

Georges Bensoussan: "Let's stop seeing the Arab-Israeli conflict through the Western prism of victimhood".

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Last book published: « *Les Origines du conflit israélo-arabe, 1870-1950* » (Presses universitaires de France, 2023).

(...) To everyone's misfortune, this conflict is mired in what Wilhelm Reich called the "emotional plague", the reign of labile emotion which, with no regard for truth, opens the way to passion, entirely devoted to the affirmation of convictions where Nietzsche saw the opposite of truth. When, in our 'society of the spectacle', emotion becomes spectacle, tears blur the issues and make the origins of chaos disappear.

In the West, this emotional plague takes the form of the "religion of the victim", generating a vision of victimhood that confuses weakness with justice and law, forgetting that not all strength is immoral and not all weakness is virtuous. This religion of victimhood, which maintains the competition of memories, perverts the meaning of words by multiplying ad nauseam the use of the word "genocide" to the point of speaking of the "genocide perpetrated by the Israelis in Gaza".

When the religion of the victim asserts that a life is worth a life, which everyone agrees on even if this is not obvious to everyone, it discreetly suggests that the strong are wrong simply because they are strong and that, consequently, the weak, because they are weak, are right. In which case Japanese militarism destroyed after Hiroshima should be rehabilitated and Daech made legitimate again after its defeat.

A strange blindness questions the West, its capacity for denial combined with its inability to conceive the psychic economy of the hatred that drives certain societies or certain human groups. An inability to conceive of the centrality of war in most human societies, while we ourselves reject it while striving to erase any conflict that might clash with the hedonistic landscape we have constructed. If, like all societies, we have difficulty understanding what does not fit into our frameworks of thought, this handicap is more difficult to conceive for the heirs of the Enlightenment that we are, heirs to a universalism that is rare in human history.

This inability to conceive of war goes hand in hand with a difficulty in hearing the massacre, even when it is announced by all kinds of discourse. We have difficulty understanding political extremism, and even in some cases its genocidal impulse, as with the Islamist movement Hamas, several articles of whose charter (1988, amended in 2017 but not on these points) imply the destruction of the State of Israel and, as a consequence (which we can all the more imagine after 7 October), the massacre of a large part of its population. We struggle to understand that genocidal rhetoric is not a figure of speech. That the anti-Tutsi rhetoric of Radio Mille Collines in Rwanda before 7 April 1994, that the German anti-Jewish rhetoric from 1933 onwards, foretold the worst. Everything was said in the background, at least about the genocidal intention and obviously not about the methods, but no one

wanted to hear, understand or see. As the American novelist Saul Bellow noted, we often deploy "treasures of intelligence in order not to understand". In our rather pacified societies, which underestimate the intensity of deadly passions, we continue to perceive things based on standards of tolerance and compromise. This is why we are stunned when an ultra-violent reality catches up with us.

The passion that specifically surrounds the Arab-Israeli conflict bears witness to a folly that derails many minds, making them prefer their beliefs to the facts, so much so that "the facts do not penetrate the universe of our beliefs" (Marcel Proust). Faced with the current onslaught of passion, lies and cynicism, these programmed deaths of the spirit, we may be tempted to remain silent, as Albert Camus did in the last two years of his life about his war-torn Algerian homeland.

We are struck by the enormous imbalance of the protests surrounding the current conflicts: how many demonstrators were there for the 500,000 deaths in Syria? What demonstrations marked the reinstatement of Bashar al-Assad as a member of the Arab League? How many marches for the Muslim Uighurs persecuted by China and how many rallies for the Rohingya Muslims in Burma? The death of Arabs and Muslims seems to be of interest only in the event of a confrontation with the Jews.

The Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwich had this to say to the Israeli poet Helit Yeshurun: "Do you know why we Palestinians are famous? Because you are our enemy. Interest in the Palestinian question stemmed from interest in the Jewish question. Yes. It's you they're interested in, not me! If we were at war with Pakistan, no one would have heard of me.(1)" Hence, fifty-two years later, we can only reread with admiration (and sadness at the same time) these sentences by Vladimir Jankélévitch written in 1971 about anti-Zionism, which he said (along with Léon Poliakov a little before him) was "permission to be democratically anti-Semitic. What if the Jews were Nazis themselves? That would be marvellous(2)".

*(1) Mahmoud Darwich, La Palestine comme métaphore, traduit de l'arabe par Elias Sanbar, Actes Sud, 1997.*

*(2) L'Imprescriptible, Éditions du Seuil, 1986.*