

Attacks on Gilad Atzmon are mistaken

The attack on Gilad Atzmon by the UK Palestine Community Network, relayed on Ali Abunimah's blog, is a depressing reminder that an influential section of Palestinian opinion has accepted the narrative about Israel-Palestine preferred by most (supposed) pro-Palestinian Jews. That is, of course their right. There *is* an argument for saying that Zionism is a settler colonial movement enabled by Western imperialism, and that therefore any discussion of the part played by Jews in influencing Western policies is at best irrelevant and at worst racist. According to this view, what needs to be attacked is imperialism, not Jewish ideology and power.

Gilad, takes a different view, as do I. He recognises a Jewish collective which wields enormous power and regulates the discussion of all issues relating to itself, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. Curiously, this regulation is exercised not only by Zionist Jews but also by anti-Zionist Jews. Not altogether surprisingly, the elephant in the room of Jewish power, is invisible to such people, because without a mirror they are usually unable to recognise themselves. But even if they happen to glimpse their reflection, they quickly turn the other way as it would upset their ideology to see it.

And here we should note that the statement by the UKPCN represents Gilad's views wrongly in one important respect. He makes it quite clear, right at the beginning of his book, *The Wandering Who?*, that he distinguishes three categories of Jews; religious Jews, Jews by birth and ideological Jews. His problem is with the power exercised by the third category.

It is protested that no subdivision of Jews, let alone Jews collectively, can be said to exercise collective power unless it is incorporated in some way. And yet many of those who use this argument are quite happy to generalise about the power capitalists exercise, though this class is not incorporated either. Ah, but that's different, we're told. The capitalist class are not a race. Well, maybe the Jews aren't either.

The philosophy of racism has been moulded in such a way that it not only outlaws discrimination against (supposed) racial groups (which we could agree is usually desirable), but also imposes a prohibition on the discussion of these groups in anything other than positive terms. If you stand back for a moment and think about this, something activists usually fail to do, it is a monstrous interference with free thought and expression.

But if a powerful group of Palestinians say they want to go along with such a view of the world, what are we to do, we who have for many years supported the Palestinian struggle, but whose ideas are rejected by this group? Should we simply accept the fact that we're not wanted and turn our energies elsewhere? Or should we even more simply accept that we're wrong?

There are three points to make here. The first is that the UK Palestine Community Network, and those who signed their condemnation of Gilad, are representative of only a section of Palestinian opinion, and probably a minority one. Having spent over ten years in the Middle East, I am well aware of another narrative which is essentially similar to that of Gilad and myself. We don't hear much about it, except in Israeli propaganda, because our media has been persuaded to see it as extremist.

The second point is that this issue is not just about Israel-Palestine. Rather the situation in Israel-Palestine is as symptom of a much greater problem, that is the domination of Western narratives by Jews, and the fatal consequences of this if not checked. In other words, our own self-interest is at stake.

The third point is that if reason has persuaded you of a particular understanding of political events, giving up such a position simply on the grounds that others oppose you is the choice of a self-doubter or pragmatist at best, and a coward at worst. It is not an option for Gilad, or for me.

Solidarity movements, by their very nature, tend to adopt ethical narratives, whereas those who wield political power usually think in terms of *realpolitik*, even when they justify their policies in moral terms. It is natural that people who know about Palestinian suffering should feel moved to support them. But it is also natural that we, like our political leaders, should consider our own interest.

One thing is very clear to me. An expansionist Israel, with its identifying adherents elsewhere, has become the tail which wags the dog of Western policy in the Muslim East. This is very definitely not in *my* interests. Nor is it in the interests of our country, nor of the West, nor of the entire world. We face a potential conflagration from which we will all suffer, not least the Jews who started it. Turning a blind eye to the roots causes of this danger shouldn't be an option for those who strive for a saver world.

It will be said that such talk fuels yet another round in the perennial cycle of anti-Semitism. Certainly that would be regrettable, but perhaps the best way to stop such a scenario would be to understand, and deal with, the causes of anti-Semitism. Racism is an inadequate explanation of this phenomenon. And in any case, the possible suffering of a very small group must be set aside the potential doomsday scenario we may face if we do nothing.