

**412 Dead Palestinian Children and one awful
“Arts’ Critic”**

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A Sunday Times review of a theatre play by Christopher Hart turned into a relentless attack on the Palestinian right to resist the colonialist-settler Israeli occupation...

I.

I never read Sunday Papers. I think they are an absolute waste of time. They are often a sanctuary for mediocre writers that cannot make it to the proper news during the week, and where they can indulge in a massive display of bigotry as well as in a complete disregard for facts.

But on Sunday (15/02), somehow, an issue of the Sunday Times made it home. Bad as it is, they have the nerve of having a so-called “Culture” supplement. And as I was checking the Review of Theatre plays, I bumped into a piece written by Christopher Hart that reviewed both a German play on the trauma of Nazism (which unsurprisingly they still have not fully dealt with), named **The Stone**, and a play on the recent Gaza slaughter called **Seven Jewish Children**, by Caryl Churchill.

The sub-title was promising: **German myths are challenged at the Royal Court, but Gaza’s are not**. But after reading a bit, disappointment replaced interest as it became obvious that the author had his own political agenda, and knowing that the best way to peddle Anti-Palestinian bigotry as a “respectable” position is by contrasting whatever evil done to the Palestinians with the Holocaust, the two in one review came as very handy for the author purposes.

I have not seen *Seven Jewish Children*, so I really can’t defend the play or deal with its merits or lack of it. What resulted obvious is that the article written by Hart had nothing to do with the play as such and everything to do with his hostility to anything that smells of Palestinians and his probably Pan-European complex that compels him to take a stand for Israel even in the face of its worst atrocities, as it represents the living symbol of Europe’s guilty conscience after centuries of persecution to the Jews in Europe. Therefore I will only deal with Hart’s views, not with Churchill’s work.

Even though such a worthless rant would not normally deserve a reply, I think it is important to deal with some of the arguments being barked by Hart as they are common currency in the European and in the global WASP media, as well as among right-wing liberals and neo-conservatives alike. It is a good example of the manichean views prevalent in Europe which project the absolute evil in Palestinians and the absolute good in Israelis.

II.

The start of the review puts his agenda in quite clear terms, so there is no surprise as the article gets from bad to worse. His complain on the play starts even before the play actually starts:

“A leaflet handed out before the show, inviting donations to Medical Aid for Palestinians, tells you how “brutal” Israel’s “invasion” of Gaza has been. “Bombardment”, “devastation”, “earthquake”: these are reassuring little signposts. Otherwise, you might worry that Churchill has written a play that considers both sides of the conflict.”

Note the use of inverted comas: what happened in Gaza was “brutal”, not brutal, there was seemingly no “bombardment”, just fireworks. Seemingly Hart does not think it was an “invasion”,

but a stroll in the desert by friendly and pious Israeli soldiers (alternatively, he may buy into the Great Israel project of Zionist hawks, therefore being entitled to Gaza, West Bank and beyond, and I would not be surprised by the tone of his article to be honest if this was the case).

But he, no matter he initially tries to pose as a “neutral” observer, suffers from the same that he criticizes Churchill, but to such a degree which seems pathological. But before going into that let us deal with the “**Two devils theory**”, for it permeates the whole of his argument. This theory, as far as I know, was first coined in Latin America. There, liberals who did not want to give an explicit support to the military dictatorships that proliferated during the ‘70s and ‘80s (probably knowing that one day they may regret it), but who supported them according to their own social and political leanings (and also according to their own class interests), argued their position as follows: “Well, we would all prefer to have civilian liberal governments, but the situation was getting out of control, all those left-wingers were too close to power, so therefore military dictatorships are a sort of necessary evil, preferable, in any case, to a Stalinist dictatorship” –as if those were the only two options available in the world!

The “two devils theory” is cunningly used by those who do not have the courage to admit their support for a terrorist regime, concealing their support behind a “something worse could happen if ‘the others’ won” and a neutral facade. This explains in this case Hart’s inability to deal with the Palestinian question beyond the common places of Hamas, the Islamist fundamentalist scare, etc.

III.

Apart from the “Two devils theory”, Hart’s line of argument seems to excuse anything done by Israelis because the Nazi concentration camps were indeed an unjustifiable abomination. Terrible as the Holocaust was, this does not mean that Israel is entitled to treat Palestinians in the most inhuman way forever more. And in our protest we will not accept the terrible memory of the Holocaust as blackmail to accept the suppression of the rights of the Palestinians. This is most clear with a couple of questions he asks after the play is summed up in one line:

“In seven one-minute acts, Israeli adults discuss what to “Tell her” — in each case, an imaginary young Israeli girl. About the Holocaust? Suicide bombings? About 1967?”

