

## **CARE Talk: Palestine Solidarity and Ramadan – 9 April 2024**

A selection of some different perspectives on the uses of language and on ways of seeing – a few examples of texts and sources that may be of interest.

Prepared by Anthony Green for the online talk supported by CARE – Center for Culture-Centered Approach to Research and Evaluation.

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*On the uses of the terms “terrorism” and “terror.”*

*(About the need to check and clarify the terms we use):*

Terror is a foul fact of human existence. The effects of terror can live on in trauma and profound damage to the human spirit.

Human ingenuity can cause others to experience terror – to be “terrorised” – in an infinite number of ways. But the label of “terrorist” (the one who delivers the terror) or “terrorism” (the act of causing terror) can be selectively, and often casually or provocatively, applied – or withheld, as the case may be. Separately, the writers Robert Fisk and Peter Osborne have made strong comments on this.

### **Robert Fisk: *Pity the Nation: Lebanon at War***

The late Robert Fisk (and his friend, AP journalist Terry Anderson, a man who was held hostage by the Hezbollah) were scathing about the use of the word, “terrorism.” Fisk lived for many years in Lebanon and witnessed at first hand the often brutal effects of war and the weaponry used on civilians and soldiers alike. He wrote:

“What’s in a name? Not long before he was kidnapped – and he may have felt very differently in the months that followed – I remember Terry Anderson, giving an instruction to his staff in Beirut. ‘Don’t use the word terrorist,’ he said. ‘It is pejorative out here.’ Anderson was right, that one-word terrorist has been used to justify more political and military action than any defined policy in the Middle East in the past decade. (p.435)

“But ‘terrorism’ no longer means terrorism. It is not a definition; it is a political contrivance. ‘Terrorists’ are those who use violence against the side that is using the word. The only terrorist Israel acknowledges are those who oppose Israel. The only terrorist the United States acknowledges are those who oppose the United States or their allies. The only terrorist Palestinians acknowledge . . . are those opposed to the Palestinians.” (p.441)

### **Peter Osborne: *The Fate of Abraham: Why the West is Wrong about Islam***

Peter Osborne is a British journalist. He describes himself as coming from very much an “Establishment” background. That means he used to write for “The Daily Telegraph” (a newspaper that fully supports the Conservative Party). Many members of his own family (father, grandfathers etc) had senior positions in the British Army and Navy.

He urges the need to reflect on words like “extremist” and “Islamist” as they are used (“promiscuously” is his description) to lump terror groups together with non-violent organisations. This book has a long section (pages 342 – 346) on the genesis of the word “terrorism.”

“We urgently need to recognise that the concept of terrorism has been debased. Originally applied to describe state terror, in modern times this usage was abandoned and applied exclusively to violence by non-state actors. In recent years, it has mutated once more and is now commonly applied to peaceful opposition movements. By an unnerving paradox, government which themselves use domestic terror mercilessly against their own populations, deploy the term to criminalise non-violent opposition. Muslim groups are the most numerous – though far from the only – victims. The term is now worse than valueless it has become actively misleading and needs to be rethought.”

**Greg Grandin: *Kissinger's Shadow: The Long Reach of America's Controversial Statesman.***

Given the widespread use of the terms “terrorist” and “terrorism,” in this book the author has an interesting observation about the creation of terror in the Vietnam War. He cites the veteran commentators Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather (both highly respected in the US in their lives):

“On 18 January 1991, at the time of ‘Operation Desert Storm,’ veteran US commentators Walter Cronkite and Dan Rather spoke in the CBS studio about the spectacle of “smart bombs” on Baghdad and Kuwait City and looked back at the use of B-52s in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and how they were “more effective in sowing terror and generating panic than the lean ‘hi-tech’ missiles the media were fascinated with:

Cronkite: you have seen the B-52's in operation in Vietnam, I have, and they are almost a terror weapon, they are so powerful.

Rather: I want to pick up on what you were talking about with the B-52's. It's certainly true, anybody who has seen or been through a B-52 raid, it's an absolutely unforgettable, mind-searing experience . . . It is a devastatingly effective, physical weapon, but also psychologically.”

