

Thoughts on a Deeply Troubled Land

This piece takes half an hour to read on average (one reads at c. 275wpm).

Please contact me if you've any questions or think part of the piece needs expanding.

To make greater sense of the place names referenced, view a map like: <http://bit.ly/dvUshd>

*"When they smile and wave at you,
each one of those faces are asking:
'are you the one to help us?'"*

Anonymous

*"Everyone has their own particular part to play.
No part is too great or too small;
no one is too old or too young to do something."*

Bobby Sands

Security; racial discrimination

I recently visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (oPt). As most British visitors to Israel do, I flew from London to Tel Aviv (Ben Gurion).

Supposedly Israel is a success story inasmuch as it's a Middle Eastern democracy. This is according to the official narrative and is regurgitated by Western mainstream media, and is considered accurate and fair. However, the very first conscious bit of analysis that came in to mind when I first arrived in Israel is that this cannot be a democracy because internationals are not treated like this. This thought came into my mind when I was making my way toward, through, and away from Passport Control. I thought to myself: internationals are simply not treated with such suspicion and interrogated in this way by a good-willed democratic state.

Israel has an A-grade record in terms of aviation security, which is not a surprising fact if you've travelled through Ben Gurion airport, the most secure airport in the world. What is the Israeli's secret? Well, apparently it's ethnic profiling. Does a democracy employ ethnic profiling for security purposes and openly admit and show off the fact that it does so?

It was recently reported that two Spaniards in their twenties who were visiting Israel “end[ed] up in [an] investigation room at Ben Gurion Airport, naked and banned from visiting lavatories”. The police said, “information was received against them”, yet “the police found nothing against them and released the pair”. (<http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3838088,00.html>) In the same month Israel detained an American journalist who was Palestine’s leading news agency’s English editor. While returning to Israel via Tel Aviv from a trip abroad, Jared Malsin ended up in detention for 7 days while authorities attempted to extract information about his contacts in the oPt. He is now banned from Israel. Reporters Without Borders said it “condemns the detention and imminent expulsion” of the editor.

(<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=254148>)

Israel is still completing a structure, which they call a “separation barrier”. On completion, the structure will be 403 miles long and more than twice the height of the notorious Berlin Wall in Germany.

(<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article1775.shtml>) I believe it is obligatory upon us to subject this situation to at least some basic critique. In Hebrew the structure is named “gader hafradeh”, which translates into English as ‘apart wall’. Something is ‘apartheid’ if it is part of system of segregation based on people’s racial profiles. Secondly, the structure varies in form, so in some places is an electric fence surrounded with trenches, and in others it is a 25ft high concrete wall. Israel said the structure is for security; to secure itself from ‘terrorists’. We can infer then that the purpose of the wall is ‘directed’ at Palestinians. In 90% of Palestinian residential areas the structure takes the form of a wall. Therefore, it seems linguistically and practically legitimate to call it an apartheid wall.

In truth Israel systematically employs policies based on racial profiling, and employs negative and positive racial discrimination.

Is the structure that some people call a “separation barrier” more worthy of the title “apartheid wall”? Is the Government of Israel (GoI) employing negative racial discrimination and systematic ethnic profiling to oppress? Is this behaviour attributable to a state that most of the Western world recognises as a democracy? The answer is yes.

I first saw the apartheid wall when driving from the airport to Jerusalem where I was staying. It was a corner point in the wall, an armoured watchtower with an Israeli flag on top of it. My reaction was that this behaviour of placing the flag like this was strangely nationalistic and militaristic for a democracy. The message it seemed to me was that this part of the world’s territory has been conquered by Israel, and we are militarily strong here. Then military vehicles drove past that part of the wall. I later found out that this area was a military prison and was notorious.

I next saw Jerusalem’s wonderful old walls, fostering a reaction that it was a wonderfully historic and special place.

To children, the apartheid wall is an overwhelming structure that must devastate the subconscious perception of the world as they grow up with the structure as a dominant force influencing their lives.

I should like to pose the question: how much oppression must you inflict before you can be called a Nazi?

On a lighter note, when visiting a friend in Ramallah (in oPt), a friend told me there is a village about twenty minutes' drive northwest of Ramallah that has a very special tradition. The Christians and Muslims live in perfect harmony and to a very high degree. For instance, if a Muslim villager passes away the Christian villagers activate to organise the funeral, the burial, etcetera, to allow the mourning group to grieve properly; and this happens vice versa.

On returning from Ramallah to Jerusalem I went through the Qalandia (or 'Kalandia') checkpoint. Israel calls these moral monstrosities 'terminals', and should be ashamed for having made them. The way in which these checkpoints operate is to humiliate and degrade those who pass through it, to make them feel inferior and like animals.

In passing through, regardless of what I might have carried (my camera, two mobile phones, various batteries, a laptop and charger) I am able to pass through the checkpoint without any of my body or possessions being searched. This is ethnic profiling. At some less high-tech checkpoints I was instructed to skip queues, based solely on the fact that I was a white-skinned, Western-looking international. In various instances, I didn't even need to show more than the front cover of my British passport to pass through checkpoints. At some stages I was told to skip queues of up to 30 Palestinians. I found this experience deeply distressing, humiliating, and upsetting. I would much rather have queued like everyone else had to. What right do I have over any other person to speed through? You may ask why I use the term humiliating. To be treated better than other human beings by Nazis who think I am 'superior' makes one feel ashamed to be of the 'superior' profile, hence being forced to accept their profile of me is humiliating and regrettable.

Each checkpoint has various 'lanes' that are open and shut at any given time. In my first experience of the Qalandia checkpoint, I was one of about two hundred people attempting to make it through, yet there were only two lanes open.

There is no human contact at all, and you don't see the Israel operators until you are let through the turnstile. It's all electronically controlled and run with security cameras. I queued for 15–25 minutes before being permitted to pass through the turnstile, then saw the room from which the Israelis remotely, electronically operate the checkpoint. The room the guards were in had windows and doors that were inches thick, and had massive metal handles. I assume their room must be bullet-proof, if not blast-proof. The construction of the operation room is like on a ship. It was as if the Israelis inside the secure rooms had to be even airtight from the 'Arabs'. This was implied by reality.

The electronic, remote control is very inhumane. Those that pass through the checkpoint are essentially treated like cattle. People regularly get stuck inside the electric turnstile; I'm not sure if this was deliberate, although there is a dedicated CCTV camera pointing right at the turnstile. In talking with others waiting to pass through the turnstile a woman (who was a Jerusalemite and had made a day visit with her two daughters to family in Ramallah) said to me, "You have come to make a film? Good! You have come to see how [they] treat us? I think they treat animals better than us, no? ... You can see!".

