

Francis,

After the constant stream of information about the suffering of the Palestinians I would like to give you a brief insight to the other involved party, the Israeli's and the Jews around the globe.

Recently one of my 19-year old friends, from the kibbutz I lived in, died in the West-Bank after clashes with the Palestinians. Chaim (ironically, his name means life) was just a regular guy like many victims on both sides.

To be honest after I heard the news I had to force myself to keep in mind that it takes two to tango in order not to get enraged. Obviously I feel anger amongst pain and incomprehension. Chaim was just another boy who had to join the army and was placed in the Westbank without even wanting to.

Does it ever cross your mind that people suffer on both sides or do you really think Israeli's enjoy this tragedy. Because that is exactly what it is, a tragedy.

Two nations have been suffering for decades now and even if we wanted to undo history we couldn't. The Palestinians lived in Palestine and didn't ask for the Jews to return to their holy land but the Jews didn't ask for a holocaust!

I was taught that hatred not only destroys any change of a peaceful environment, it destroys yourself as well. Therefor I try to envision the suffrage of the Palestinians as well, that's the main reason why I joined this society. And even though I struggle with my emotions I try very hard not to let these emotions overtake my optimism about the future. I am fighting this anger in order not to end up hating people who are just as well trapped in the same situation.

What disturbs me is that your society doesn't seem to have this capacity. All I read are accusations and downright vulgar slogans like Zionist are nazi's.

Therefor I hope you will send this around so people get a glimpse of the 'other' as well.

Let me stress one point, most boys (boys because they are only 18) who join the army have only one simple reason, they have to. Why on earth else would they expose themselves to the danger and leave their family, friends and girlfriends behind in the prime of their lives ?

Sure, from the minute they are born, the Israeli's are made aware of the constant threat of the neighbouring countries and the terrorist organisations. But most of the people I know have learned to live with this without it causing any form of hatred.

Of course the Palestinians have the same problem being born in a region which is under control of another nation which is something I do not envy. But the situation in Israel is not much better mentally I would say.

In response to earlier observations from people from this society and especially from the World Socialist supporters, this whole conflict did not start out as Zionist imperialism as has been suggested . The foundation of the state of Israel was the result of centuries of persecution with WW2 as the climax.

Suggestions as I heard about it being a deliberate action means one has either read the history books or is simply denying the past of the Jews. It seems to me that history is repeating itself with this ideas about Jewish complots. Haven't these people learned anything from the past ?

Theodor Herzl came up with the suggestion of a Jewish homeland after the Dreyfuss case which again showed the continuing hatred of the Europeans against the Jews.

This does not justify the injustice that was done to the inhabitants of Palestine who of course had nothing to do with the hatred as exposed in Europe.

What I am saying is that this is the reason for the later foundation of the state Israel.

You can therefor not present it a a black and white conflict with the Israeli's as the bad guys. The argument that people lived there already might be true but we can go back in history as well and claim that the Jews lived there before as well.

I propose that this doesn't matter any more. We arrived in 2001 and unfortunately the situation is like it is. Instead of throwing accusations we better start looking at a solution of this problem.

Which brings me to the next thing. As you accuse American Jews of being radical I notice the same in this society. I can only conclude, the further from the core , the more radical people become. This is a dangerous development.

I am not suggesting that being born in the territories is a precondition for judging the situation but this whole conflict is more than just adding the facts. We have to take the history of the two parties in account as well as the cultural differences.

I believe the Palestinians themselves seem to have a more moderate and more profound knowlegde of the Israeli mentality than you.

If we want to solve this problem, we have to look at the options rather than to stimulate hatred between the two involved parties. Therefor I do criticise the way you present the problem which is near to propaganda sometimes. It is a dangerous movement when people who are regarded as knowledgeable about a subject and who are in a influential position stimulate prejudices or spread around statements which are simply not true. Of course you are entitled to your own opinion but it doesn't seem to be based on research of both sides.

I am not the only person who doesn't even bother reading all the emails I receive any more. If you want to reach as many people as possible and if you want the western world to start supporting the Palestinian cause I think you should be aware that people consider you as too biased and radical. Especially at a University where you are taught to research both sides you are not a very helpful example.

Furthermore, it damages the Palestinian cause. You might think you are very helpful to them but in the end of the day, they are the ones who have to live there and not you.

