This is a book about the creation, evolution, interaction, and mutual definition of two national communities. It is about the struggle between those two communities, the inner logic that has propelled that struggle, and the historical conditions that have delimited its course. If for no other reason than its persistence and its never-ending demand for attention, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle has earned its claim to uniqueness. By most other standards, however, it might be regarded as the quintessential struggle of the modern age. Either way, it is a story worth recounting.

Sometimes the struggle between the two national communities in Palestine has been submerged in wider struggles that embroiled outside powers. There was a time when it seemingly dropped off the radar screen altogether. For the forty-five years between 1948 and 1993, most of the world chose to regard the struggle for Palestine as an Arab-Israeli conflict, as if the claims of one of the principals in the struggle could be addressed by outside powers or simply written off. With the hindsight of history, we now know better. The Arab-Israeli conflict was but a phase in a struggle that has come full circle, and no peace between Israel and its sovereign neighbors will bring the struggle to an end. Only the principals can do that.

I have written this book for students and general readers who wish to understand the broad sweep of the history of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle and situate it in its global context. The book is not, nor was it intended to be, encyclopedic. It is interpretive. It is also concise and, hopefully, engaging. If I have neglected or been too cavalier with your favorite hero, event, or peace plan, I apologize in advance. You might want to take consolation from the fact that I have honed the narrative
you are about to read with care. You might also want to take conso-
lation from the fact that, in return for the sacrifice of a few details,
you are getting the occasional pearl. Where else are you going to find
Michel Foucault’s theory of governmentality slimmed down to a couple
of paragraphs and written as if it were meant to be understood?

True believers on both sides of the struggle are, of course, beyond
consolation. As you will soon see, I regard Zionism as a – perhaps the –
prototypical nineteenth-century nationalist movement. I do not regard
it as the fulfillment of Jewish history (as many of its adherents main-
tain), nor do I regard it as a “particularly virulent form of racism” (as its
opponents have written). As a national movement, it is, to paraphrase
Henry Fielding, no better than it should be. And yes, the word “Pales-
stinian” does refer to a real nation, albeit one whose ancient lineage is
as spurious as the ancient lineage of any other nation, and the word
“Palestinian” can be used as a noun, not just as an adjective modifying
the word “terrorist.” While it is the role of the true believer to believe,
it is the role of the historian to treat the self-aggrandizing claims of
any and all nationalist movements with skepticism. The same goes for
the claims of their opponents. I only hope I have done so evenly and
effectively.

Skeptics, like pioneers, get all the arrows. Thus, it is with a certain
amount of trepidation that I list those who have contributed to my
efforts. First off, there is Marigold Acland, my original editor at Cam-
bridge University Press, who suggested I write this book even though I
had stiffed her on another one. This is my penance. I also wish to thank
others on the editorial side of this book: Eric Crahan, Isabelle Dambri-
court, William M. Hammell, Pauline Ireland, Sarika Narula, and Sue
Nicholas. Then there are those friends and colleagues who have read
this or earlier versions of the book, made suggestions, or contributed in
other ways: Carol Bakhos, David Dean Commins, Michael Cooperson,
Kristen Hillaire Glasgow, Roya Kla-idman, Ussama Makdisi, David N.
Myers, A. Rantin Polemick, Manal Quota, and Jihad Turk. Finally, to
this list I would like to add those undergraduates who read this book in
its preliminary stages and graciously called my attention to every typo
and misplaced comma, as well as those who raised questions that forced
me to rewrite or rethink what I was trying to say. Once again, I wish to
dedicate this book to them.