In looking at the faces of children who had to pass through this checkpoint experience, I was deeply disturbed to look into their faces, and more so to imagine what must be passing through their minds, for the experience is so extremely oppressive, inhumane, and military.

My descriptions of passing through the checkpoints are quite impotent, for one must witness the experience first person to comprehend the suffering of those who have to (even each day) frequent these checkpoints.

Asymmetry and reporting

One of the most striking issues of the Israel–Palestine conflict is that the conflict is portrayed as symmetrical. This happens usually subconsciously by the media and the so-called 'international community'. This is something we *must* properly problematise.

Even during particular episodes of the conflict in which 1400 people are killed on one side and 13 people are killed on the other, terms like 'war' are employed quite comfortably. This occurs because the case of asymmetry goes almost universally unacknowledged and ignored.

For example the term 'war', as is often used to refer to the 'Gaza War' of winter 2008–9, implies that the particular episode of conflict features two armies, both of which have equal chances in the battlefield inasmuch as the outcome cannot be accurately predicted, and implies 'struggle' on the part of both armies for survival in the battlefield. However, in truth, the only struggle that existed in the case of the 'Gaza war' was that of the Palestinian civilian population's struggle for survival. Strong assertions? Well, let us examine the figures in question: the ratio of Palestinian civilian dead to Israeli civilian dead is Palestinian 400:1 Israeli; the ratio of total deaths is Palestinians 100:1 Israelis; and in terms of damage done to infrastructure the ratio is Palestinian structures destroyed to 6000:1 Israeli structure destroyed. Despite these basic statistics, the mainstream media comfortably uses the term 'war'. This is deeply dishonest and intellectually corrupt.

In temporarily holding back all other facts and prejudices, and in looking at these ratios and counts on their own, one would be more inclined to employ the term 'genocide' after all its definition is:

“The deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation”
(Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military 2002)

I concede that some news outlets used terms such as “Operation Cast Lead” in their coverage of the ‘Gaza war’. Thankfully terms like ‘Operation Cast Lead’ direct those who are discerning to the real truth. The importance of language should never be underestimated. The first sentence of the Wikipedia page on the ‘Gaza War’ offers two alternative names: Operation Cast Lead (Israel Defence Forces) and Gaza Massacre (Arab world). Is this alone not able to raise our suspicions to see the real truth of the ‘war’. One side of the story saw it as a military “operation”; the other saw it as a “massacre”.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War) One cannot read about ‘Operation Counter Cast Lead’. There was no counter-operation. The Palestinian people do not have an army. There’s no ‘Operation Cast Lead Defence’. There’s just “massacre”.

The linguistic situation is the same in relation to the 1948 War. The Israelis call it the War of Independence, while the Palestinians call it the catastrophe (the ‘nakba’). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1948_Arab%E2%80%93Israeli_War) In the 1948 war, Israeli academic Baruch Kimmerling argues, politicide took place, defining it as “a gradual but systematic attempt to cause [the] annihilation [of the Palestinian people] as an independent political and social entity”. (Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians 2003) Cultiricide (my term) also seems to have taken place: a Ben Gurion University researcher’s recent doctoral thesis argues Israel “destroyed tens of thousands of Palestinian books in the years after the State's establishment” and says it “was a cultural massacre undertaken in a manner that was worse than European colonialism”.

(<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3841252,00.html>)

Returning to more recent times, did the UK government expel the Israeli ambassador on hearing of the atrocities occurring in the Gaza war? No, because doing so would justify an ‘unfriendly act’, and the UK would lose its ‘special relationship’ with the US. Instead countries like Venezuela and Mauritania expelled ambassadors. Venezuela’s President even publicly condemned the atrocities. Forget not, of course, the official UK narrative on Venezuela which is that it is an autocratic regime. What a twisted world we live in when the morally integrious political actions are taken by ‘autocratic regimes’ while we, in our ‘democracy’, do next to nothing.

The truth is that the Palestinian people are generally defenceless. Gazans live in extreme poverty. Other Palestinians are usually refugees and live in poverty. Palestinians have no air force. They are not given billions of dollars by the United States in the form of military aid. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/6948981.stm>) They do not have an economic specialisation in security or military technology. The Israelis, however, are wealthy, have an air force and army, and are recipients of US military aid. The points of asymmetry between Israel and Palestine’s situations could go on forever.

The United States' position in regard to Israel is a simple, deeply corrupt, and immoral stance. Basically, the US' position can be explained in analogical form as such:

“Consider this scenario. A and B stand accused of murder. The evidence shows that A provided B with the murder weapon, A gave B the 'all-clear' signal, and A prevented onlookers from answering the victim's screams. Would the verdict be that A was insufficiently engaged or that A was every bit as guilty as B of murder?”

(<http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/article.php?pg=4&ar=12>)

American Professor Norman Finkelstein adds:

“The problem with the Bush administration, we are repeatedly told, is that it [was] insufficiently engaged with the Middle East... But who gave the green light for Israel to commit the massacres [in the West Bank in 2002]? Who supplied the F-16s and Apache helicopters to Israel? Who vetoed the Security Council resolutions calling for international monitors to supervise the reduction of violence?”

(Ibid.)

The United States of America did.

While away I attended a United Nations cluster meeting, which was enormously revealing and informative. It involved representatives from iNGOs (international non-governmental organisations) like UNICEF, the World Food Program, Crisis Action, the World Health Organisation, and Save the Children) and UN representatives, including those from UNIFEM, the UNDP, and UNEP. It was held in Israeli Jerusalem, in a nice neighbourhood, with decent roads and attractive trees. After the meeting, I visited Al-Quds University in Palestinian East Jerusalem where a set of talks were being given. Many of those from the UN meeting ignorantly afraid of the 'security threat of visiting East Jerusalem' forwent hearing the talks, which were on the Goldstone report and ensuring international accountability.

The streets of Palestinian East Jerusalem have not been repaired or in anyway ameliorated in decades. Conversely, the streets in Israeli West Jerusalem are just like any western city's roads; that is, extremely well kept. In talking of streets I am reminded of a Gazan human rights professor who was one of the speakers at Al-Quds. He was in Gaza, speaking via satellite link. He at one time said – and I shall never forget it – of the roads of Gaza, rather than Jerusalem, “One year later we still have smell of death in the streets of Gaza.”

