

Israel, the Media, and the Anatomy of a Sick Society

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The [video](#) of 13 year old Palestinian Ahmed Manasrah bleeding to death on the pavement of an East Jerusalem neighborhood has been described as “shocking,” “disturbing,” and “painful to watch.” The callous verbal abuse and insults from Israelis watching the child writhe in agony are variously characterized as “heartless” and “cruel”; and indeed they are. “Die you son of a whore. Die! Die!” the Israeli onlookers can be heard shouting in the video which has since gone viral on social media.

While there has been much discussion of this video, and other similar incidents involving the extrajudicial executions of Palestinian youths accused by Israel of having stabbed Israelis (the veracity of some of these claims is disputed), there is decidedly little examination of the sociological implications. Specifically, it has become taboo to interrogate just what sort of ideological and psychological conclusions can be drawn about Israelis society – a society where such behavior is not an outlier; where, rather than being an anomaly, it is indicative of a significant, if not mainstream, attitude. Such undeniably barbaric treatment is not simple hate, and cannot be explained away or justified. But that is precisely what the corporate media does.



Suffice to say that there are many political analysts, activists, and others who are timid about outright condemnations of Israeli society and Israeli attitudes. They are, with much justification, fearful of being demonized as anti-Semitic, terrified that rather than open dialogue and critical examination, they will have their arguments twisted and portrayed as hateful and racist. While such accusations are sometimes warranted – as in the case of fascist bigots and neo-Nazis for whom “Jew” is synonymous with “evil” – more often than not these are willfully deceptive deflections designed to shield Israeli society from the criticism that it so clearly deserves.

But those whose interest is in justice and speaking the truth cannot be silent, cannot allow themselves to become the victims of self-censorship induced by fear. For muted criticism of Israel is in fact a failure to properly defend oppressed people; it is an abdication of the responsibility to speak against injustice, the brutality of colonialism, and the inhumanity of contemporary Zionism. It is equally an abandonment of the duty to deconstruct dominant narratives in the interest of social justice, to challenge the propaganda of corporate media whose primary function is to shield power from the uncomfortable light of criticism. I cannot, and will not, be silent.

Media Propaganda and the Danger of False Equivalence

Reading the New York Times, Washington Post, and other allegedly liberal major media outlets, one could be forgiven for thinking that the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is tit-for-tat, that it is the product of an ongoing cause-effect-counter-effect relationship. That is precisely how the conflict is portrayed in nearly all so-called 'respectable' papers.

Take, for instance, an article published in America's "paper of record," the New York Times, just hours after the incident with the headline [*Stabbings, and Deadly Responses, Add to Israel's Security Challenge*](#). In deconstructing the headline alone, it is clear where the bias and deception lies; the Times imbues the very headline of the article with a presumption of guilt on the part of the Palestinians. According to the syntactic logic of the headline's construction, it is the "stabbings" (presented first) which are the root of the problem and, therefore, the "deadly responses" are just that, responses. The effect is to justify the murder of Palestinians by portraying them as simply responses to an external factor: violence against Israelis.

But of course anyone who has even a rudimentary understanding of the issues knows that the stabbings are themselves responses to the attacks by [Israeli settlers](#) and [security forces](#) on Palestinians, as well as the predictable outgrowth of seemingly endless brutality and occupation, poverty and despair. The history of colonialism is replete with such examples.

And yet Israelis, and the Israeli state itself, are presented as the victims. The headline frames the issue as being one of a "security challenge" for Israel, rather than, say, a colonialism problem, or a vicious occupation. So, taken in total then, the headline and accompanying article have the cumulative effect of making the victims into perpetrators, and perpetrators into victims, thereby inverting the oppressor/oppressed relationship. This inversion is absolutely necessary in order to whitewash Israel's crimes, and absolve the state and its fanatical, fascist far right of guilt.

Even the allegedly even-handed treatment of the issue by a presumably moderate liberal outlet such as NBC News, belies a dishonest treatment of the conflict and the recent violence. In covering the incident, NBC News published a story about the Ahmed Manasrah shooting and subsequent taunting with the headline [*Viral Video of Shot Ahmed Manasrah Sums Up Israel-Palestinian Conflict*](#). The article purports to present the issue fairly by presenting the events surrounding Ahmed's heinous shooting as emblematic of the entire conflict. Essentially, NBC News here tries to present the competing narratives of Israeli and Palestinian sources as indicative of the broader struggle for public opinion, trying to convince readers that the ongoing allegations and counter-allegations are just more of the same, and that the truth is simply unknowable; after all, Israeli sources say X, Palestinian sources say Y. I guess we'll never know.