From this comfortable position you might not be too worried about the image of your society but it is damaging. The fact that members of your society feel free to send pictures around with Israeli soldiers being called Nazi's says enough...

I appreciate you want to stand up for the Palestinians but as I said before, people who are not directly involved in this conflict seem more fanatic and radical than others.

If you want to be fair and you want the respect of the other parties I think it is useful if you acknowledged that there is another side to the story. I don't want the death of Chaim to be celebrated as yet another victory over the Israeli's. I want people to commemorate his death as another tragedy in a unnecessary bloody conflict.

Just as I mourn the death of Palestinians and see it as a useless loss of valuable lives, why not let people mourn about the death of my friend Chaim as well.

Nicole

Dear Nicole,

Thank you for writing to me again. I can well imagine how outraged you must feel about the death of your friend Chaim. Had I known him I'm sure that I would feel the same (and I *do* know many Israelis, so this is *not* an impossible situation).

And though I didn't know Chaim 'any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind.' That is why I want to get away from discussing this whole conflict in terms of nations. I no more believe in a Palestinian nation than I do in a Jewish one. We are all human beings, and that is all that matters. I am less inclined than you to pay attention to cultural difference, because in my experience it is usually emphasised in order to justify discrimination. In my view Chaim's life (ironically, as you say, the very meaning of his name) was sacrificed, like that of countless others over the ages, to the illusion that nations, that is relatively culturally homogenous societies, offer us security. That makes it more, rather than less, tragic.

There is of course a danger, I am well aware, of being a comfortable spectator who looks on and pontificates while others live in constant danger. What right have I, or anyone else in our group who is not a Palestinian or Israeli Jew, to judge the rights and wrongs of the situation? This brings me back to Donne's words - 'I am involved in Mankind'. What happens in Israel-Palestine affects all of us. You probably know the words of the poem by Pastor Niemoller: 'In Germany first they came for the Communists and I did not speak out - because I was not a communist. / Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out - because I was not a Jew.' Garth Hewitt has added in his song based on the same poem: 'And then they came for the Palestinian and I said nothing because I wasn't a Palestinian.' Niemoller's poem ends: 'Then they came for me - and there was no one left to speak out for me.'

This is why I am so pleased that you joined the Palestine Society and why I admire your ‘fighting this anger (about the death of Chaim) in order not to end up hating people who are just as well trapped in the same situation.’ Sadly there are many, on both sides, who do not understand the need to imaginatively enter into the world of ‘the other’. I’m sorry that you think I am one of these. I also struggle hard not to be, though I also sometimes feel overwhelmed by feelings of anger. I am only too well aware, especially since my trip to Israel-Palestine last March, that most Israeli Jews have arrived at their present situation through no choice of their own, and to the extent that their view of the situation is distorted, this also is, in one sense, not their fault. One can compare the situation with Northern Ireland. Each side there has its own self-justifying narrative.

Perhaps where we really differ is that I reserve the right to make judgements about narratives. I’m sure that you would agree with me when condemning some other narratives as unacceptable, but you seem to want me to be especially kind to Zionism. In my view the (political) Zionist narrative, which is still the fundamental basis of the state of Israel and which informs most Western thought about the Israeli-Palestine struggle, is fatally flawed. Moreover, its realisation necessarily involved, and continues to involve, the suffering of the present inhabitants of Israel-Palestine. It would take too long to go into all of this, though a good start would be for you to read the last appendix of my DPhil thesis in the library (Clark-Lowes, F., ‘Wilhelm Stekel and the Early History of Psychoanalysis’, University of Sussex, 1999).

The fact that I do not, and Brighton & Hove PSC does not, spend great efforts to highlight the undoubted suffering of Israeli Jews does not mean that we deny this aspect. It is simply that in my (and our) view the Palestinian voice is constantly in danger of being ignored, whereas it does not seem to us that this is the case with the Jewish-Israeli voice. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly there is the overwhelming power of the Holocaust as an idea in western society. Secondly there is the predominantly western orientation of Israel (despite its Arab-Jewish majority), hence Israel’s membership of the Eurovision song-contest etc. And thirdly there is the fact that for strategic reasons, among others, the only superpower supports Israel and therefore to a considerable extent controls the narrative. I know that recent Zionist rhetoric here has it that there is a bias in the British media *against* Israel. I think there *has* been a shift over the years, but in our view we are still a long way from the balance tipping, as we believe it should do, in the Palestinians’ favour.