There is no smell of death in the streets of Israeli Jerusalem. Indeed, the sweltering injustice there is invisible. It is quite possible, in fact, to visit the 'Holy Land' and not to notice any elements of conflict at all.

Later on my way back from the talks, travelling East to West, the expert who I was with pointed out some of Israel's state administrative offices including police stations and the border police's HQ. Moments later she indicated the position of the Green line (the 1949 armistice line). We were travelling

Westwardly. The Israeli state structures were on the Palestinian side of the line; the structures, I was told, are illegal under international law.

'Holy Land' and language

A friend of mine is an Anglican priest and before my trip, when talking with him, and indeed others, I comfortably referred to my destination as the 'Holy Land'. This was convenient, for the alternatives (Palestine and Israel; Israel and Palestine; Israel and the oPt; Israel and Occupied Palestine; Israel; Palestine) are inconvenient because in choosing between them the following problems arise:

Using alternatives that include 'Palestine' rather than 'Palestinian territories' suggests that Palestine is a proper contiguous state with the main prerequisites for regarding it as such. Unfortunately for the Palestinians and its leaders, the Palestinian state, although an idea that should be more widely accepted as desirable and legitimate, hasn't been given a chance, and isn't presently viable. In order to honour this reality it's better to avoid the term 'Palestine'.

The problem with using the terms 'Israel and Palestine' or 'Palestine and Israel' is that either one automatically conveys a greater proximity to the former entity than the latter. Whether the audience understands this implied order to be that of moral authority or any other kind of order is irrelevant, however a greater allegiance to one of the two entities can be mistakenly portrayed.

Another two terms one could employ are "Zionist-occupied Palestine" or simply "Palestine". In using either one implies factual consciousness that there was a Palestinian state before Israel's creation and one automatically delegitimizes the state of Israel. As someone who believes in a two-state solution, I believe that using these terms is not right, good, or useful, and should be avoided.

For thoroughness, I should add that the problem with using just 'Israel' is that it automatically supposes that there is no legitimacy in a Palestinian state, which should also be avoided.

I also dislike the alternative terms which include the word 'occupied'. In international law, 'occupation' is a temporary state and is therefore more tolerable than chronic control. If we believe in justice, peace, and the rights of human beings, we will be interested in the conflict's statuses in terms of international law. Well, since 1967 Israel has occupied Palestine's territory. Whether or not this is legitimate is of no immediate significance in this particular matter. However, the term occupation, and therefore occupying force and occupying state, presupposes that the occupation will be temporary – perhaps of up to 10 years in duration – and that its purpose is to control the territory to maintain law and order following an armed conflict. By 2010, Palestine has been occupied for 43 years, which, by no stretch of the English language can be considered temporary. Therefore as every day passes it's increasingly illegitimate to call Palestine's territories, as recognised by international law, 'occupied'.

By the way, areas of the West Bank have one of three different statuses: A, B, or C. Lands that are in area 'A' are under Palestinian control and administration; those in area 'B' are under Israeli control and Palestinian administration; and those in area 'C' are under Israeli control and administration. For example, 83% of the West Bank is under Israeli control and administration (part of area 'C').

Returning back to the idea of 'occupied'. If 'occupied' is not kosher, then which term to use? I would like to offer some more appropriate alternatives.

I mentioned earlier how Israeli state structures have been built illegally on occupied territory. In addition, Israel purposefully creates as many residential structures as possible to create 'facts on the ground' which render a contiguous Palestinian state as impossible as can be. These Israeli residential structures are called 'settlements' and 'outposts'. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis live in these illegal and illegitimate structures. Moreover, Israel has annexed and unlawfully expropriated (or appropriated) control over Palestinian territory, and in doing so has denied self-determination to the indigenous population, the Palestinians.

This practice of acquiring control of another state and occupying it with its settlers satisfies the definition of a colonialist act. The idea of 'colonialism' rather than 'occupation' is far more appropriate to use, I submit.

I find another term is also highly appropriate to generally attribute to the situation: 'apartheid'. As I mentioned above Israel employs positive and negative forms of racial discrimination. This happens regularly, systemically, deliberately, and overtly. Meet the Arab Palestinian mothers who've been forcibly illegally evicted from their homes, whose homes have been illegally demolished, and who've been 'displaced'. Then meet the Israeli families who are positively discriminated against by the Israeli state. They are deliberately not Arab and are given a different legal system, different rights (e.g. land rights), vast economic support, and often were offered citizenship from other continents, all because they satisfy particular racial criteria. For instance, it was recently revealed, for instance, that those Palestinians who work in Israel are economically abused and have been defrauded out of \$2 million USD in the last 40 years "by deducting from their salaries contributions for welfare benefits to which they were never entitled, Israeli economists revealed".

(http://www.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=213791) This sort of racial discrimination satisfies the definition of the adjective 'apartheid'.

Therefore, using phrases like 'occupied Palestine' and 'oPt' does not really convey reality accurately, while terms like 'colonialised' and 'apartheid state' are truer, I submit.

I was mentioning how many of the alternatives to the name 'Holy Land' are troublesome. Thus, before my visit I left with the notion that 'Holy Land' was a convenient name for avoiding all of the complexities, connotations and implied allegiances of the terms I have criticised. However, during my visit I comprehended how this term is also inappropriate. In my journal while away I once wrote that I was not in a 'Holy Land' but rather in a "deeply troubled land". After all, what is a Holy place? Is it one in which peace, prayer, respect, and humility are practiced, one in which the sanctity of life is understood, one in

which human beings' rights are appreciated, or a place in which significant religious events supposedly once occurred? Even if this land was once holy, honestly calling it Holy in today's reality is certainly very difficult, even for devout pilgrims. Or, perhaps the "devil has an unholy plan for the holy land"? (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5o4Vb0lAAj4>)

Israel's matrix of control (checkpoints; control of water, electricity, etc.; apartheid roads; settlements and outposts) is quite staggering in a troubling way. One of the most pertinent and debilitating feelings felt when travelling around as an international was that of oppression on freedom of movement. One of the first Israeli checkpoints I passed through was attended by Israeli border officials. The particular lane we drove through was manned by two girls younger than myself (probably of 18–20 years old), who were similar-looking to two of my Israeli friends who I first met at Sixth Form College. They were clearly on military service, relaxed, and laughing to themselves as we passed through the checkpoint. I asked the driver of the Israeli vehicle in which we were travelling, why we drove straight through the checkpoint while others were stopped in other lanes – for I wanted the obvious articulated to me. The driver said, 'I am wearing my kippah, and driving in an Israeli vehicle, while you are an international and not a suspicious-looking person'. At this moment I was deep in solidarity with those who are routinely oppressed at that place.

