

The Good and Evil, the Others and the Foreign:

Living in between the German-Jewish discourse and the Israeli-Palestinian one.

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I am very thankful to participate in your 2007 *Jom Ijun*. I feel at home in this Jewish community more than in any other Jewish community abroad, due to its openness and willingness to learn. I admit that I learned a lot today: From Monique Eckman a good presentation of how we moved from polarity to ambivalence regarding good and evil in social sciences; from Mario Erdheim a deep psychoanalytic perspective on the foreign and the other; from Michel Bollag on the case of *Amalek* in Jewish tradition; from Prof. Ephraim Meir on Emanuel Lévinas and the role of ethics in philosophical thinking. After such a rich day, what can I still add?

I will focus on two of the projects I have been involved in in the last decades: One is a very difficult and on-going project with my Palestinian friend and colleague – Prof. Sami Adwan of Bethlehem, we both run PRIME (Peace Research Institute in the Middle East) developing a joint school textbook (Learning the historical narrative of the Other – Israelis and Palestinians), that tells the history of our conflict from two perspectives – a Jewish-Israeli perspective and a Palestinian perspective. We know that historical events happened (like the Balfour declaration, the partition plan of 1947), but we address the fact that these events have been constructed very differently within the two national entities. Even when a Palestinian State will be established (and the sooner the better) these two narratives will continue to exist and be different: There is no chance to develop a bridging narrative between them. The narratives are sometimes painfully different from each other. They are so incongruent, due to the fact that we live within a political climate of no agreement: Not what had happened in the twenties or the forties, not who was the perpetrator and who was the victim, who is stronger (Israel, politically, economically, militarily from the Palestinian

perspective while Israelis feel weak and threatened living among hostile Arab Muslim countries: a mixture of real threats and fantasies). In such a climate, bottom up projects like our school book are essential, as they help teachers, pupils and parents consider that the other has a legitimate narrative, just as their own. Though they start off believing that their narrative is morally superior, they learn to respect and acknowledge the narrative of the other, slowly on a basis of equity. Our textbook is the only one through which the Holocaust is systematically taught in Palestinians classes, while the *Naqba* is discussed in Israeli-Jewish classes. We see this process as a first necessary step to change the political climate. Of course, as long there is no political – top-down solution, such bottom-up efforts will not turn the politics around. But we believe that once the political process will move ahead, such peace building efforts will help and support the political process. That what was missing during the Oslo accord, and that is one of the reasons why that process failed.

My other project took place in 1992-2007 - is the German Jewish group (TRT-to reflect and Trust) in which German descendants of Nazi perpetrators came into dialogue with descendants of Holocaust survivors. This was an outcome of my research project in Germany in the mid eighties, interviewing the descendants of the Nazi perpetrators. At that time, even the idea of such a group of people who need help, did not exist yet. I just returned from a conference in Frankfurt – Scenic Memories of the Shoa. More than 300 psychologists and psychoanalysts discussed the aftereffects of the Shoa in families of survivors and in parallel among families of Nazi perpetrators and bystanders. There was no need anymore to fight who suffered more or less, like it was in previous years in such meetings. There was a maturity of understanding that these are "two sides of the same coin," as one of the TRT members defined already in 1993, in the BBC documentary (Children of the Third Reich). I enjoyed the fact that today a common narrative developed, in spite of the terrible events that took place 60 years ago, by the Nazis against the Jews. This narrative is composed of a joint

understanding with consensus about who was the victim and who the perpetrators were, what had happened when and where and how it still effects us, the second and third generations, from either side.

Perhaps if we could choose, we would prefer to only live within this second joint narrative, as Jewish people who hardly overcame the worst manmade disaster of our times. But we do not have this luxury: we have to live in between the first unresolved conflict, of incompatible Israeli and Palestinian narratives in which we are also perpetrators and have a share of responsibility for the plight of the other. The European context is easier to address, as we are respected for what we went through, in which we are still healing from our wounds. So, our difficult task is now to move ahead within our process with the Palestinians. In that respect we have to focus on the process, and not to hold onto the outcome. As long as we cling to what we want the outcome to be, they mistrust us regarding our earnestness in entering into the process of mutual acknowledgement with them. This is a difficult issue for us to digest, but I see no way of bypassing this Palestinian request. Who are we, to be able to respond to this request of the Palestinians from us: Are we still that monolithic collective we had been for generations, in regard to us and them, to good and the evil? Or, are we open for an internal dialogue, recognizing the evil also within us, creating an external dialogue, recognizing also the good within them?

In my book, "The Others within Us" I suggested that during the monolithic representation of the others in the Jewish-Israeli society, these were mainly Jewish others, while the foreigners were the Nazi and the Arabs, the external threat. The deconstruction of this monolithic representation did not yield a dialogue between the fragments that did not fit together anymore (if they ever did). After October 2000 and even more so after Sept 11, 2001, we developed a neo-monolithic representation of the foreign, while the deconstruction of the Jewish others continues. Therefore many of us do not know today anymore where we

came from and where are we heading. The possibility for dialogue among the fragments suggests that then, the quality of that dialogue will be our identity, rather than this or that fragment.

Thank you for your attention!