

**FICTION REVIEW**

# Novel challenge to zionist fallacies

**Of Winter's Cost**  
by Geoff Akers  
(Grosvenor House, £9.99)

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“How easy to deny who you are and become the very thing you most loathe; how easy to banish love and compassion from your life.”

Thus Geoff Akers in this bold, moving — and ultimately frustrating — account of how many Israelis misuse the lessons of the Holocaust in smug theoretical platitudes that airily deprecate comparisons of contemporary regimes with the nazis.

Of Winter's Cost bravely ignores such denial. Focusing on Sam, a young Israeli soldier torn between his bombastic bully of a father and his grandfather Leo who survived the Warsaw ghetto uprising, we witness the battle for the young man's conscience.

Alternating anecdotes of growing Polish anti-Semitism before the war and its murderous intensification once the nazis are in control with the Israeli Defence Force's actions in Ramallah and Jenin, the author is clear that there is if not an exact equivalence then at least clear similarities between the two.

The utter demonisation of European Jewry finds an uncomfortable parallel in the contemporary language of modern rabbis spouting forth in their yeshivas about the Palestinian threat and the uncompromising need for its removal. In the narrative, a wheelchair-bound Arab is clinically crushed under a military vehicle without a second thought, a direct victim of such theological hatred.

Aside from the broader narrative of the brave Jewish resistance in 1943, Akers sharply captures the detail of the terrors wreaked on an innocent population and the ironclad determination of a few to fight back.

His account of Leo's personal liberation from the grave into which he was pushed by the fleeing nazis and the compassion of a weeping Soviet soldier as he scrabbles away at the dirt is extraordinarily moving. Yet the book frustrates because Akers minimises the challenges for a viable and just solution for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

Sam's father — now separated from his family — undergoes a total conversion to the peace process. The author then offers us an epilogue of two alternative immediate futures, one that ends in a sixth former's account of an accelerated route to nuclear war and the other which miraculously unlocks the inner decency in Israeli hearts and the rebirth of the two-state solution as a viable political solution.

The reality, of course, is likely to be very different — the slow, painful and stony realisation of the shared need for economic, social and religious security of both sides over many, many years.

Nonetheless, this is a brave and compelling novel.

**PAUL SIMON**