

Three points on Israel

by Günther Lanier

You could call me the unlikely combination of a pro-Palestinian anti-Israeli authorities Zionist. Consider the following:

- There is probably no state with as good a reason of existence as Israel¹⁾. Atrocities committed against Jews during Nazi times are almost beyond description. But also look at how wide-spread anti-semitism is to this day (synagogues and Jewish cemeteries keep being attacked in Western Germany – not by Arabs but by neo-fascists). And there have to this very day been only ridiculous not-even-half attempts at compensation for Aryanisation²⁾. And anti-semitism is by no means restricted to Austria and Germany. It exists everywhere, in the former Soviet Union and other transition countries as much as in the haven of capitalism, the USA. To this day, there is not a safe place in the world for Jews³⁾. If the world was just, then the territory for the state of Israel would probably consist of parts of Austria and Germany - to somehow make up for Nazi crimes. In the early days of Zionism it was by no means clear that Israel would be established in Palestine⁴⁾: lands in Argentina were at some stage an equally plausible choice. Then ‘the land of the bible’ was selected (there was more of a ring to the place, and it was easier to reach from European countries where future immigrants would mostly come from). Colonial policies then started Jews and Arabs off on the road to the present impasse.
- Nowadays, in Israel and especially in the ‘occupied territories’ (i.e. the West Bank and the Gaza strip) Palestinians are second-rate citizens. There are definite parallels with South Africa’s former apartheid system. Palestinians are harassed (e.g. at the innumerable road blocks – freely passed by Israelis), discriminated against (irrigation water rates are substantially higher for Palestinians than for Israelis), subjected to humiliation (at confrontations with Israeli security forces), and they are the main ones to get killed when there is trouble (like now). Yes: Israel has to be strong because the Jews need to be protected, need to be safe somewhere in the world (are they safe in a permanent state of war in Israel?). I was in Israel and Palestine⁵⁾ at a time of ‘peace’. I have walked through the Arab parts of Jerusalem, I went to Nablus, Bethlehem, Hebron. Hebron was worst. In that Palestinian city, a few fairly recently arrived Israeli settlers live under the heavy protection of Israeli security forces. I walked through the souks (market) in the very centre of Hebron amongst the Arabs and very few other tourists. I had Israeli soldiers sitting in towers specially put on top of houses right above the narrow lanes of the souks pointing their guns down at us, vigilantly. I do not believe they were there to protect me, let alone the Arabs. And the situation in the Gaza strip is reputedly a lot worse: living conditions are appalling, the population density of the mostly poor inhabitants is extremely high. Sealing off the borders means on top of all that that people lose their livelihood – which most earn as ‘foreign workers’ in Israel proper. Intifada (the large scale uprising of Palestinians in the occupied territories that started in the late 1980s; Intifada has recently been proclaimed again by some Palestinian groups), Intifada under such conditions of constant and severe oppression become more than understandable. The potential for an outbreak of violence is omnipresent⁶⁾. Forgive my solidarity with the oppressed and not with the mighty gunmen!
- My third point starts from Noam’s and Jonathan’s and Einat’s presentation in Global Affairs. I was amazed at the persistent usage of ‘we’ when one of them referred to Israel (and they say that they have major disagreements as to Israeli politics). ‘Their’ state has apparently very successfully brainwashed them into totally identifying themselves with ‘the collective’ meaning the state. Beyond that, they were shockingly incapable of presenting a Palestinian side of things. How deep is that rift – if even they, who are to some extent friends with the Mohammeds and with Nadia – cannot bridge it! And I am by no means attacking them only – I mean all nationalists. How inconsequential is reason if, in times of stress and conflict, it gives in to the ‘animal spirits’ of blind patriotism, ethnocentrism, chauvinism? And I know most Israelis and most Austrians and Canadians and Mexicans ... are a lot ‘worse’ than us

here at MUWCI, a lot less open to reasonable arguments, more prone to fall prey to government propaganda. How easy it is to rule over such people! How easy it is to manipulate them! Pity on us all!

- 1) I am by no means implying that 'states' are good or even necessary institutions.
- 2) Aryanisation is the Nazis' name for theft of property from the Jews and transfer of ownership to 'Aryans'.
- 3) Everybody of course has an equal right to live in peace. It is a right denied the poor more often than the rich.
- 4) geographical sense here.
- 5) The term is used in its political sense here; it refers to the territories (West Bank + Gaza) subject to the Oslo and other agreements between Israel's political authorities (especially prime ministers Rabin, Netanyahu, now Barak) and the Palestinians represented by their 'president' Arafat
- 6) Do not misunderstand - this is not what I would do. I would try to get away as quickly as possible. But I am rich and mobile. Also: Do not misconstrue the afore-written for overall support for the Palestinians: I hold their nationalism to be as bad as the Israelis', and women are on average treated even worse there.