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Ugly reverberations from the orgy of killing and destruction in the Gaza Strip

- Homepage - News - External sources -

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"Decent fellows"

Ugly reverberations continue to be felt in all sectors of Israeli society from the orgy of killing and destruction that Israel's army of invasion carried out in the Gaza Strip - first and foremost within the army itself.

At the height of the wave of suicide-bombings, there was a lot of talk in Israel, from the political and senior military echelons on down to regular Israelis as reflected in the "talkbacks", about "the Arab mentality that does not sanctify life" or "the Muslim religion that preaches murder". I do not think that those allegations are correct. I have written more than once in the past that there is no religion that is clean of martyrdom, just as one can find in all religions values that sanctify life. These allegations express an Israeli feeling of superiority, to the effect that "we Jews are different; we are part of the civilized world that sanctifies life". Not exactly.

It turns out that suicide is one of the values of the Israeli army. Before the entry into Gaza, a brigade commander in the Golani regiment was recorded telling his soldiers that if a soldier is abducted he should blow himself up with a grenade. In other words, better to commit suicide than fall into captivity. An IDF spokesman who was asked about the army's response reply reaction expressed no reservations about that directive.

More than once the media in Israel have published excerpts from sermons by imams in mosques that are full of harsh words about Israel. Among us it is no different. The chief military rabbi, the settler Brig.-Gen. Avichai Ronski, distributed material to soldiers who were invading Gaza that included right-wing political expressions that had a racist tinge, such as "it is forbidden under the [Jewish] Law to concede one millimetre of the Land of Israel to the Gentiles. We will not leave it in the hands of another people, not even a finger of it, not even a fingernail". The chief military rabbi told the soldiers that "there is no innocent population ... the morality of the Torah says 'woe unto the wicked' [Isaiah 3:11] and woe unto his neighbour. We appeal for the disregard of foreign doctrines and orders of all kinds that distort the logical process of combat - the destruction of the enemy."

In other words, the chief military rabbi is telling the soldiers of the invasion force that a civilian population including women, children and old people is part of the enemy that must be destroyed. That material is intended "to strengthen the soldiers' morale".

When that is the message it is not to surprising that 400 children and more than a hundred women were killed, not to mention the thousands of wounded, including a great many women, children and seniors.

Colonel Pnina Sharvit-Baruch is the head of the international law branch of the Military Advocate General (the legal department of the IDF). She and other members of the branch closely monitored the army's actions in Gaza and provided judicial authorization for the mass killing and destruction. According to the judicial analysis that she gave to the army, the conversion of Gaza into a kind of Warsaw Ghetto - as a UN official put it after he surveyed the terrible devastation - is in conformity with international law. Renowned experts in the field of international law, from Israel and abroad, have expressed the view that the war in Gaza entailed a great many war crimes and that all who took part in it, from the privates all the way up to the generals and members of the government, are indeed liable to prosecution.

Ms Pnina Sharvit-Baruch will soon be released from the army and she has already been accepted as a lecturer in international law at the Tel Aviv University faculty of law. There are lecturers at the university who have expressed astonishment and criticism at this appointment. Dr. Anat Matar, a lecturer in the philosophy department, said "I was shocked to discover that this year half of the second-year law students will learn the fundamental principles of international law from someone who whitewashed the killing of civilians, including hundreds of children."

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Prof. Haim Gans, a senior lecturer at the faculty of law, wrote to the dean of the faculty, Prof. Hanoch Dagan, that Pnina Sharvit-Baruch "interpreted the laws of war for the army in the recent Gaza war in a manner that paved the way for the commission of acts that are suspected of being war crimes."

To that the dean replied: "the faculty does not have to examine and evaluate the judicial, political and moral positions of its teachers, as long as they are within the framework of the law and what is acceptable in a democratic society."

For Prof. Dagan, authorizing the killing of masses of civilians is consistent with "what is acceptable in a democratic society." It is apparent how war corrupts the values even of the Academy.

A friend of mine in a moment of profound despair observed that not only did Hitler succeed in destroying a third of the Jewish people; he also succeeded in morally distorting a substantial part of the Jews who remained alive.

I will conclude by quoting from an address that was made in another era to a different audience, but is very much apropos of the brutalization that characterizes Israeli society: "Most of you must know what it means when 100 corpses are lying side by side, or 500 or 1000. To have stuck it out and at the same time - apart from exceptions caused by human weakness - to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history ..." (Heinrich Himmler in a speech at a party convention in Posen, 1943)*

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Official announcement: I will not swear allegiance

Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the extremist right wing party "Israel Beiteinu" is one of the cruder manifestations of the ugly, aggressive, triumphalist and racist Israel. Public-opinion polls today predict a significant gain for his party, which will likely become the third-largest in Israel. Lieberman, an immigrant from Russia who arrived in the Middle East a few years ago, wants to expel from the State hundreds of thousands of Arabs who have been living here for hundreds of years. He has a plan in stages, the first of which is to pass a law that will oblige all citizens to sign a "declaration of allegiance to the State". Those who do not sign will lose their citizenship. The slogan of the project is "without loyalty there is no citizenship" (Heb: "bli ne'emanut, eyn ezrahut"). The loyalty document will include clauses that no sane Arab could reasonably be expected to sign. (Why for example should an Arab citizen sing the anthem that includes the line "the soul of a Jew yearns"?) The clear result: a million or more Arab citizens will lose their right to vote.