Another aspect of the feeling of oppression was that it is impossible to tell where the Green line actually is, without explanation by a local expert, because Israel has transgressed it so deliberately.

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."
(Martin Luther King Jr.; 1963)

Settlements, settlers; refugee camps

I joined a political tour for a few hours while I was away; we drove through settlements, and saw some demolished homes' remains and new structures built upon formerly privately-owned Palestinian land. In seeing settlements it was quite obvious that there is no construction freeze in place since many dozens of workers were at work building settlement homes. The very first remains of a demolished Palestinian structure I saw was that of what was once a seven-story building. It had housed about a dozen families who were consequently rendered homeless. I also saw an extremely large modern Israeli building with a flag upon its roof, and it was built upon what was formerly Palestinian land. When a case went to court the *Israeli* judiciary said authorities hadn't noticed the structure being built and that it had stood for too long for any action to be taken regarding it by that time. So, no action was ever taken. The man who had once owned the land was left with nothing.

In American political theory the notion of a 'Military–Industrial–Congressional Complex' is often used. According to an Israeli political academic there is a similar complex alive in Israel: the 'Settlement–Government–Security Services Complex'. This triangle of mutualism and overlap should not be underestimated, I was told. For example, in recent years settlers attacked a Palestinian

neighbourhood of East Jerusalem. A 2-year-old baby was thrown out of a window and killed. As dozens of settlers were involved, quite a happening took place. Consequently, many peace activists saw those involved. After the police and ambulances had done their business, the disturbances disbanded. According to those peace activists who arrived at the scene, one of the settlers involved was Israel's incumbent Tourism Minister at that time. The same witnesses later enquired as to the status of the investigation into prosecuting those who had been responsible for this bandit act of assault. The police said they had not recorded or interviewed any of the settlers before allowing them to leave the scene. With impunity, therefore, the tourism minister was even later promoted in his political career. In any other 'democracy' the perpetrators would have been prosecuted, their lives would be properly restricted, and they would be rehabilitated, and shamed. Well not in Israel's 'democracy'.

I visited Aida refugee camp during my visit. It was one of the most touching moments of my trip. The scars of recent years' military offensives on the Bethlehem Aida refugee camp are still visible. Missile craters are still obvious in the roads. The local UN-run school's entrance door is still riddled with bullet holes. In the same offensive the camp's two factories were both destroyed, and a local Imam was shot thrice. An Israeli tank tried to fit through a tiny residential road (more like a track) and became stuck. The driver tried to barge his way out, leaving inch-thick scratches in the walls of people's homes. Palestinian children helped the tank driver manoeuvre free then were minutes later rewarded with CS gas grenades.

I am a person who is deeply sympathetic with both Israelis and Palestinians. Having never visited the Middle East before my trip, I stood in solidarity with the suffering in this conflict from a compassionate, but more intellectual and theoretical point of view, with knowledge of some anecdotes. Now, my solidarity is comparatively more three-dimensional. I now have the mass of an emotional and practical connection with the conflict, having seen the reality and facts on the ground. It was an enormously humbling experience and in seeing the facts on the ground in reality for the first time made me feel extremely small, helpless and insignificant.

My philosophy and position

Legendary British playwright Harold Pinter once wrote:

"To maintain ... power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed."
(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2005/dec/08/theatre.nobelprize>)

One lie that is prevalent in our Western reality is that in the realm of politics, news, journalism, and history there can be such a thing as balance and objectivity. It is said that in discourse giving a point then a counter-point is 'objective' and 'impartial'. This philosophy underlies certainly the BBC's modus operandi and that of most other mainstream news organisations in the Western world. It is, however, a completely false construct and a lie.

Facts are not sacred and pristine, but are gathered by human beings on the basis of imperfect knowledge and often compromised world outlooks. More importantly, however, to mention a particular fact – ‘that’ fact – over another – ‘this’ fact – is already to express an opinion. Facts, therefore, actually *are* comment and opinion. For instance, to mention A’s opinion and then B’s opinion, which may be highly contradict each other, is not to offer impartiality, for C’s opinion is completely unincorporated.

‘Objectivity’ and ‘impartiality’ are not realistic or truly obtainable; they are as realistic as perfect competition in contemporary economic theory. The whole game played in being supposedly ‘neutral’ and ‘indifferent’ is illegitimate.

What is legitimate, and what is required is honesty and rationality. This requires far more than professional competence; it depends upon quite special human qualities: compassion; independence of thought; the willingness to disobey authority and disregard the carrots of conformity (status, wealth, power); and the comprehension that all human happiness and suffering is of equal value.

“Mine and other's pain – how are they different?

Simply, then, since pain is pain, I will dispel it.”

(http://www.medialens.org/cogitations/090406_the_art_of.php)

I suggest it is morally right for us to commandeer our bias in the direction of relieving the suffering of human beings.

My interest in this region of the world and its peoples is not for self-gain, but has grown out of compassion and respect for the sanctity of human beings’ lives. I love all peoples, including the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. I respect religion; one of my best friends is a leader within a particular organised religion. I have very good Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist friends. I respect universal rights and appreciate the international institutions that seek to uphold them.

I intend this piece to act as an antidote and remedy to mainstream, official, ‘authorised’ narratives and versions of reality. I wish to promote rationality, compassion, and respect for others, in the interest of justice and peace.

Sustaining mythology and virtual reality

There is nothing inherently evil about any people on this planet, including Palestinians and Israelis.

For the GoI to sustain its position in the Middle East and international community, and to be able to take the actions it does and with the level of impunity or liability it has, it is essential that Israelis and internationals are kept in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. Whether this is done consciously and/or subconsciously cannot be made a generalisation of.

There is no doubt that Israel’s PR machine is far more effectual than the Palestinians’, primarily since Israeli is a contiguous state, economically stable, and militarily strong, and the Palestinian people barely have a state and have never really been given a chance to rebuild one.

For instance, take Israel's apartheid wall: even its positioning is cunning. It is really very difficult to notice if you're a tourist visiting Israeli to see the main Holy sites of Jerusalem. And, if you do notice it, there is little impact since one is submerged in the developed culture of touristy Jerusalem.

Indeed, most tourists who visit the Holy Land (I use this term, for I am referring mainly to religious or history tourists) leave with an impression of: 'what a wonderful country Israeli is; what a wonderful people; what wonderful cities; what wonderful heritage; what wonderful weather'. Whether or not these ideas are true is irrelevant, the point is whether or not they are the most important ideas one leaves the country with.

