Imprisoned by the Stereotypes of a Struggle

Martyr's Crossing
Reviewed by Elizabeth Price

Unwittingly, Amy Wilentz achieved a journalist's dream with the publication of her new book - getting the first scoop on a major historical event. Published in May 2001, Martyr's Crossing revolves around the events sparked by the death of a Palestinian baby at a checkpoint, after he is refused access to medical care during a tight closure imposed by the Israeli army. Only four months later, fiction became reality and suddenly the international press was filled with stories about martyrs, closures, and dead babies at checkpoints.

As a resident of the West Bank, the book was painful to start and bitter to read. I found my own experiences of the current
conflict captured in her descriptions, which my mind fleshed out into vivid reality with
details from my life. At first, this shock of
recognition made it difficult to view the book
objectively. I found myself bridling at
descriptions or resounding conclusions that sat
ill with my beliefs about the Palestinian-
Israeli relationship.
But, as I read on and adjusted to the
ereteness of art imitating life, I found my
unease had objective grounds. Wilentz does
a thought-provoking job of evoking the
hopes, ideals, and delusions of both the
Israeli and the Palestinian peoples, clearly
drawing upon her years as The New Yorker
correspondent in Jerusalem. However, she
too often achieves this by resorting to
shallow characters, whose purpose is only
to bring the story to its tragic and expected
conclusion.
The problem lies in the book's setting. By
choosing a still volatile political landscape as
her backdrop, Wilentz gave herself a
challenging task of bringing something fresh to
a much-rehearsed history. How does one
personalize the Palestinian-Israeli conflict
while painting the grand picture for a
presumably novice audience? The result is
alternately distracting and refreshing.
Just as I had a visceral reaction to seeing a
fictionalized version of my experience during
the ongoing intifada, the attention of most
readers will be snagged by the loosely veiled
appearance of historical figures in the
Palestinian and Israeli establishment. The
grandfather of the "martyred" infant is
George Raad, a secular Christian intellect
who lives in self-imposed exile in America
from where he writes scathing criticisms of
the Palestinian Authority: from his birth to an
aristocratic Jerusalem family to his
international acclamation, Raad is a clear
echo of Edward Said. Then there is Ahmed
Amr, a Machiavellian politico who thrives on
the new glamour of the returning PLO cadre
and manipulates the story's events for
maximum PR: with his diplomatic skills, old-
school revolutionary ties, and hunger for
control, Amr could be any one of the
existing leadership. Perhaps the author
used allusions to conveniently well-known
figures as shortcuts to characterization, but,
along with the references to "the Chairman,"
the desire to spot the difference between
fact and fiction tempts the reader's mind
away from the novel.
The other characters also fall prey to an
externally imposed characterization: the
Hamas militant; the hawkish Zionist
bureaucrat; and the bumbling, amateur
kidnappers. Again, by writing about current
events, Wilentz gives herself an almost
impossible task of rising above the intense
reality of her carefully done research to pen
a living and personal story. On a cultural
and political battlefield in which negative
stereotypes are thrown like grenades at the
opposing side, Wilentz's broadly drawn
characters, with their one-sided passions
and blind dedication, are a disappointment:
the Palestinian leader who views the death of
a little boy as benefiting the struggle; the
devious Israeli security official who sees the
Palestinians as base criminals; and the
Muslim onlookers who congratulate a
bereaved mother on the martyrdom of her
son.
In fact, only two characters emerge as fully
rounded individuals with personalities that
escape easy definition: Marina, the child's
mother, and Ari Doron, the Israeli soldier
who vainly battled his superiors to let the
mother and child through the checkpoint.
Significantly, and to Wilentz's credit, Marina

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and Doron are the two main characters in the story. Their lives are so shattered by the child's death that they are forced to rebel against the confining roles forced on them by their opposing cultures. By the end of the story, both Marina and Doron break away from their set places in a painful, transforming process, with each, in the end, stumbling into a lonely vacuum.

As he watches the Israeli military establishment spin the child’s death into a virtue, Doron begins to doubt the Zionist beliefs that had permeated his life and rationalized his career in the army - an uncertainty that leaves him bereft:

But was protecting [his country] worth the pain of that poor little boy and his mother? Was it? Was a country worth that loss? Probably it was, this country was, anyway. "Civilians die when wars are fought," his father used to say. "A war is not just about soldiers." But now, after Ibrahim’s death, Doron wasn’t so sure. He wasn’t sure of anything.