It seems to me that you accept much of the justice of the Palestinian case, but that you turn away from the logic of your own argument. You write: ‘I propose that this (history) doesn’t matter any more. We arrived in 2001 and unfortunately the situation is like it is. Instead of throwing accusations we better start looking at a solution of this problem.’ A bit further on, however, you write: ‘We have to take the history of the two parties in account as well as the cultural differences.’ It must, of course, occur to you that there is an explosion of what Finkelstein calls ‘The Holocaust Industry’, that is commemoration of Jewish history. You come dangerously close to saying the Palestinians should forget their history, but the Jews have every right to remember theirs. I know *you* don’t think this, but many do, and so you need to be careful how you express yourself on this subject. I would, incidentally, very much like to engage with you in a debate about the history of political Zionism, but let’s leave that to another time. Suffice it to say that I would defend, with considerable evidence, the proposition that the creation of Israel *was* a deliberate action.

Actually I have much sympathy with both points of view: ‘forgot history’ and ‘remember history’. History can only be reversed at terrible, and to me totally unacceptable, human cost. I therefore stand firmly opposed to any kind of radical solution which envisages a return to the *status quo ante*. I don’t think there are many Palestinians who believe in such ideas, just as I don’t think most Israelis *really* believe in the removal of all Palestinians. (You probably know that a majority of Israeli Jews said in a survey a year or two ago that they would prefer that the Palestinians be removed if this could be achieved peacefully.)

But there is also a need for remembering and for acknowledgement. Here, however, the situation is asymmetric. Of course the Holocaust is, for many Jews (and also for even more non-Jews), an event of horrifying historical significance. It was not, however, caused by the Palestinians, the victims of the present situation. I feel, therefore, that there is a real need for Israelis and their supporters to acknowledge what was done to the Palestinians; their attitude to the refugee situation shows that they are still a long way from doing this. On the other hand I think it is a bit far-fetched to expect Palestinians, as a people rather than as individuals, to acknowledge the Holocaust. They are only too well aware of what a wonderful weapon this terrible event has been in disarming all criticism of Israel. Moreover, Palestinians are very well aware that Israel, and the policy of transfer which was required to make it possible, was firmly on the planning board before the Holocaust took place. Opinions differ as to whether Israel would have been established anyway: in my view it would.

Let's just stand back now, for a moment, and consider the case of British India. Indians had not asked Britain to come and rule their country (though some elites within their society benefited from it), and they rightly resented and resisted it. In order to maintain their rule the British authorities resorted to increasingly draconian measures - administrative hassling, detention without trial, torture, shoot-to-kill and even massacre. At the time critics of these policies, such as George Orwell, were regarded as unbalanced, and were suspected of 'going native', of ignoring the importance of 'cultural difference'. It was maintained that the great majority of Indians welcomed British rule because they knew that their own people would make a mess of it. It was only a few rabble-rousers who caused the trouble. Yes, the measures taken against Indians were unfortunate, but they were necessary to maintain the peace. We were doing it in their own interest. I am old enough to have heard all this rubbish that Israeli propaganda machine regularly trots out before. How many people, however, would now try to defend what Britain did then?

And suppose George Orwell had paid equal attention to the suffering of some British families rather than directing the full force of his rhetoric against the injustice of the regime in Burma, wouldn't this simply have diluted his argument, and weakened its undoubted effect on the British attitude to its empire. After all the cause of the suffering, on both sides, was the injustice of the situation itself. The Israel-Palestine situation is not exactly parallel, but I believe most of what I have said applies there as well. As people Israeli Jews and Palestinians of any confession are, in my eyes, equal in value; both are capable of good and bad actions. But they are involved in a power structure which is massively unjust to the Palestinians and morally damaging to Israeli Jews. The recent case of a settler who was given 6 months community service for killing a Palestinian child is a damning example of this. I therefore maintain the right to attack that system.

It is, however, good that you should remind us, as you have done, of the terrible cost of this injustice is paid not only by Palestinians. Your friend Chaim also paid that ultimate price.

Best wishes,
Francis