Having seen a very good sample of the many realities on the ground (save Gaza's) – i.e. not just tourist realities – I was certainly not left with the tourist sentiments listed above. Instead, I left quite despairful and troubled.

For such a number of humans to live in such a terrible way is one matter. Quite another matter is that so many other humans elsewhere remain in virtually complete ignorance about the important, real truths of the matter, and this is far more troubling.

I met a Palestinian mother and father who had been forcibly, illegally evicted from their homes in occupied territories by Israeli forces. Later their 16-year-old daughter was beaten up by several male ideological and/or religious settlers. The parents said "this is man-made, not natural", in light of devastation in Haiti, and for them this fact morphs the nature of their suffering: they know they are on the receiving end of abusive treatment by other human beings which treat them like animals, and are full of prejudice and hatred.

At one time I visited the main tourist area of historical Jerusalem, the sun was blaring and tourists filled the spaces. They did what tourists legitimately do: take photos of the great sites, then take more photos of themselves and the great sites as 'proof' that they'd been there, then they'd read the history in their guidebooks – you know the story. Yet, 20 meters away from this buzz, just next to a shopping mal, was another reality: in witnessing it I was struck by how almost nobody, as far as I could see from people's behaviour, noticed that a young Palestinian boy (of probably about 10 years old) was rummaging through rubbish bins for leftovers. He collected what he found in a bag, then, as a young child does, jumped off to his next destination. Dozens of people walked past the boy every minute. He was the only Palestinian child in at least 3 miles, as far as I could discern. Did tourists notice him? No: they were oblivious and uninterested in the deep realities of where they were visiting.

I said earlier how Israel has a superior public relations machine compared to the Palestinians'. There is no doubt that this is the case. Since returning back to the UK, I've followed over two thousand news articles with Israeli and Palestinian politics to remain up-to-date and continue to ameliorate my understanding of the political and social situations. Following the news thoroughly and copiously like this is extremely revealing, and – as anyone who has followed news in this way will know – it is highly cyclical.

The GoI advantageously employs PR tactics in regard to the coverage of negotiations on the re-starting of peace talks. First, the Palestinian position can be broadly understood to be that they will not restart peace talks without a complete freeze of illegal settlement building, including inside East Jerusalem, and this is usually their position, which, from my very personal point of view, based in an understanding of international law, is a reasonable one. Second, the Israeli condition upon which they will re-start peace talks is that there should be no condition. Oxford University Professor Shlaim offers a useful analogy:

“It's like two men negotiating the division of a pizza while one continues to gobble it up.”

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/03/gaza-tony-blair-betrayal>)

To extend the analogy: the Israelis gobble up the pizza while spouting that the Palestinians are holding up the negotiation of who gets how much of the pizza by asking the Israelis to stop gobbling the pizza up! It might be a simple analogy but it is truly paralleled with reality.

So, Israel then mobilises its public relations machine to spread the message that it is willing to start negotiations and points the finger at the Palestinians who are the culprits and who are unwilling and ‘holding up’ peace talks. Israel’s mobilisation of such opinions in the Israeli and international press means that journalists latch on to this analysis and usually employ it dominantly in reporting. The Palestinians are not so aggressive in dissemination of their interpretations of reality, even with Palestinian news agencies, hence news agencies tend not to pick up the Palestinian narrative, or if they do, not as dominantly as the Israeli’s narrative. This usually leads to reporting and coverage painting a picture that the Israelis are willing to re-start peace talks, while the Palestinians are portrayed as unwilling to make peace, and a set of people who are disinterested in peace. This happens to varying degrees but is the case almost universally in mainstream reporting of the conflict. This is clearly devastating for peace. It’s a shame that the Palestinians can’t activate and be more aggressive in the dissemination of their position, to counter the up-take of the Israeli narrative by journalists and newsmakers, but who am I to say what they should be doing?

“The media is the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and the guilty innocent.”

(Malcolm X)

Of course Obama supports the Israeli position: his ‘special envoy’ to the Mideast recently proclaimed that “the time has come to stop finding excuses for avoiding a return to the negotiating table”, referring to the Palestinians’ position.

(<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1146976.html>)

Not only has Israel portrayed itself as ready for peace talks to resume and Palestinians as unwilling and blocking, but Israel has even said that the Palestinians are making peace increasingly unobtainable by this ‘conditioning’ of the re-start of talks. They have even said that Israel will become an apartheid state if the Palestinians fail to come drop their re-start conditions. This is

hypocritical in the extreme, for it is Israel who has already earned the status of an apartheid regime, and is blocking the peace talks by their condition that there are no conditions, in my very personal opinion. It's a devastating narrative for peace.

In Israel the official truth, as uncritically reported, is Orwellian, straight out of the ironically prophetic *1984*. Toward the end of January 2010 the Israeli Prime Minister visited some settlements built in oPt, which are illegal because they constitute a significant morphing and change in the demography and geography of occupied territory, which is illegal under international law, namely under the Forth Geneva Convention. During one of the visits the Israel PM said:

“Our message is clear: We are planting here, we will stay here, we will build here, this place will be an inseparable part of the state of Israel forever”

(<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/01/201012417289707969.html>)

In truth, this was an admission, and a case of chutzpah. The PM openly put on the record that his country had occupied land (illegal), would continue to expand in and change these colonised lands (illegal), and that the new situation rendered would be perpetual. This is the truth, as affirmed by the PM of a ‘democratic’ state. Does the BBC report that his assertion actually affirms Israel’s illegal behaviour? No. Does the British Prime Minister or British Foreign Minister speak out to condemn these bandit acts of defying international law? No. Later below, I briefly explain why.

Some Israelis are convinced that the government of Israel has “never, ever worked in good faith, never tried to honestly solve [the conflict]; have always tried to do a deal to deny Palestinians their rights”.

California is often thought of as one of the most liberal US states. However, recently Californian Congressman Howard Berman proclaimed:

“Prime Minister Netanyahu and his colleagues are the ones who have taken the difficult decisions, and for this they deserve more credit than they get”

(<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1145384.html>)

‘Shared values’

I am not unfair on particular countries in criticising them. Many of the criticisms I have levelled throughout this piece at the state of Israel are also applicable to other states like the USA. The state of Israeli is not an enemy of mine, and I am not someone who is gung-ho about disparaging it. I am someone, however, who wishes to highlight the usually unregarded reality of states like Israel and the US when their actions are morally unacceptable.

