

Holocaust Memorial Day and the Palestinians

Ever since a Holocaust Memorial Day was first proposed Palestinians and their supporters have been concerned that such an event would be used to further justify vicious Israeli policies. Norman Finkelstein, the radical Jewish author of *The Holocaust Industry*, sees this commemoration as another strand in the exploitation of Jewish suffering. We agree that this is a danger, and stand here today not to deny the appalling suffering caused by the Nazis - indeed we also wish to commemorate this and other massacres - but to counteract a tendency towards the use of that suffering for illegitimate and inhumane ends.

‘The Holocaust’, as Finkelstein points out, has come to have a different meaning from the Nazi holocaust. The former is seen, typically, as a *uniquely Jewish* experience and also as *historically unique*. Both of these assumptions need to be challenged for they easily become the justification of a *unique solution*, that is the creation of an exclusively Jewish state and the maintenance of its apartheid system. While in no way wishing to diminish the horror of what happened to Jews, it needs to be emphasised that a substantial majority of the civilians massacred by the Nazis were not Jewish. The Russians, in particular, lost countless millions who were forgotten as the Cold War emerged. And while it is true that in one sense all historical events are unique, this should never prevent us from attempting to make comparisons. Only in this way can we begin to understand the mentality of oppression and massacre and prevent its recurrence.

What, then, is the common factor underlying oppression? Surely it is exclusion. The Jews, among many others, were excluded by the Nazis from the concept of German nationality, indeed from the very idea of humanity. If we could now return to the 1930s, before the holocaust, would it not be our duty to do much more than was done to prevent that looming disaster? This is what we feel about the Palestinian situation today. The Palestinians have already suffered massacres, at Deir Yassin and many other places in 1948, in Sabra and Shatilla in 1982 and more insidiously by relentless drip-drip murder over the years. The potential for an even greater bloodbath is constantly present so long as the Palestinians are excluded. Our simple message, for the sake of all humanity, not just Israelis and Palestinians, is:

Say no to exclusion!

(And this also means ‘no’ to exclusion from holocaust memorial.)