

April Memories: Israel's Birthday, Palestine's Tragedy Commemorated

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“No person has the right to rain on your dreams.” (Martin Luther King, 1929-1968.)

Many dreams have been rained on since peace was declared at the end of the Second World War, on 8th May 1945.(i) Two veritable historic hurricanes were commemorated on 9th April, as was the burial of the man who dreamed: Martin Luther King.

The day Baghdad fell nine years ago, also marked the massacre in, and near destruction of, the Palestinian village of Deir Yassin by Jewish forces sixty four years before.

Ironically, in the month the State of Israel has arranged world-wide sixty fourth birthday celebrations (26th April) Palestine marked the sixty fourth anniversary of butchery and carnage, as almond , olive blossoms and spring flowers painted the surrounding slopes with fragrant life.

It also marked more than the day's nightmare, it heralded the policy of the “cleansing” of Palestine's villages. The displacement, destruction and still counting, the ever diminishing and fragmentation of what was Palestine.

Deir Yassin marked the first time Jewish forces had gone on the attack, setting a precedent, and an ongoing weeping wound through the collective Palestinian soul, as year after year, homes, farms, orchards, livelihoods even fishing is destroyed, disrupted - or separated by the Wall, “an iron curtain which has descended” across their land.

A graphic description of the attack on the village comes from the diaries (ii) of the Swiss representative of the International Red Cross, Jaques de Renier who was first to reach the site. He was let in by an “enormous German born member of the Irgun”, who told Renier he owed his life to the Red Cross.

The Irgun and Stern gang, had denied any involvement in the events at Deir Yassin and accused Ha Haganah (“The Defence”) the paramilitary organization under the British mandate of Palestine, who, subsequently became the core of the IDF (Israeli Defence Force.)

Sir Alan Cunningham, Britain's High Commissioner, later firmly laid the blame with the Irgun and Stern gangs.

The spectacle on entry, made Reynier “gasp”, as did the youth of many attackers, men and women, some mere adolescents. “There were people rushing everywhere, in and out of houses, carrying Sten guns, rifles, pistols, long ornate knives. They seemed half mad. I saw

a beautiful girl carrying a dagger still covered with blood. I heard screams.” The German remarked: “We’re still mopping up.”

“All that I could think of was the SS troops I’d seen in Athens”, Reynier wrote, witnessing: “A young woman stab and elderly man and woman, cowering on the doorstep of their hut.”

In the first house he reached: “Everything had been ripped apart, there were bodies strewn around ... ‘cleaning up’ was done with guns and grenades, their work finished with knives.” Seeing a movement, he discovered: “a little foot, still warm.” A ten year old girl “mutilated by a grenade”, was alive, who the German carried to an ambulance. Renier found an elderly woman hiding behind a woodpile: “paralyzed with fear”, and a dying man.

He estimated he saw two hundred bodies, one a woman, probably eight months pregnant, shot in the stomach. There were butchered infants. Schoolgirls and elderly women were raped then murdered. Ears had been severed to remove ear rings, bracelets were torn from arms and rings from fingers.

It subsequently transpired that the dead were taken to the rock quarry where the villagers had made their living from the expert stone cutting, for which they were renowned. The bodies were doused in petrol and set alight.

“It was a lovely spring day. The almond blossoms were in bloom ,the flowers were out and everywhere there was the stench of the dead, the smell of blood and the terrible odour of the corpses burning in the quarry”, recalled a horrified Officer, Yeshurun Schiff, who in spite of the horrors he had witnessed could not bring himself to order revenge on the perpetrators because, he decided, Jewish history was: “too full of stories of fratricidal struggles”, to start another now in their new land.

A further tragic irony was the good relationship the village enjoyed with the neighbouring village of Orthodox Jewish settlers. The village arranged signals to warn them if Arab dissidents were approaching them and might attack, and the Jewish residents warned if their own dissidents were in the vicinity. The pre-dawn attack foiled that.

Jewish residents of Palestine overwhelmingly condemned and abhorred the attacks. In an extraordinary move, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem excommunicated those responsible.

An appeal by the Arab Emergency Committee to the British to intervene to halt violence fell on the stone deaf ears of General Sir Gordon MacMillan, who said he would risk British lives only in the: “British interest.” Nothing changes.

The quiet hero that day, was the Red Cross’s Reynier, who rescued survivors, having been threatened by: “A dozen soldiers, their machine guns aimed at my body. I flew in to one of the most towering rages of my life, telling these criminals what I thought of them and threatening them with everything I could think of and then pushed them aside.”

On 10th April 1948, Albert Einstein wrote a searing, five line damnation to Shepard Rifkin, Executive Director of American Friends for the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel.

It read:

“When a real and final catastrophe should befall us in Palestine, the first

responsible for it would be the British and the second responsible for it the Terrorist organizations built up from our own ranks (Jewish.)

“I am not willing to see anybody associated with those misled and criminal people.

Sincerely yours, Albert Einstein.” (Facsimile: iii.)

A year later the settlement of Givat Shaul Beth was founded. In the 1980s the remains of Deir Yassin was bulldozed to make way for settlements, as was much of the cemetery, to make way for a highway. The streets of the new neighbourhoods were named after members of the Irgun and Hagannah.

The British shadow is long, over the remnants of Palestine. Their Mandate passed the right of house demolitions to the local military Commander, without limit or appeal in 1945. Although they stated it was repealed in 1948, they failed to follow the correct legal procedure ensure the rescinding had validity in law, thus demolitions are still carried out under the sixty seven year old British Directive 119.

Deir Yassin was one act which led to the flight of 700,000 Palestinians. Since 1967 to June 2011, 24,813 Palestinian homes have been destroyed with not one permit issued for Palestinians for any construction in the Occupied Territories, formerly their land.

According to the Israeli Civil Administration, in the first five months of 2011, Israeli forces demolished more Palestinian homes than in the entire year of 2010, rendering homeless seven hundred and six Palestinians, of which three hundred and forty one were minors.(iv)

Further, the first draft of a law passed by a Committee of the Knesset (Parliament) last June requires, if it becomes full law, Palestinians who have their homes demolished by Israeli forces to carry the full costs of the destruction of their homes.

“Already, many Palestinian homeowners, mainly in Jerusalem, have been forced to pay for the forced demolition of their homes.”

It is perhaps apt that Deir Yassin, where this insanity arguably began is now also the site of the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Centre, a large psychiatric hospital.

The demolitions are carried out using US-made D9 bulldozers, manufactured by the Caterpillar corporation, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Einstein would surely have wept.

In April 1963, in his Letter from Birmingham Jail(v) Martin Luther King wrote: “We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.”

Heartening however, is whether in flotillas, last week’s “flytilla”, across the world, in actions globally too numerous to count, Jewish people from every walk of life, including doughty Holocaust survivors, are joining those from countless nations, as they are in Israel itself, demanding an end to the divide, the oppression, and, as Ilan Pappé has written so eloquently(vi) the collective paranoia of Israel’s : “... rollercoaster of mass hysteria.”

Notes

- i. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_wars_1945-1989
- ii. <http://www.amazon.com/O-Jerusalem-Larry-Collins/dp/0671662414>
- iii. <http://www.ifamericansknew.org/history/ter-einstein.html>
- iv. <http://www.imemc.org/article/61573>
- v. <http://www.mlkonline.net/jail.html>
- vi. <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=30409>

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