In the nationalist and racist mood that is casting its shadow over Israel, such a plan will find substantial support among Israeli Jews - substantial, but not absolute. Lieberman has not taken into consideration that there are tens of thousands of Jews, maybe a hundred thousand, maybe more, who will not sign the document, and will declare "we will not swear allegiance to the State of Lieberman and Co." Those people are Jews who are the cornerstones of the educated Israeli public, a substantial part of the Academy and the technological infrastructure in Israel.

And then what? Will Lieberman cancel the citizenship of a hundred thousand Jews?

For my part I want to make it clear right now that I do not have an iota of loyalty to the Israeli apartheid state and I will do all in my power to bring down and smash the apartheid system.

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The enemy of my enemy is my friend

Senator George Mitchell, who has been appointed as the Obama Administration's emissary to the Middle East, is visiting our region. In a profile of the man that was published in Maariv (25 January 2009), he was described as an "enemy of the settlements". If that is true, then he is my friend, according to the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

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International Holocaust Remembrance Day

27 January is the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Israel's contribution to that day came in the form of racist attacks by gangs of Jewish youths who attacked Arabs only because they were Arabs. In Upper Nazareth a group of youths, including yeshiva students, banded together and burnt cars of Arabs and tried to set fire to their apartments, because in the opinion of those racists the Arabs had "defiled" the city, which they feel should be pure of Arabs. In Tiberias about 20 minors aged 14-16 attacked Muhammad Mansour, 20, from Majd al-Krum, as he was walking on a promenade in Tiberias. They set upon him as a lynch mob like in the Krystallnacht pogrom, inflicted injuries all over his body and lacerations on his head, so that he had to be hospitalized. The youths had no personal interest in Mansour, they did not even know him. His only "crime" in the eyes of those youths was being an Arab. The police confirmed that those were the circumstances of the incident.

Whence did those youths in Upper Nazareth and Tiberias derive the ideas that led them to conclude that it was permissible to them to burn Arab apartments along with their occupants and to lynch an Arab? Clearly it would not have occurred to them to do that unless Israel had been a Garden of Eden for racism and racists. The atmosphere and the air in Israel are suffused with racist incitement towards Arabs. They absorbed the ideas at home, at the yeshiva, at school and in the media; and the path between the idea and the execution among racist youth is a short one.

Did the government make a sharp statement against those acts? Did the Minister of Education issue a press release in which she apologized because the system for which she is responsible had failed to assimilate the struggle against racism? To the best of my knowledge: no. International Holocaust Remembrance Day is observed not only for the memory of the Jewish Holocaust; its purpose is to constitute a forum for the struggle against racism as such. Not in Israel. What do our ministers care if people are attacking Arabs? They have just finished their festival of murder of hundreds of Palestinian children in Gaza, so how can they be expected to get excited about burning or lynching Arabs? That's too petty for them.

Did Yad Vashem (Israel's official Holocaust memorial museum and institute) issue a statement expressing its revulsion at those incidents that occurred so close to International Holocaust Remembrance Day? How naßve to expect the leaders of the Holocaust industry at Yad Vashem to concern themselves with such trifles! Not to mention the fact that that institution is headed by a man who was a senior officer in the Israeli occupation army. To him in his role, pogroms against Arabs, as well as the Occupation and the Apartheid in the Occupied Territories are as interesting as yesterday's news. Yad Vashem is not an institution against racism, but rather a branch of the government of Israel, the role of which is to promote the manipulation according to which criticism of Israel is anti-Semitism on the part of people who "have not learned the lessons of the Holocaust". The Holocaust is enlisted for the current needs of the government of Israel.

Yad Vashem is a well-financed institution. It receives financing from the government of Israel, contributions from wealthy Jews and Jewish organizations, but not only Jews; also from non-Jewish organizations in which Israel has

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succeeded in instilling feelings of guilt. And that too is a reason for it not to concern itself with racism against Arabs in Israel, for that would bring no monetary bonus.

Yad Vashem also has a well-oiled machine for soliciting donations from ordinary individuals, each according to their ability and their credit card. I recently received a letter from Yad Vashem signed by the billionaire David Azrieli (chairman of the Azrieli Group) who is serving as the president of Friends of Yad Vashem, in which I was asked to contribute to the institution "for the sake of the continuity of Jewish existence and conserving the basic values of human society."

The Yad Vashem organization distinguishes itself by its unresponsiveness to racism in Israel and its ongoing silence in the face of acts of cruelty and war crimes committed by governments of Israel, its army and its Security Agency. Apparently in the eyes of those responsible for managing Yad Vashem, that silence is consistent with "the basic values of human society". And for that reason I will contribute the little money that I budget for contributions to organizations that raise the banner of the struggle against racism as a universal value.

Gideon Spiro, Red Rag Weekly Column, 28 January 2009

Translated by George Malent,
Original Hebrew

***** [English translation from the original German provided by the Web Genocide Documentation Centre of the University of the West of England