The US and Israel are terrorist states. They have many traits in common, some of which are even self-proclaimed “shared values”:

- Claims to moral superiority
- Economic ideologies that allow the daily mortality of 36k children worldwide due to malnutrition
(<http://www.socialistalternative.org/news/article10.php?id=446>)
- Deeply subservient and corrupted mainstream media systems which complicity enable immoral and illegal behaviour
- Vast public relations machines that ensure universal regurgitation of official narratives, understandings, and opinions
- Single foreign policy ideologies that are static despite different parties in power
- Regular employment of “them” and “us” language to demonize and dehumanize other peoples and official state enemies
- Regular use of terms like “terrorist”, “terrorism”, “war on terror” to demonize the state enemies of a particular time:

“To take the word ‘terrorism’ and build everything around it, as they do, you only make more misery, more war, more casualties, more suicide bombers, more revenge, more punishment. Where does that go? Nowhere... terrorism only has meaning for those who are weak and who have no other choice, and no other means. While there is this silence, this looking away... We are not only complicit in a crime, we ensure that we ourselves never know peace.”

(Rami Elhanan, Palestinian electrician, Hebron)
- Militarism hence large ‘defence’ budgets
- Colonialism and imperialism
- Hiding economic gains beneath the guise of ‘nation building’, ‘intervention’, and ‘enforcement’ of international law, in the sake of ‘national interest’:

“We speak of national interests, national capital, national spheres of interest, national honour, and national spirit; but we forget that behind all this there are hidden merely the selfish interests of power-loving politicians and money-loving business men for whom the nation is a convenient cover to hide their personal greed and their schemes for political power from the eyes of the world.”

(Rocker, Culture and Nationalism, Michael E. Coughlan, 1978, p.253)
- Fearful civil societies
- State-sponsored Islamaphobia
- Regular and systemic contemptuous breaching of international law, including acts of torture, extraordinary rendition, assassination, invasion of sovereign countries’ territories
- Highly selective and subjective, arbitrary application of ‘universal’ principles like human rights
- Police states
- Subordination of universal rights to: (a) profits; and (b) the rights of *particular* socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic groups
- “Democracies”

Many, and in some cases all, of the features I enumerate above may be ascribed to the UK (of which I am a citizen thus most morally responsible for), but also to France, Germany, Canada, and others. However, the US and Israel have been more potently of the standing I describe above and for a much longer time.

In the UK, for instance, a London magistrates' court recently released an arrest warrant for the Israeli opposition leader Tzipi Livini due to her involvement in war crimes committed against Palestinians. She was planning to visit the UK but cancelled after the UK Ministry of Defence couldn't assure she wouldn't be arrested. Other Israeli military officials planning to make visits were of the same standing. "The UK is one of a number of countries where private prosecutions can be brought for alleged war crimes committed abroad."

(<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jan/05/israel-war-crimes-warrants-britain>) Consequently, the British government under PM Brown is attempting to change the law to give incumbent administrations arbitrary power to prevent arrest warrants being issued under universal jurisdiction. Brown recently personally phoned Livini and assured her that she would "always be welcome" in Britain, while his Foreign Minister asserted that "Israel is a strategic partner and a close friend of the United Kingdom".

(<http://www.france24.com/en/node/4949822>)

The European situation outside of the UK is not dissimilar:

"In a speech at a conference ... an Israeli diplomat serving in a European capital... [distinguished Israel] between 'the only democracy in the Middle East' and its autocratic Arab neighbours. ... 'We share common values,' the Israeli told the Europeans. To his surprise, a member of the audience stood up and replied to him: 'What common values? We have nothing in common with you.'"

(<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1145985.html>)

The US situation is no brighter. On 28 January 2010 a South Florida University student and former Obama campaign volunteer, asked President Obama at a town hall event:

"Last night in your State of the Union address you spoke of America's support for human rights. Then why have we not condemned Israel and Egypt's human rights violations against the occupied Palestinian people? And yet we continue to support [Israel and Egypt] financially with billions of dollars coming from our tax dollars."

Obama replied:

"Let me just talk about the Middle East generally... Here's my view: Israel is one of our strongest allies; it is a vibrant democracy; it shares links with us in all sorts of ways; it is critical for us and I will never waiver from ensuring Israel's security, and helping them secure themselves in what is a very hostile region. So I make no apologies for that. What is also true is that the plight of the Palestinians is something which we have to pay attention to, because it is not good for our security and it's not good for Israel's security to have millions of individuals who feel hopeless, who

don't have an opportunity to get an education or get a job or what have you."

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oniFAoHgSmw>)

He might have more succinctly said:

"That's an awkward question so I'll talk about the Middle East generally. Israeli is an important ally in terms of our national interests so I will never waiver from ensuring Israel's security, but as for the Palestinians, who aren't linked to our national interests, frankly I don't give a ___"

Obama referred to 'shared links' with Israel in his reply. I wonder which links Obama was thinking of; perhaps those of military technology and intelligence?

"Behind much of [America's foreign policy] are the Israelis, who have long advised the Americans in both the Iraq and Afghanistan adventures. Ethnic-cleansing, wall-building, checkpoints, collective punishment and constant surveillance - these are claimed as Israeli innovations"

(<http://usa.mediamonitors.net/content/view/full/70569>)

Indeed, an Israeli Foreign Minister recently claimed that Israel's relations with the United States have "never been better".

(<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1146709.html>)

Sheikh Jarrah

In Israeli civil society there are few individuals that are part of a firm resistance to the illegal actions of their state. Only a small fraction of the 'peace movement' is as outspoken as they should and could be. However, there *are* demonstrations, there *is* lobbying, and generally there *is* action, although not enough. As a UN representative said in the meeting I attended, when "most Israelis see 'Collective punishment' or 'Goldstone' they just the page".

While away, I attended, as a photojournalist, a demonstration in an East Jerusalem neighbourhood called Sheikh Jarrah. The activity was in solidarity with dozens of families who've been illegally, forcibly evicted from their homes by the state of Israel, causing the homelessness of hundreds of Palestinians (all Arabs), including hundreds of children. I first arrived at the starting point of what was going to be a march to the demonstration site. I arrived very early and there were four police vehicles and about 25 police officers already. By the time the first marchers appeared there were about 45 police officers for only 30 marchers, including a baby in a pram. The police, all armed, of course, as is the way in Israel, formed a loose circle around those marching and the media, then told the demonstration organisers that the march was unlawful and wouldn't be allowed to go ahead. The leaders asserted their constitutional rights to peacefully march with placards to a destination of their choosing, which caused many moments of discussion with the officers in charge then, via telephone, their superiors. In the end no one was allowed to march and attempting to do so would've lead to arrest. This is not an isolated incident but the default behaviour

and the normal outcome of attempts to peacefully protest in solidarity with Palestinians.

