



Palestinian statehood – a non-starter?

Interview with the Israeli human rights lawyer, Ms Lynda Brayer, Haifa, Israel.

Since 9/11 we have been facing a kind of neocolonial déjà vu. The old imperial and colonial powers are all over the place and reoccupying one country after another on their periphery and the so-called critical and enlightened civil society keeps quiet or even applauds to this kind of open aggression. Please could you describe the national and international setting for this unprecedented process of recapture of the former colonies?

Actually this neo-colonialism began immediately following the collapse of the former USSR. The first Gulf War took place because the US no longer feared any interference from the Soviets. The lack of a balance of power in the world today seems to account for all the neo-colonialist ventures, all of which have taken place as a result of the perpetual need of capital to accumulate. As we know though, capital reached its peak in the early 1970's, and since then it has been searching for ways to find profit. Globalization is the latest manifestation of monopolistic capitalism, or imperialism. I don't like the term 'civil society' at all. I am not sure what is even meant by it. For instance, in Palestine, it is used to describe civilians, in contra-distinction to whom? Or what? To Hamas? To resistant fighters?

It is my considered opinion that the brainwashing in the West, which actually is a continuation of the war propaganda from WW II, is the reason for the silence of what at one time we might have called "intellectuals". But maybe there simply are none anymore. If one reads the Israeli papers, and also the New York Times, I believe, there is unceasing references to the Holocaust. I believe that this is to keep people thinking that "they", in this case the Germans, were evil, whilst "we" are good. As if these are static values. It is part of the propaganda that George W. Bush used when he described Iran, and Iraq, as being part of the "axis of evil", the term "axis" of course referring obliquely to the "axis" powers of WW II and the horrors of the Holocaust. People in the West, which now includes Germany, consider themselves the "allies", the "good guys". Being "good" is a status – not a description of behavior.

But basically, I think that liberal politics has always been a cover for capitalism. It is the capitalist political project that keeps the barbarism of capitalism hidden from view. Of course the way this has been done has been the vilification of the USSR and the persecution of communists, anarchists and socialists in the US. Eugene Debs, the socialist leader in the early part of the 20th century was imprisoned, Sacco and Vanzetti were hung because they were anarchists, and the Rosenbergs were executed because they were communists. The McCarthy era wiped out all leftist thinking in the US.

In Europe, you know about the CIA operated covert terrorist operations (Operation Gladio L. W.), carried out to delegitimize communism. Marx is hardly studied in the West today and most definitely only on the fringes in the U. S. It is this total lack of understanding of capitalism and its continuous persecution of those who resist it, which has produced the non-critical "civil society" which is neither civil, nor not much of a society.

The West tries to justify its occupation policy with expressions like "war on terror" or "humanitarian" intervention or in the case of Libya with "responsibility to act". How do these slogans stand up to international law?

They don't. They have been invented to side-step international law and have introduced what used to be called

barbarism into international relations. The laws governing the opening of warfare and its conduct have been set aside completely. More than anything else, we see that the concept and practice of *hors de combat*, that is, that part of the population, the overwhelming majority, who are unarmed civilians, are no longer a protected category of people. This in itself is totally barbaric.

Do the U. S. and its Western cronies try to destroy the rules that have been governed international behavior since 1648? Do they want chaos instead of the rule of law?

One of the greatest illusions in the West is the liberal political discourse which does not refer to the power and impetus of capitalism. People think that religion causes wars: they do not usually. It is the desire for control of resources and their distribution, and which requires the exercise of power, which causes wars. What we as human beings call chaos, is marvelous for capital. Because if capital causes and controls the chaos, that is, exercises power for its own interests, obviously at the expense of most human beings, then the “chaos” as you call it, prevents the establishment of another power. At the beginning of the Second Gulf War in Iraq, I understood how the destruction of order in Iraq, and the chaos created, served capital. Not the Iraqi people of course. We shall see the same chaos in Libya serving these Western Capitalistic interests with the people paying a very heavy price.

In the light of the current power structure in the international system, is it the appropriate time for the Palestinian Authority to ask the United Nations to recognize their statehood?

In this current political dispensation of the unrestricted actions of the U. S. government, its domination of the UN, NATO and apparently the European Union, we are witness to the meaninglessness of state sovereignty. The U. S. with NATO has just toppled the Gaddafi government of Libya without any provocation at all. Libya is a sovereign state. So what does this mean? It is about to begin to topple Bashar al-Assad in Syria, and we know that it is waiting to attack Iran. All these three countries have armies but as we saw in Libya it cannot stand up to an attack by NATO. What can Palestinian statehood mean today? In the fact of the U. S. and Israel? Not much, I am afraid.

The so-called peace negotiations since 1993 have gone nowhere. The Palestinians seems to be fed up. What impact would an official recognition of a “State of Palestine” by the UN have on the reality on the ground? Which Palestinian arguments could convince you?

I do not think that a Palestinian state is possible as long as there is a Jewish colonial settlement in Palestine, called the State of Israel. 62 years of no statehood and growing and expanding Jewish colonization seem to prove this point.

This is a very radical view that I cannot identify with. But let us put differences in opinion aside: The U. S. and the rest of the West have been reluctant to do anything against the occupation of Palestine. What are the reasons for such a behavior? Does not Israel’s policy contradicts all the Western rhetoric about the so-called Western values?