The reader of the NBC article is left with the utterly dishonest, though politically very useful, conclusion that both sides are equally guilty, equally worthy of blame, and that the conflict itself is beyond critical analysis. Moreover, in presenting the issue in this way, the outlet, in this case NBC, is seen as fair, as having provided a balanced accounting. In reality however, it has simply obscured the true nature of the conflict: one between a colonial oppressor and its victims, displaced and dispossessed systematically for seven decades.

But false equivalence aside, by obscuring the truth of the issue, NBC News here inadvertently reveals something fundamentally true about the conflict; that, indeed, this incident very much "sums up the Israel-Palestine conflict." Though they didn't intend it this

way, NBC News correctly exposes the fact that the behavior of the Israelis on camera is clearly emblematic of the broader society of Israel, one which sees Palestinian children as “dogs,” and “sons of whores” unfit to breathe, unworthy of living.

The Pathology of Israeli Fascism

What the Ahmed Manasrah video laid bare for the world to see is the inhumanity of Zionism, a Jewish supremacist ideology which necessarily places non-Jews in an inferior relation to Jews, which places less value on the life of the non-Jew. It is not simple hatred that motivated the disgusting comments from the onlookers, it is an ingrained, inter-generational sense of superiority bred of dehumanization of the Palestinian, and the Arab generally.

This fundamental fact is only very rarely discussed, but it lies at the heart of the Palestine conflict. By seeing Arabs as subhuman, many Israelis are able to justify, often on an unconscious level, all forms of brutality, violence, and oppression. It should be said here that there are some Israelis who fight against just such thinking (Gideon Levy is perhaps the most prominent and vocal opponent of such supremacist ideology), but sadly they are drowned out by the rabid barbarism of the Israeli right (and much of the center, it must be said).

And this phenomenon, quick to get you rhetorically tarred and feathered as an anti-Semite, is what underlies all Israeli policies, and the active or passive acceptance of those policies by the Israeli body politic. While Ahmed Manasrah bleeding to death amid a swirl of insults from Israelis may elicit a brief outpouring of shock on social media, it is merely one instance of such violence. Is it really that different from Israeli bulldozers demolishing countless Palestinian homes? Is it somehow more barbaric than the [torching](#) of Palestinian homes with babies sleeping inside?

Perhaps it would be best not to express shock and outrage at the video, but rather to see it as the logical outgrowth of the fascist, supremacist ideology espoused by the leaders of the Israeli state. For the Israelis on the video are merely following the example of leaders such as Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked who, at the height of Israel’s criminal war on Gaza in the summer of 2014, infamously [wrote](#):

The Palestinian people has declared war on us, and we must respond with war. Not an operation, not a slow-moving one, not low-intensity, not controlled escalation, no destruction of terror infrastructure, no targeted killings. Enough with the oblique references. This is a war...It is not a war against terror, and not a war against extremists, and not even a war against the Palestinian Authority...This is a war between two people. Who is the enemy? The Palestinian people... What’s so horrifying about understanding that the entire Palestinian people is the enemy? Every war is between two peoples, and in every war the people who started the war, that whole people, is the enemy... Behind every terrorist stand dozens of men and women, without whom he could not engage in terrorism. They are all enemy combatants, and their blood shall be on all their heads. Now this also includes the mothers of the martyrs... They should follow their sons, nothing would be more just. They should go, as should the physical homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more little snakes will be raised there.

Such rhetoric, with all the attendant dehumanization, is reminiscent of any number of fascist ideologies, from German Nazism of the 1930s to the contemporary Ukrainian politics of

Right Sector and Azov Battalion. The notion of “total war” against an entire people, including non-combatant women and children, is really beyond simple war propaganda, it is the advocacy of genocide and ethnic cleansing.

And this is exactly the point: ethnic cleansing as both a concept and military objective has become the political currency of modern Israel. So why should it surprise anyone when young Israelis wish death upon a bleeding Palestinian, calling him a “son of a whore.” After all, isn’t Ahmed Manasrah just another “little snake”?

...And One More Thing

If past history is any indicator, what has been written above will undoubtedly elicit some negative reactions, condemnations, hate mail, and insults of every sort. “Anti-Semite,” “traitor,” and “self-hater” are some of the most common epithets I’ve heard countless times when I’ve written or spoken out about Israel, Zionism, Jewish supremacy, and such issues. Not only do such obloquies not deter me, they motivate me to further speak out because they are an indication that the words are striking a nerve, one that is raw, and desperately in need of exposure.

I equally recognize the privilege with which I write these lines. As an avowed atheist who rejects the ethno-nationalism and tribalism inherent in the political ideology of Zionism, my Jewish background provides me with a modicum of insulation from accusations of anti-Semitism (not that it stops them, of course). Not only does that allow me greater latitude to write and speak freely on these issues, it reminds me that I have a duty to do so.

For those who don’t righteously oppose the crimes of imperialism, colonialism, oppression, and genocide are undoubtedly complicit in them. I, for one, will not be.

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