Marchers and the media made their way to Sheikh Jarrah where the actual demonstration was due to take place. There, about 45 protestors peacefully demonstrated in a public garden next to a road. Banners read 'Free Sheikh Jarrah!' and 'End the occupation!'. Some cars beeped their horns in support. On the other side of the road stood a couple of dozen police officers next two or three police vehicles. After a few minutes of peaceful protest a few police officers, including the most senior among them, walked over the road to the protestors, standing in the middle of the road, just off the pavement, and using a megaphone, exclaimed in Hebrew that the protest was unlawful and would be forcibly disbanded in 5 minutes if it didn't naturally disband. This was all witnessed and recorded thoroughly by media outlets (including ActiveStills) and international observers (like those from the World Council of Churches). So, many individuals deliberately carried on exercising their constitutional right to protest and allowed themselves to be arrested, to create reporting opportunities for the media, all to create buzz in Israeli civil society. In total 17 activists were arrested that afternoon. About a dozen photographers captured the happenings and a basic Google search shows a thorough record of the afternoon. After being carried off and detained for many hours, the protestors appeared in court, and were released by the judge who said that the protests were legal, the arrests unlawful and illegitimate. The Israeli judiciary is a little more liberal than Israeli politics spheres. Recently, Israeli judges have grown angry and annoyed with police chiefs for illegitimately ordering en masse protestors' arrests, which has blocked up the legal system and wasted the judges' time.

One would hope that the police would stop their actions? On the contrary. Every Friday since that demonstration there've been repeat demonstrations, to show the unwavering message of groups in Israeli civil society who will not silently stand by and watch their state break international law and abuse helpless people of a particular race. Since then hundreds of protestors have re-congregated and have been arrested en masse repeatedly by the same police officers on the same charges. This is why the protestors also chant 'Police state!'

On a hill above the police on the opposite side of the road to the protestors are those Palestinian mothers and children who've been evicted from Sheikh Jarrah. They see the arrest of those activists who've worked to try to get them their homes back. They see them bundled into police vans, illegally arrested, and taken off for days' of incarceration. Some of the mothers weep. The look on the children's faces is particularly distressing to see. Children should not have to witness this sort of oppression at this age; it is traumatising and shakes them. It is the Israeli state, not the children's parents, who has the burden of responsibility fall on them for this.

Just next to the demonstration site, just behind where the police congregate, is an apartheid checkpoint through which only particular ethnic group(s) can pass through. So while there are demonstrations Israel citizens of the illegal settlement (who can pass through this checkpoint) often walk past the protestors and police officers.

In Israeli, Palestinian, and international media, such a buzz has been created recently that the UN even spoke about the evictions, demolitions, and settlements in East Jerusalem when they recently congregated for a meeting on the Middle East. This is a great and rare success. One peace activist even gave a bouquet of flowers to the chief police officer responsible for the repeated mass arrests to thank him. The Israeli media are usually completely unresponsive to domestic dissent on these sorts of issues, and when they do cover such stories there's usually an underlying assertion that the "leftists" are innately dotty. (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3838186,00.html>)

In this neighbourhood of Sheik Jarrah I once saw a girl and boy (probably siblings of about 7–8 years of age). They played with stones and rubble next to a broken barbed wire fence on a pavement next to a main road. Fifteen minutes' away in West Jerusalem Israeli children play cleanly in safety and security.

At another time I saw a Palestinian child (of about 12 years of age) selling things in the central isle in middle of a main road. Whatever he was selling was in some sort of tin. His behaviour was weird; he looked mentally disturbed. The truth is, while some Palestinian children do, Israeli children do not have to stand in the middle of main roads because they have to help sustain their families. "Israel has created a new generation of Palestinian children who are damaged", says former MP Baroness Tonge. (<http://www.savegaza.eu/index.php/Press-Release/Israeli-Officials-Must-Be-Held-Accountable-for-War-Crimes-MPs-Announce-in-British-Parliament.html>)

Gaza

About four years ago Israel justified a siege (or 'blockade') on Gaza on the pretext that it was boycotting Hamas (a 'terrorist organisation', who were democratically elected to represent the Palestinians of Gaza). The blockade, which continues today, is a collective punishment against the Gazan population and constitutes a war crime. Often the UN can't even deliver food to the Gazan people because Israel blocks all of the entrance points it controls. Egypt, who is keen to do the US' and Israel's dirty work, controls the only other entrance to Gaza and blocks that too. By the end of summer 2010 an underground wall (probably made of steel) will have been built by Egypt to prevent underground tunnels that are the mainly, and often only, Gazan access to food supplies. Israel's response to the idea of the underground barrier is that it's "impressive" and that the Egyptians are "right to prevent the smuggling of arms into Gaza". (<http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3840046,00.html>)

While Israel enjoys the twenty-fifth largest GDP per capita in the world, some Gazan women are forced to search for gravel, a basic construction material, to get some money to feed their children. (<http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/DDPQQ/member.do?method=getMembers&userid=1&queryId=135>)

At the end of January 2010, an Israeli "official dismissed reports of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza". (<http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3840046,00.html>) If that is true, why has the UN consistently claimed during

recent years that Gaza *is* in a state of humanitarian crisis? For instance, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in 2009:

“The reality on the ground was extremely shocking and disturbing, with enormous suffering and pain, widespread panic and fear, and vast devastation. The humanitarian crisis was reaching catastrophic proportions in Gaza”
(<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/ga10807.doc.htm>)

The international community has never rushed to defend the Palestinians from aggressive wars and genocidal policies. The Palestinian people are an unpeople.

It is often useful to employ Reverse Thinking: imagine a world in which during winter 2008–2009, the 13 dead were Palestinians, soldiers of a highly sophisticated army, and the ~1400 dead were Jews. I imagine there would be a third world war quite rightly as Western states activated to save innocents from genocidal onslaughts.

In the desert

In the 1948 war, 7000 Bedouins were driven out of their homelands, and made refugees, and forced to leave their livestock behind, as well as their nomadic way of life. Today, they live in shanty places, fragmented around the West Bank. During my stay I went to a Bedouin camp, just outside Jerusalem, and was grateful to be shown around by someone from Rabbis for Human Rights. Most of the Bedouins were on siestas, but those who I did see were so very warm and lovely.

