s perspective in a way that abstract and generalized positions or claims do not” (21). We also tried to select West Bank locations that would best demonstrate different realities of how the Occupation affects daily Palestinian life—from checkpoints to the Separation Barrier and curfews. And we interviewed a cross-section of Israeli and Palestinian peace and justice activists—from well-funded human rights organizations like B’Tselem to the more grassroots group Anarchists Against the Wall.

Audiences and Distribution

My husband and I looked at each other and then at Noor, a young college student and our unofficial tour guide for our weekend stay in Jayyous. “We can go to the roof and maybe see the soldiers from there if you want,” Noor informed us. We had considered disobeying curfew and venturing out anyway, but a volunteer human rights monitor in the

village urged us to obey the curfew and not leave the house because she witnessed Israeli soldiers preemptively firing tear gas into a group of young men gathered in front of the local mosque after Friday prayers ended. Without any other options left, we took our equipment up to the roof from where we could see most of the village and surrounding hills. From there, we not only had a good view of the armed soldiers patrolling the village, but we could also see the Separation Barrier, the village lands on the other side, and even Tel Aviv high-rises in the distance—a stark reminder of just how small this contested land really is. While we didn't get to attend a demonstration as we had planned, what we witnessed from the roof that day strengthened our resolve to complete our documentary and present it to American audiences.

Aside from my motivations and intentions, a carefully crafted response to a rhetorical situation only has the potential to effect change if it reaches an audience, however small. One of our primary goals was to make our finished feature-length documentary useful for educational purposes so that teachers and religious, civic, and human rights organizations would be able to show it to introduce American audiences to the issue. Our intended audience is at least vaguely liberal leaning but not very informed about the situation, and we are not trying to reach people with a very strong, predetermined ideological commitment to the issue. Because we want *Dreams Deferred* to be useful in classrooms and for speaking engagements, we kept the finished product within 70 minutes, but we also edited a 35-minute version without some of the interviews of activists for educators who need something shorter.

We also recognize, however, that a 68-minute documentary can only hope to offer a brief introduction to the issue and to peace and justice activism in Israel and Palestine. In order to supplement the limited information contained in *Dreams Deferred*, we set up a website at www.supportisraelfreepalestine.org where viewers can find additional information about various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through our Frequently Asked Questions. Visitors to the website can also find links not only to the organizations whose members were interviewed in our documentary but also to other credible sources of information and organizations working to end the occupation and address human rights issues in Israel and Palestine.

While we offer audiences a way to find more information, we do not offer any easy or oversimplified solutions to what is a very complex political situation that includes many stakeholders and obstacles to peace. Through our website, we try to take a heuristic approach and direct visitors to what we see as some of the most important issues to consider if people are to understand the conflict and preconditions for peace. We want audiences to inform themselves after seeing our documentary about the complex issues involved, but without access to further information from reliable sources, they may reach for the first oversimplified solutions they encounter on the Internet. Higgins et al. articulate this problem in the context of community literacy projects, but their discussion applies to viewers of our documentary as well:

Ultimately, a rhetorical model of inquiry will create the potential for informed and just action in the future. Yet participants find it challenging to move from expression and analysis to action. One obstacle is that when people think of taking action, they often think of single or simplistic solutions and feel compelled to argue for them as positions. In this move toward action—even after having acknowledged multiple perspectives and having recognized the complexity of the problem and involvement of others at the table in these projects—participants often first reach for default, prepackaged, or stock solutions that already circulate in the dominant discourse. (20)

We haven't completely figured out how to prevent audiences from turning to stock solutions for Israel/Palestine, but at least the *Dreams Deferred* website will offer a fuller picture and some good sources of information for them to begin to think more critically about the issues.

We have chosen to distribute the film ourselves, primarily online and for free, in order to reach our intended audiences most effectively. To ensure that people who want to use it for educational purposes can access our documentary, we decided to make it available for free viewing and downloading from our website. We also mail free DVD copies to anyone who contacts us through the website and wants to show it. Because we used a small amount of our own money as

the only budget for the project, our distribution is completely DIY (mostly online combined with some face-to-face networking). We have other full-time jobs that pay our bills, so we do not need or want to make any money from the project. This will, hopefully, enable us to get the movie out to more people who may not see it if they have to pay, and some of them may also pass it along to others, thus aiding our distribution efforts.

