



My Israeli Brothers, My Palestinian Brothers

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These difficult days are encircling me and throwing me into a tumult of emotions. My State, Israel, is fighting my people, the Palestinians, and I am forced to be quiet. I must restrain and hold back my identification and pain at the imaginary border of the Green Line. What am I to do with the fact that I am half-Gazan. My mother's family was expelled in 1948 from Kfar Harbiya in the South, what is today the lands of Kibbutz Zikim and Karmiya, and became refugees, living today in the camps of Jabaliya, Sejaya and Almagazi.

For more than ten years Israel prevented me from visiting my aging aunt in Gaza. The country that reached out to the Jews of the World, that cried "Let my People go" to the Soviet government in the 1970s, expects me to leave my pain at the Erez Checkpoint.

Pain and love do not recognize geographic borders. Two months ago my aunt died. Thank you, my country Israel that you allowed me, your Palestinian citizen, to attend her funeral in the Almagazi refugee camp.

I, the Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel, did everything that was expected of me to be accepted by Israeli society. I learned the Hebrew language to a high level of fluency, and the Jewish culture and its roots. I memorized Ethics of the Fathers and didn't skimp on the Song of Songs. As a child I waved the Israeli flag and sang Hatikva. As an adult I joined a delegation to Poland and went to Auschwitz in order to connect to Jewish history and suffering.

None of this helped me. I am "the other". I am expected to be emotionless and be thankful to the State of Israel that allows me to live in my Motherland, and more, to receive child benefits from National Insurance (the same National Insurance to which I contribute from my monthly salary, same as every citizen).

And now we are at war with Gaza. "Silence! There's shooting". It is forbidden to protest against the war. "It's an unpatriotic act" said a member of the media as I walked into the news studio to be interviewed on the need for protection of the unrecognized Bedouin villages from rocket fire.

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"I don't know why you Arabs don't understand us," he added. "We've been in this situation before, and there is another way," I responded. "Only by force alone, only by force," he ended the conversation. The rifts between the Arab and Jewish perception of our reality become unbridgeable in times of war; you can feel the suffocation in the air.

But this directive "Silence! There's shooting" doesn't apply to those who wish to incite against Arab citizens, and exploit this difficult and sensitive atmosphere to sow the seeds of destruction. The Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, as is his wont, seizes every opportunity for political gain – once he called to treat the Arab demonstrators as terrorists, later to boycott Arab businesses. And we will all pay the price. This is while the government speaks on the importance of economic development in Arab towns.

And on the ground, the public tone is encouraging for groups of Jewish hooligans like Lehava, Kahane Lives, and now "The Lions of the Shadow". Calls of "Death to Arabs" have become commonplace in the Israeli public arena, soldiers who sing "throw the Arabs out" go unpunished, and right-wing thugs have moved from concealed "price tag" attacks to assaulting young Arabs in the streets.

The media, for the most part, fuels these sentiments. There is a feeling that anything goes. The demonstration in Haifa, at which Jews and Arabs protesting against the war were attacked with heavy-handed violence by right wing counter-protestors, is another moral deterioration in Israeli society. We are standing on the verge of a slippery slope, and in danger of future intra-communal violence throughout the cities of Israel. The government must act before it is too late.

I am not disconnected from the reality of the average Israeli Jew. I well understand the fear and distress caused by the threat of rockets. For the past 8 years I have taught at Sapir College in the Negev – one of our students was killed by mortar fire. The rockets fired from Gaza do not distinguish between Jews and Arabs. But I will not accept that the Arab citizens of Israel become a punching bag for the Jewish public's frustration and fury.

I, the Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel, am ready and want to share this land; I believe it is possible to build a shared society and a shared future for the two peoples here. But just like the Jewish citizens of Israel, I feel the pain of my people and of my family on the other side of the border. That is why I am protesting against this war which is harming us all. I am a free man looking for peace and equality in his homeland. Israel is also my country and I will fight for its future, for my future and for the shared future of us all.