There are projects in existence to help the Bedouins. For example, a school with solar-powered electricity has even been built. Israeli officials dispute the legitimacy of the school buildings, of course. The matter is currently in Israeli courts, despite the fact that the structures are on Palestinian territory. The Israelis argue that the school structures constitute buildings, however, because they have been built out of tyres and mud, there is legal murkiness regarding whether they legally constitute buildings which can be demolished.

Less than 10 minutes' away from this Bedouins' refugee shanty settlement is an illegal Israeli settlement, complete with a school, gas station, and specific security apparatus. On entering the settlement I was reminded of entering a luxury holiday complex: at the entrance was an elaborate map of the settlement, which boasted the settlement's self-sufficiency. The settlements are just like self-contained, secured mini-American dream experiments.

“We don't choose to live like this; we would also like to have beautiful homes and gardens and farms, but these privileges are only for the Israeli settlers... we are not even allowed basic services”
(In'am Bisharat, Palestinian mother of seven; Amnesty International)

Earlier I mentioned Israel's matrix of control over essential resources like water. Indeed, desert agriculture irrigation technology sustains the existence of flowers, plants, shrubbery, and trees in the illegal settlements. Israel developed this

desert agriculture technology and now exports it to the world. It has also created vast 'national forests' which are also sustained by this desert agriculture technology. Driving past these forests, one sees the drip irrigation pipes that sustain the trees' artificial life; they don't naturally belong there.

Since 2004 Israel has killed 1,000,000 living Olive trees. Olive trees were the backbone of the Palestine's economy and a symbolic feature of Palestinian society. They are not only economically and historically sacred. For many the treatment of the olive trees is metaphorical for respect for the desert landscape and the Palestinians themselves.

I mentioned earlier how, on arriving in Israel, I noticed an Israeli flag upon the corner of the apartheid wall. Israel has not only killed Olive trees but also stolen and transplanted them, from Palestinian neighbourhoods to illegal settlements, where the trees are generally put (symbolically) in the middle of roundabouts.

A former Israeli PM said Israelis should:

"Run and grab as many hilltops as they can to enlarge the settlements because everything we take now will stay ours... Everything we don't grab will go to them"

(<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090721/halltext/90721h0002.htm>)

Indeed, most of the settlements – and all I visited – are upon hilltops, providing spectacular views for settlers, but which further oppresses those Palestinians who live in communities below.

Israel pays

I mentioned earlier how I am sympathetic to Israelis and Palestinians. Admittedly Israel doesn't suffer the organised slaughter and starvation of its civilians, however there are major reasons to be in sympathy with Israelis. The conflict has deep consequences for Israelis. Damage to Israeli society is somewhat invisible, but there is a spiritual and psychological damage, caused by constant artificial, state-induced fear, hatred, and prejudice, and it's acute. Many Israelis who've lived (or their families have lived) in Israel for decades are leaving the country for it is, according to some, an "increasingly broken society". The country suffers from 30% brain drain (high-skilled graduates leaving the country, seeking citizenship elsewhere).

An aspect of this 'broken society' is that it is increasingly militant. Most Israelis must do military and/or civil service, before moving on to higher education. This is part of the state's propaganda and indoctrination system. Therefore, most Israeli adults have experience with guns and other weapons. In walking around Jerusalem one sees dozens of youngsters carrying assault rifles on their shoulders; they are on military service – the military society is plainly visible.

As is also true in the UK, in Israel delinquency and alcohol-related issues increasingly affect youth. Israelis pay deeply for the status quo. There are often

Israeli cases of young people committing alcohol-induced Russian roulette suicide.

Resolution

I've never been very interested in fiction because when we pay attention to realities around us, we can see that the most complex and deep stories are right there. This is so true in the case of the troubled lands which I visited. The reality there is desperate and overflowing with inhumanity. You simply couldn't make it up. There's such an overwhelming moral injustice that it feels like 'something' is waiting for the conflict to be fairly resolved and for peace to be properly obtained before political, social, and spiritual balances can be realised.

Israel has managed to create a reality that is so sick and morally unjust that "now nobody can deny it because [Israel has] made it too obvious" (<http://emergencemusic.net/node/118>). Members of the UK Parliament who've recently returned from the Gaza strip are proclaiming, "War criminals... must be punished for their actions - in this case, the devastation of the Gaza Strip, home to nearly 1.5 million people. ... War criminals must not be allowed to escape accountability under the cover of law, in Great Britain or elsewhere.", said a member of the House of Lords. The organiser of the visiting delegation to Gaza said, "this delegation is not the first and will not be the last", which is good news. (<http://www.savegaza.eu/index.php/Press-Release/Israeli-Officials-Must-Be-Held-Accountable-for-War-Crimes-MPs-Announce-in-British-Parliament.html>)

However, Israel clearly has other plans to counteract the buzz being generated by these few visiting delegations, as it recently prevented a French foreign minister, a Turkish minister, and a Belgian minister from visiting the Gaza strip saying it would "bolster" and "legitimize" the democratically elected Gazan administration – known as Hamas – which Israel, in orchestra with the US, Canada, UK, et al. class as a 'terrorist organisation'. Deputy Israeli Foreign Minister Daniel Eyalon said, "Political visits are prohibited". (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3839001,00.html>)

Some say the conflict will be resolved only by international pressure (esp. economic – e.g. boycotting, divestment, and sanctioning). The hoodlums say the conflict won't be solved until one side is dead proper. Others say that it is Jews, both in Israel and in the Diaspora who will move to resolve the conflict. However, I believe every avenue must be pursued – including activation of as many people as possible the world over – and that only this is a necessary and sufficient condition for peace to be properly realised.

Indeed, as Noam Chomsky once said:

"There are no magic answers, no miraculous methods to overcome the problems we face; just the familiar ones: honest search for understanding, education, organization, [and] action that raises the cost of state violence for its perpetrators"

(<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article18492.htm>)

[End]

Act now

The quickest way to get involved is to support organisations' campaigns like those below. Why not sign up to a couple and see how things proceed?

- War on Want's Palestine Campaign (<http://www.waronwant.org/campaigns/fighting-occupation-in-palestine>)
- Palestine Solidarity Campaign (<http://www.palestinecampaign.org>)
- Global BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) for Palestine (<http://www.bdsmovement.net>)
- MediaLens (<http://www.medialens.org>)
- Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (<http://www.icahd.org>)

Author

Harry Fear has been interested in the Israel–Palestine conflict since 2007. He visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in early January 2010 and wrote this follow-up piece on his return. In general, his interests are the state of the mainstream media in Western societies, foreign politics, and human rights.

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