

Language, Untruth and Illogic

by Francis Clark-Lowes

Language moulds our view of the world, which is why élites seek to control it. The Israel-Palestine conflict is a paradigm case. At every turn we are persuaded, through the misuse of language, that the oppression before our very eyes is illusory.

Here, crudely drawn, are some highlights from the Zionist narrative: ‘The Jews, a peaceful people forced out of their homeland by the Romans, have remained a homogeneous race in the diaspora. They have always been victims of an unanalysable anti-Semitism which culminated in the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust. To protect themselves from this scourge the Jews created Israel in an empty land. The Zionist pioneers were resisted by an overwhelming force of anti-Semitic Arabs but miraculously succeeded in defending themselves. Later the Gaza Strip, “Judea” and “Samaria” (by right also parts of Israel) came under benevolent Israeli administration and settlements were established there to establish Israel’s rights and to subdue the unruly Arab population. In an act of unprecedented generosity Prime Minister Ehud Barak finally offered the Palestinians almost all of the “disputed territories” in exchange for peace. Yassir Arafat’s rejection of this offer proves that he and his followers are anti-Semitic terrorists.’ In a short article such as this I can only offer a taster of what a comprehensive deconstruction of this story would involve.

The idea of the Jews being ‘a people’ is partly religious, partly romantic nationalist. While it might have made some sense to describe the Yiddish and German speaking Jews of Central and Eastern Europe as ‘a people,’ to regard *all* Jews in this way is as curious as asserting a Christian ethnicity. Yet this idea has been cemented into Western consciousness by the phrase ‘anti-Semitism,’ which implies the existence of a Semitic (i.e. Jewish) race. While Hitler’s concept of an Aryan race has rightly been abandoned, Semitism, now expressed ethnically, continues to flourish. The term ‘diaspora’ supports the ‘Semitic’ myth by obscuring the realities of conversion to Judaism and interbreeding with non-Jews. The only unambiguous use of the word Semitic refers to a group of languages which includes Hebrew. Arabic is by far the most widely spoken Semitic language; Arabs are therefore all Semites, while most Jews, that is those not speaking Hebrew, are not!

Question: How many people died in the Holocaust (with a capital H)? If you automatically think six million you either believe the Holocaust is defined as the murder of Jews, or you have failed to realise that the great majority of civilians who died at the hands of the Nazis were not Jews. It should in no way reduce our horror at the barbarity committed against Jews to point out that non-Jewish Russian civilians, who hardly ever get mentioned in this regard, were certainly the largest category of Nazi victims. But then they were ‘commis’! Norman Finkelstein calls the disproportionate Jewish memorialisation ‘the exploitation of Jewish suffering.’ What he calls ‘the Holocaust industry,’ by deflecting all criticism of Israel, serves to support its oppression of the Palestinians. (Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry*, 2000)

A common way of misleading people is simply to assert something authoritatively. Thus the belief that Jews are inherently more pacific than others goes unchallenged, which is odd if you have even a rudimentary familiarity with the Old Testament. This myth required, of course, that Jews settled in ‘a land without a people.’ Astonishingly

this nonsense is believed, or at least half-believed, by otherwise intelligent people. Surely, they say, every culture has its myths, and as long as they don't harm anyone ... Stop right there: these ones *do* harm people. Badly.

But if you are bent on harming others you need, psychologically, to demonise them. A whole vocabulary has been developed which describes Palestinians as either non-human (cockroaches, crocodiles, beasts walking on two legs etc.), or uncivilised (untrustworthy, dirty, irrational, fanatical, incomprehensible, aggressive, and worst of all terroristic). If they were not so, how could one possibly justify the state's actions against them? How terrible to consider a Palestinian terrorist as someone courageously defending his homeland and perhaps even demonising you in the same terms!

Demonisation serves to make the irrational distinction between Arabs and Jews absolute. Yet if an Arab is defined as someone who speaks Arabic, or at least comes from an Arabic speaking background (have you another definition?), then half of Israel's Jewish population is Arab. The Israel-Palestine conflict is often presented in terms of Israelis against Palestinians, yet one million Israelis *are* Palestinians. To deny this, Jewish-Israelis call them Israeli Arabs. Indeed, after subtracting not only these, but also the bedouin, Druze, Christians and Armenians from the definition of Palestinian, the enemy is reduced to a more uniform and less troubling form.

Israel makes much of its liberal democracy, a system defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica as 'a form of government ... where the powers of the majority are exercised within a framework of constitutional restraints designed to guarantee the minority in the enjoyment of certain individual or collective rights ...' I wonder whether barring a minority from the use of 92% of a country's land would qualify as democratic in these terms. Probably not.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines fascism as '... a political attitude which puts the nation-state or the race, its power and growth, in the centre of life and history. It disregards the individual and his rights, as well as humanity, in the exclusive interest of the nation.' Let us add a sentence: 'The fascist dream is to be realised by a system which apparently vests power with at least some of the people, but which in reality manipulates them, through the misuse of language, into believing what is needed for the benefit of the nation (i.e. its élite).' We could call this system fascist democracy, and we would find that it was not limited to Israel.