Similarly, Marina finds her uncomprehending grief over her son's death dislocates from her adopted homeland; and even the return of her long-imprisoned husband fails to stop her alienation from her politicized life:

Everything was over, every possible thing. She would go back to America: where she belonged. She held back her tears. There was too much emptiness for her there. She would go home with her father and see him through his illness, and then start over.

Ironically, it is only by embracing their alienation that Marina and Doron have a chance to rebuild their lives, free of the limiting demands of their cultures. Similarly, George Raad divorces himself from what he comes to believe is only empty posturing with a terrible cost: "How long could we go on squabbling while the rest of the Palestinian people sacrificed endlessly for our mistakes? And Ibrahim was dead."

Ultimately, it is her ability to capture the absurd tragedy of the conflict that makes Wilentz’s book powerful. Drawn together by their shared experiences at the checkpoint, Doron and Marina - and vicariously Raad - are able to recognize that their common humanity overshadows their cultural differences. But the other characters do not have a similar nexus with the opposing side and are only able to live the life dictated to them: as Marina reflects ruefully, "What stereotypes people agree to live by..."

In the end, Marina chooses to step out of the role she is asked to play, which has already cost her the life of her son. But in letting Marina go beyond the limits of the conflict, Wilentz highlights the confinement of everyone else by the stereotypes accumulated through the struggle’s history. As Raad says in memory of his dead grandson:

Our little Ibrahim was not a brave Palestinian freedom fighter. This was my Palestinian grandson, my boy who was going to have the life in Palestine that history did not permit me to have. The life that history stole from me, and stole from you... stole from all of us.
Although this book was written well before the start of the second intifada, Wilentz recognized that these stereotypes, crafted in the heat of war, are both a vital support and an unbreakable bondage. For the last 14 months, local televisions have been filled with stirring pictures of daily funerals and eulogies to those fallen for their nation. Behind each flag-draped body is a weeping family, who doubtlessly fling themselves back and forth between desperate patriotism and mind-numbing regret. In a similar scene from the book, Amr organizes a rally in the dead child’s name in order to put pressure on the Israelis. Placed on the podium next to her father, Malla stands frozen, caught between the crowd’s expectations of her as a mother of a martyr, beautiful in her patriotic sacrifice, and her own need to mourn her grief on her own terms.

She heard the name of her son, her husband, her father. She looked down at the plain plywood planks of the stage. Humble, she thought, composed, grief-stricken. They were all looking at her… I just want to go home and be alone in Ibrahim’s room.

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Stereotypes in cross-cultural communication

Stereotypes of Poles

Question 1: What do Polish people think about themselves? Do stereotypes really affect interpersonal communication? Why? Why not?

1. France
2. Great Britain
3. the USA
4. Colombia
5. Turkey

Descriptions of the characters and stereotypes of the two social classes from the book The Outsiders by S.E. Hinton. Terms in this set (13). The Stereotypes of the “Greasers”. gangs, long greasy hair, stick together have each other’s back, (sometimes) criminals, (sometimes) dropout of school, poor, ”hoods”, junky cars, fights, smoke, drink, t-shirts, jeans, un tucked shirts, boots, leather jackets, often carry knives. Ponyboy Curtis. Parents were killed in a car wreck, he and his brothers, Darry and Sodapop, can stay together as long as they behave, he has light brown Not surprisingly, racial stereotypes always seem to favor the race of the holder and belittle other races. It is probably true to say that every ethnic group has racial stereotypes of other groups. Some psychologists argue that it is a â€œnaturalâ€ aspect of human behavior, which can be seen to benefit each group because it helps in the long-run to identify with oneâ€™s own ethnic group and so find protection and promote the safety and success of the group.Â It is cued by the mere recognition that a negative group stereotype could apply to you in a given situation. It is important to understand that the person may experience a threat even if he or she does not believe the stereotype. Stereotypes refer to beliefs that certain attributes, characteristics, and behaviours are typical of members of a particular group of people. The way we categorise social groups is often based on visible features that provide the largest between-group differentiation and least within-group variation (for example, skin colour, gender, age). We construct stereotypes from direct personal experience or, more commonly, from other people, or via the media.Â No social group is homogenous. Stereotypes might not accurately represent the characteristics of a particular member of that group. Biased. Research shows we that believe individuals from the same social group to be more similar than they really are.