



Introductory Comments: Israel/Palestine Forum

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The four articles published in this issue were first presented at the *Psychoanalysis and Public Sphere Conference* held in September 2020. These four articles are: *COVID 19: Bringing the unimaginable realities of Gaza to the world* by Yasser Abu Jamei, *Mental Health Organisations as Moral Agents: Professional Responsibility in a Settler Colonial Context* by Martin Kemp, *Projecting Israel's settler-colonial racist aggression onto Labour Party 'antisemitism'* by Les Levidow, and Sabby Sagall contributes *A Marxist-Psychoanalytic Appraisal of the 'Jewish Question.'* All four articles contest commonplace understandings and knowledge, provide pertinent information, provoke reflection on the question of moral action, values and dominant ideological belief systems. In short, all the articles challenge the reader not to turn away from the damage wrought on human beings, specifically Palestinians. For those reading these contributions there is no hiding place, and no recourse to supposed 'neutrality.'

Yasser Abu Jamei's lucid and matter-of-fact presentation of the realities of living in Gaza hits hard as there is no hyperbole nor any resort to exaggeration. Abu Jamei outlines in detail the grave difficulties of living in Gaza under Israeli occupation: the struggle to gain a permit to travel whether for health or education that has led to absolute restrictions of movement, the unimaginable reality that all that makes up living a life has been taken away and nothing that sustains and nurtures us as human beings can be taken for granted. The strength of Abu Jamei's contribution is the focus on one temporality – the present – and one place – Gaza.

Sabby Sagall takes a wide historical sweep to present a different historical understanding of the history of the Jewish people. This presentation of an atypical history challenges two powerful myths: the first is that there has always been a profound division between Jews and anti-Semites. This myth has strong resonances with another dominant discourse that there is an inevitable clash between the Middle East and the West because it has always been thus and therefore it will always be so. The other myth that is perpetuated is that the Jewish people have withstood inexorable aggression due to their adherence to religion and to nationalist ideals. Sagall carefully confronts these two discourses by drawing on distinctive historical evidence to argue that Jewish people from the first millennium held a significant role in cities through commercial activity, that they enjoyed freedom of movement and the right to own property.

This Marxist emphasis on the importance of commerce and fiscal exchange provides an important dimension to existing knowledge. Underpinning Sagall's epistemology is a strong Marxist lens along with a psychoanalytic sensibility. Of special note is an important insight, offered by Sagall, is that the tradition of the Jew as an outsider AND an internationalist (for example, Freud, Luxemburg, Marx, Spinoza), to name a few famous people runs against the Jew as possessor of a national state. I

appreciate the specificity of Abu Jamei's contribution while simultaneously I value Sagall's wide-ranging theoretical and historical reach.

Martin Kemp and Les Levidow, by contrast, focus on the essential moral failures of certain organisations: for Levidow it is the mass media and for Kemp mental health organisations, and this includes psychoanalytic organisations. Kemp and Levidow are vigorous in their injunction that we re-think our belief and value systems and to reflect robustly on our perceptions, strongly held opinions and identifications. Kemp carefully examines the impact of the endurance of the structures, beliefs, and values of a stubborn settler-colonial ideology which does not and will not recognise itself. Kemp helpfully defines settler colonialism as that which entails exploitation of land, resources, and people. Exploitation and violence are the key marks of settler colonialism and we must come to grips with our complicities in its accompanying corruption and aggression. As Kemp asserts, we must undertake a thorough exploration of our taken-for-granted knowledge and assumptions and this requires taking on board in a serious way Palestinian experiences and perspectives.

We are all embedded within organisations and we all internalise and perpetuate the perspectives and value systems of surrounding dominant socio-political systems. This critical psycho-social perspective underpins the concerns of both Kemp and Levidow. Kemp focuses on the compliances of mental health organisations in relation to contestable truths perpetuated by Western and Israeli Governments while Levidow concentrates on exposing the manipulations propagated by the British mass media. Levidow provides a powerful analysis of the malign projections that circulate from Jewish people to the Palestinians, and via British mass media onto the Labour Party and especially onto THE then leader Jeremy Corbyn. Levidow is particularly concerned to trace through and analyse what he terms as 'bad conscience' with regard to the subordination and the dispossession of the Palestinian people.

Reading these articles challenges the reader to reflect, to understand and to take on new understandings and knowledge of that which we can take for granted. This is easier said than done. These articles deeply unsettle us as they provoke important questions such as: which values and beliefs underpin my knowledge base? Why do I hold onto my values and beliefs and what do they do to bolster my illusions of my selfhood? What does it mean for me as an Egyptian/Muslim woman to engage with these articles and what would I have to undertake to reach a different moral base?

All the articles in their special ways and with their distinctive foci draw attention to the aggression, exploitation and violence that are so entrenched in the societies we inhabit. As I have written above, these articles perturb and cause worry and this disturbance and apprehension cannot be avoided, indeed should not be shunned, if we are going to work towards societies that are built on socio-political justice.

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