According to the statistical tracking from Vimeo (the host for our embedded video clips in high definition and standard definition), Google Analytics (our website tracking), and YouTube, over one thousand people from all over the world, but mostly Americans, have seen at least part of our documentary and visited more than one page on our website since we launched it in the fall of 2011. This is still a relatively small number of people, however, so for our documentary to have a significant rhetorical impact on the discussion of this issue, it would be useful for many more people to see it.

While our online DIY distribution method has many benefits, it also depends on people somehow locating our website, meeting us in person, or speaking with someone else who has seen the film or visited the website. Even though we are not seeking commercial distribution or any profit from the project, we submitted *Dreams Deferred* to several film festivals as a way to get attention so that more people would ultimately see the film. We haven't yet received responses from several festivals, but it has already been screened in the Awareness Festival, accepted into the Long Island Film Festival, and won "Best Documentary" at the DIY Film Festival in Los Angeles. These festivals are smaller venues, but at least they afford us some recognition and accompanying audiences. While commercial or educational distribution through a company or organization could help us reach more people in some ways, it would also negate our ability to offer the documentary for free, which interferes with our intentions.

Even if only a few people ultimately see our documentary or visit our website, it could still have a small but positive rhetorical impact. It wouldn't have to be viewed by tens of millions of people in less than a week, as was the case for *KONY 2012*, to have some effect on

the discourse, though. But as with IC's *KONY*, if people in positions of influence see it, for example, they could either pass it on to many others through one Tweet or Facebook post. If one member of Congress were affected, he or she could introduce or oppose some key legislation related to the issue. Or maybe some students who see it in a class will be inspired to become more active and informed about the issue. Similarly to how I see my impact as a teacher, even if our documentary only inspires a few people who see it to promote the cause of peace and justice, then our efforts are worth it. As Higgins et al. point out, "the impractically broad result of clear social change" is "more likely to come from tightly focused advocacy," but "the indicators of impact can be seen in personal understandings and deliberative performance, and in the more public, multi-faceted evidence of circulation" (30).

Maintaining Hope

"But the guidebook says Salon Mazaal should be right here, and it's not," I complained to my husband. We had come across town to find a leftist-activist bookstore/café mentioned in our guidebook so we could, hopefully, get some tips on possible interview subjects. Before leaving, I had tried to set up as many interviews via email as I could through activist organizations in Israel, but I had only been able to arrange three interviews. My contact in the West Bank was helping us set up most of our interviews and home stays there for us, but I was on my own in Israel. A helpful woman who worked at the café that had replaced Salon Mazaal in its former location directed us to a street across town where it had relocated. So we found it on our map and set off in that direction on foot, only to end up on the wrong street with a similar name in the one part of town near the old bus station that our guidebook had warned readers to avoid after dark. We passed a couple of prostitutes and were on the verge of giving up when I decided to ask one more person for directions. A helpful Israeli set us in the right direction, and we finally made it to the elusive Salon Mazaal by city bus at about 9 pm. Our very long and unplanned tour of several less-visited neighborhoods in Tel Aviv finally paid off when we met Netta there, a young refuser who was happy to talk to us and help us set up interviews with some other refusers and activists.

Like teaching first-year composition, it is easy to get burned out by activism and dedication to a cause when the impact of our actions isn't always obvious or the problems seem too big or intractable. It is in those frustrated moments we have to hold on to a little optimism and hope. As Paula Mathieu asserts in *Tactics of Hope*, "hope, defined in critical terms, requires the ability to recognize the radical insufficiency of any actions, be honest in assessing their limitations, imagine better ways to act and learn, and despite the real limitations, engage creative acts of work and play with an eye toward a better not-yet future" (134). Like Mathieu, I acknowledge the importance of organized, systemic change while also recognizing the benefits of tactical projects "grounded in timeliness and hope and as such seek not measurable outcomes but completed projects" (114). I see *Dreams Deferred* as a tactical documentary project that is radically insufficient to end the Israeli Occupation and bring peace and justice to the region, but I believe that it has a strong potential for creating intangible changes in a few people who see it. It is also a small piece of a growing international movement for peace and justice that, when examined as a whole, has a real and growing potential to bring change. Paulo Freire also relates the idea of hope to activism in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*: "the dehumanization resulting from an unjust order is not a cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of the humanity denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist in crossing one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight with hope, then I can wait" (73).