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*On Shin Bet (Israeli internal security service)*

**The Gatekeepers (documentary made in Israel)**

This documentary interviews six former Heads of Shin Bet and offers valuable insights into their thinking and perspectives, and the issues they dealt with. One of them, the late Avraham Shalom – a man who had taken uncompromising decisions in his life – says,

“There’s no alternative to talking. Hamas. Islamic Jihad. Everyone. Even Ahmadinejad [\*\*], whoever. I’m always for it.”

“It’s a trait of a professional intelligence operative to talk to everyone. Things get clarified. I see you don’t eat glass. He sees I don’t drink petrol. That’s how it is.”

[\*\* Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, at that time the Iranian President]

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*On the experience of daily life of Palestinians*

**Colum McCann, *Apeirogen: A Novel***

A novel, based on the actual experiences of two men – one Israeli, one Palestinian – both of whom lost their daughters to violence from “the other side.”

**Nathan Thrall: *A Day in the Life of Abed Salama: A Palestine Story***

Nathan Thrall is a Jewish American journalist, based in Jerusalem. “A Day in the Life” narrates a traffic accident, threading together all the tiny elements of control and segregation that frustrate, with fatal consequences; what one reviewer referred to as, “ordinary lives trapped in the jaws of history.”

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*On the Jewish experience in Europe*

**Amos Elon: *The Pity of it All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743 – 1933***

A detailed retelling of 190 years of the life of Jews in Germany and their attempts to assimilate, and to see themselves as German. From that, the rejections and hostility they faced, even after loyal military service up to World War One, leading to the birth of the ideas of Theodor Herzl and the Zionism project.

Amos Elon was referred to in *Ha'aretz* as “The chief chronicler of the Israeli story.” He is quoted (in a 2009 Guardian obituary) as saying that Arabs, “whatever their subsequent follies and outrages . . . had been punished for the sins of Europe.”

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**Rashid Khalidi: *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance.***

A very personal account that draws on primary sources. Khalidi has been close to significant political figures and events in Palestine..

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*Looking “across the lines that divide” Israelis and Palestinians*

**Ami Ayalon, *Friendly Fire – How Israel Became its one Worst Enemy: A Memoir***

Ayalon was a former Head of the Israeli Navy and a former Head of Shin Bet (Israel's internal security service). A son of the kibbutz and a loyal Israeli he came to a very different view of Palestinians and the need to co-exist.

He has said elsewhere that,

“Those who want victory against terror without addressing underlying grievances want an unending war.”

In this book he cites questioning Dr Matti Steinberg (an advisor to Shin Bet) on the history of Palestinian nationalism.

“He told me straight out that I would never understand the Palestinians if I didn't read their national poets, and familiarise myself with their songwriters, graffiti artists, and clandestine newspapers.”

[From Steinberg's list]: “It was also my first encounter with the poet, Fadwa Tuqan, whose words were as monumental for Palestinians as Nathan Alterman's verse was for us:

*All I ask is to remain in the bosom of my country  
As soil, grass, a flower.*

[And this]: “The Palestinian National poet, Mahmoud Darwish, topped the reading list of Matti's crash course. Seven-year-old Darwish fled with his family in 1948, from their ancestral village in the northern Galilee, now a moshav. I found myself breathless reading ‘To Our Land’:

*To our land, and it is a prize of war,  
the freedom to die from longing and burning  
and our land, in its blooded night,  
is a jewel that glimmer for the far upon the far  
and illuminates what's outside it.*

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**Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine***

A detailed study of the forced removal of Palestinians from their homes and villages after 1948.

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*On the need for all people to “tell their own stories”*

The late **Chinua Achebe** was from Nigeria. Writing about colonialism he said,

“No foreigner can tell 'my' story for 'me,' no matter how talented, or knowledgeable. Stories are not innocent; they can be used to put you in the wrong crowd, in the party of the man who

has come to dispossess you, who with determined earnestness, lays a claim to your territory, then carves out a space for you, and wants you to be content with that slice of life.”

There are a great many Muslims who may see themselves and their own situation in this description. If the stories being told and re-told about any community have you emerging as a singularly destructive or negative entity; if they lay you open to systematic denigration then, just as with any human community, other stories need to be told, and heard.

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