The West and the US are not interested in a Palestinian state. In fact, they, together with the Israelis, are hoping the Palestinians will disappear. The blockade on Gaza is a form of genocidal punishment and all the actions taken by Israel against the Palestinians are done to harm damage and fragment and possibly destroy their society. This is a form of genocide – a killing of a people, as opposed to the killing of individuals. Western rhetoric is just that – flatis vocis. They are liars.

Is Israel a useful Western tool in the imperial strategy of the West in order to create tensions in the Middle East and to strengthen its control over the oil resources of this region?

I believe Israel is in the Middle East to control tensions – not create them. The tensions arise from Western imperialist theft of Middle Eastern resources. And the support of governments which govern in favor of the capitalist imperialists and not their own people. This is what brought about the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Israel is here to prevent that kind of thing happening.

Do you think that an independent Palestinian state is possible in the near future?

I don't think that is a useful way of thinking. I think we should think of how to resist imperialism in the Middle East. The oppression of Palestinians is imperialist policy.

What are the major obstacles against the self-determination of the Palestinian people? Is it Zionist ideology or the Israel and the US-American intransigence?

Capitalism. Self-determination was made up by President Wilson to destroy the then existing empires – Austro—Hungarian and the Ottoman. But it has never been a universally applied political doctrine or practice. Zionist ideology is a tool of capitalism.

I believe that the political entities of nation-states are not the power centers where the big decisions are taken. They are the executive centers. The decisions are taken in the towers of capital – amongst the bankers and the big capitalists – oil, and the big concerns, like Halliburton etc. Our question has to be how we dismantle these entities which control our world to the detriment of human beings.

After all strategies against Israel's brutal occupation have failed, some Palestinians and large sectors of the civil society around the world have started the BDS movement (boycott, divestment, and sanctions). They are using the same tool that brought apparently the Apartheid regime in South Africa to its knees. Will this campaign succeed?

I think that the BDS movement must be seen as marginal, because its organizers have not exhibited any serious or deep understanding of the actual political problems facing Palestinians in the manner in which I have described. Furthermore, the sanctions against South Africa, which is the model they have adopted, did not bring the South African apartheid regime to an end. Rather, the acquiescence and agreement of the ANC and the South African Communist party to a continuation of the neoliberal capitalist regime, with no expropriation of assets and land nor their redistribution to Black owners and citizens, is what permitted the end of the openly racist regime. No preparation for a transfer of land in the form of agricultural training courses for Black farmers, to prevent a reduction in food supply (as happened in Zimbabwe) took place, nor did civil service training take place on a scale demanded in the circumstances. In South Africa today, the class divisions continue as before, without the legal framework of deliberate racism as in *apartheid*. A Black plutocracy serves as a fig leaf for those continuing and profound inequalities of wealth and power which existed under *apartheid* and which have never been ameliorated. The tragic irony is that the average Black person is worse off than he or she was under the hated Afrikaner Nationalist regime. The Palestinian negotiators might well be compared to the black South African plutocracy for what they have to offer I believe, can be and will be only a continuation of the terrible life conditions in both Gaza and the West Bank, if not worse.

Some of their protagonists call also for a one state solution for Israel and Palestine. Knowing the Zionist mindset, this idea seems totally out of place. As an Israeli citizen, which chance would you give such an idea? And how many Israeli would support it?

I propose instead, as part of the resistance, a serious attempt to theorize the illegitimacy of the Jewish settler

colony in all of Palestine, and not to grant it the status of a legitimate sovereign state in any part. It must be regarded as an illegitimate political entity which has served to provide privileges for foreign Jews in Palestine at the quite deliberate expense of the native local population.

The governing principle for the future political dispensation in the Middle East must be the principle of unification. It must be understood very clearly that unification must be the struggle of all the local populations against the divisions and fragmentations imposed in the region by foreign imperialist capitalist powers. Unification confronts the imperialist motto "divide and rule" with "unify for strength!" My particular political inclination is to seriously push for an opening up of the political question of "Syria Tabiyya" - natural Syria, or Balady Shams – the Semitic/Arab Country. For the sake of the people in the region there should be a return to the unified territory of Greater Syria before its fragmentation by the then imperialist powers of France and England. The carving up of Greater Syria has had disastrous consequences for the local population and has most definitely held up its development and overall well-being. It has also deprived the region of the richness and interest of its cosmopolitan character as it existed prior to its divisions and most definitely prior to the 1948 carving out of the Jewish state in Palestine. Only a few Jews would support this idea at this time. But I daresay that the Arab populations would very much appreciate it.

I do have to object again. The state of Israel is recognized by three quarters of the members of the United Nations. How can it be illegitimate? But let us continue with the interview. When all these strategies fail to bring about Palestinian statehood what remains? Is there an alternative force to the Abbas regime, and would they have to bring about a change in behavior of the Israel political class?

The U. S. and Israel do not allow an independent leadership. The U. S. and Israel are the problem. There is no solution as long as they have the power. The Israelis, and Palestinians and their supporters who would like a free and independent and socialist Middle East must continue fighting together.

Do you think that the uprisings in the Arab world will help the Palestinian cause in the long run?

If they can manage to overthrow the capitalist regime, then yes. But in the long run, the capitalists might collapse because they are like the pelican which eats its own young. In order to accumulate its profits it must destroy – and hopefully it will destroy itself before it destroys us.

Ms Brayer, thanks for the interview.

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