Along with some patience and perseverance, hope has already paid off for the Palestinians in at least some small ways, even though the Occupation remains in place and Israeli settlements continue to expand. After undergoing several years of frequent curfews and night raids in response to their weekly popular protests against the Separation Barrier, the residents of Jayyous scored a major victory recently: the Israeli military finally conceded to reroute the Separation Barrier and return the majority of confiscated Palestinian farmlands. And the same thing happened in Bil'in; years after the Israeli High Court had ruled that the route of the barrier was unjust and most of the lands should be returned, the military finally implemented the court's decision. Nonviolent popular protest worked again, which

only reinforces the lessons of the Arab Spring. Now even Hamas supports nonviolent protest as a primary means of struggle.

One activist and author who presents a more hopeful view of the prospects for peace in the region is Rabbi Michael Lerner, also the editor of *Tikkun* magazine. In his recent book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine*, Lerner argues for a more deliberate and thoughtful approach to rhetoric about the situation that he hopes will help people talk about the issue more effectively: “the first step in the process of healing is to tell the story of how we got where we are in a way that avoids demonization. We need to learn how two groups of human beings, each containing the usual range of people—from loving to hateful, rational to demented, idealistic to self-centered—could end up feeling so angry at each other” (2). Lerner makes his case clear when he argues,

There is a great temptation, then, to rant and rave at the sins being committed by either or both sides. I think that articulating righteous indignation and confronting those who support oppressive or violent policies has a real and valuable place..Yet, I also believe that there is a temptation that must be avoided. We get mired in our own righteousness and avoid the more difficult question: how are we going to change things...And this next step sometimes requires us to modulate our cries of righteous indignation and to focus more on how we can change things. (9)

Lerner’s ideas about the discourse of Israel/Palestine also touches on our rationale for how and why we chose to approach this documentary: to publicly circulate these important Israeli and Palestinian voices of peace and resistance in American discourse, while avoiding overly emotional or heavy-handed rhetoric. *Dreams Deferred* introduces American audiences to the peace and justice movement in the region, some of the realities of the occupation, and a few of the larger issues involved by focusing on the voices of peace and justice activists themselves—to ultimately help dispel myths and inspire change in some small way. You are welcome to watch our documentary and decide for yourself. And then pass it on.

Jennifer Hitchcock and her husband, Vernon Hall, have been doing documentary work together as a hobby for over ten years, but *Dreams Deferred* is their first feature-length documentary. Jennifer received her Master's in English from Virginia Tech in 2007 and has been teaching composition full-time at Northern Virginia Community College's Manassas campus since 2009. She is currently enrolled in Old Dominion University's distance PhD program in Rhetoric and Textual Studies.

Endnotes

- 1 Even using the term “conflict” is rhetorically loaded because it can suggest an equivalence of two powers fighting each other when the terms “occupation” and “resistance” may be more appropriate and accurate (unless one is also referring to the earlier history of Israel and Palestine before the 1967 war which officially began the Israeli military Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza). In this essay, I will use the terms “occupation,” “situation,” “issue,” “conflict,” and as suggested by Michael Lerner, “Israel/Palestine,” but the most appropriate term often depends on whom you are talking to.
- 2 Even though the U.S. media continues to have a pro-Israel bias, many critics and activists have noticed the mainstream news media becoming less one-sidedly pro-Israel since the 2008-2009 Gaza War.
- 3 The Green Line refers to the 1949 armistice line that was the functioning border between Israel and the Jordanian-administered West Bank and Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip. From the end of the Israeli-Arab war of 1948-1949, this line served as the unofficial border until Israel captured the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war and began militarily occupying the Palestinians living in those territories. This line is recognized by the international community as the most legitimate border on which to base future peace negotiations. It allots 78% of the land of Palestine under the British Mandate (including the Negev Desert) to Israel, with 22% for a future Palestinian state. The Separation Barrier is controversially not built on the Green Line but rather it extends deep into the West Bank in several places to incorporate Israeli settlements built on Palestinian land.

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