Nothing else than those three selectively quoted moments in history exists for Hart. Anything that could be said on the brutal Israeli occupation can be silenced with a mention of the Holocaust –a crime the Palestinians did not even commit in the first place! Suicide bombings? 1967? There’s no room to get into a crash course on Palestinian-Israeli history, but on 1967, the conflict was the logical response of people which had been displaced and robbed of their homeland; and on suicide bombings, they came in as a desperate response to massive brutality Palestinians faced since the start of the first Intifada in 1988, an upheaval which was largely non-violent but faced a heavy handed military response from Israel.

IV.

But as if he was aware of how rabidly pro-Zionist he comes across he makes a “surprising” statement:

“We all agree, I think, that the scenes coming from Gaza are not good. But the enormously complex reasons for such horrors are not considered here.”

The scenes from Gaza, for Hart, are simply not good. For anyone with a heart inside his or her chest, the scenes from Gaza are appalling, absolutely horrific, inexcusable. Yet, posing as neutral, Hart tell us that the play, in spite of lasting only 10 minutes, fails to consider the enormously “complex” reasons for such horrors.

We all know the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is complex. But is not complex beyond the point that some basic facts cannot be established. One of them is that the attacks with white phosphorous and cluster bombs over civilian population are just unacceptable. No matter how complex the local situation is. Another one is that there is clearly a side (Israel) which is the occupier and another side (Palestine) which is the occupied one, subject to unspeakable humiliations, abuses and constant bombardments by one of the most powerful armies of the world.

So, we have learned, because of the Western hypocrisy on Palestine, that when it comes to suicide bombings, there’s a straight condemnation of terrorism. But when it comes to the bombing of 1,5 million people with deadly and outlawed weapons, then the conflict turns out to be too “complex” for taking a clear stand... how convenient indeed! The complexity of a conflict is used in order to dilute responsibilities and obligations of clearly responsible actors... we talked about poor displaced Palestinians but we fail to mention who displaced them and why. Thus, the conflict is devoid of its causes and of its politics to be turned into a simple Humanitarian crisis that we all regret. Hart only repeats and abuses this ill-logic.

V.

But while pontificating on the “complex” nature of the conflict, he can still write the following utterly outrageous paragraph which proves beyond doubt his clear bias:

“Ah, yes, the idea that you can fairly judge the righteousness or wickedness of either side in this miserable conflict by looking at the casualty figures. You hear this on the BBC, too. Hamas rockets rarely kill anyone. They don’t really mean it, they’re just teasing. Not like those ruthless Israelis. In fact, Hamas would love their rockets to kill Israelis – men, women, children, whatever. The reason their rockets rarely kill anyone is that they’re really rubbish at aiming them. Israel, on the other hand, despite having directly caused the deaths of more than 1,000 civilians in Gaza recently, does not deliberately target queues of people at bus stops.”

A condemnation on the Israeli massacre in Gaza would therefore be, according to his own words, unfair –even though he clearly condemns Hamas, so we wonder if he was the same person that a while ago was talking about the “complexities” of the conflict...

As with all bigots, any attempt of achieving some minimal degree of objectivity (inasmuch as you can be objective) is met with hostility from his behalf who see a mischievous world turned against his Holy Cause. Enemy’s agents are everywhere, even in the BBC... yes, the same broadcasting channel that raised polemic when declined to show a Gaza appeal to preserve its “neutrality” (!?)

At this point you actually wonder if Hart thinks all of his readers are stupid or if it is he who's indeed thick as a block. The man of the "complex conflict" platitudes comes up with his own summed up version of it: Palestinians — ie, their Hamas leadership — are ruthless murderers willing to kill anything in sight (despite the fact that they have not resorted to suicide bombing, the most effective way to maim and murder, since 2005). On the other hand, the Israeli State, in spite of having massacred over 1,000 civilians, are somehow "humanitarian" mass murderers who do not target queues of people at bus stops... but target UN humanitarian convoys, UN buildings and Red Cross hospitals full of children, women, elderly and wounded men instead! All of this with a disturbing support of 95% of their citizens. We should believe that these are all unavoidable casualties by an army with hi-tech war equipment that could prevent this sort of indiscriminate massacres to take place —if there was a minimum will to prevent them. Nothing, absolutely nothing, excuses the scenes of suffering we have seen in Gaza, and in fact very few went to the extent as Hart does. Only the most fanatical mind can downplay the **deliberate attack on civilians** of the Israeli army.

I repeat: Nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies the careless (at best) murder of 412 Gazan children.

But again, Hart quotes on Qassam rocket (the ultimate "proof" of Palestinian wickedness) ignores completely the context in which they came to existence, and it is the criminal Israeli blockade of Gaza, which is as indiscriminate as a rocket but far more deadly. It is an Israeli scholar, Tanya Reinhart, who gives the best argument to understand the logic behind Qassam rockets, the most ineffective weapon ever (not because Palestinians are rubbish at aiming as a "smart" Hart tells us, but because you just can't aim them!) but which are persistently launched from Gaza:

"Besieged occupied people with nothing to hope for, and no alternative means of political struggle, will always seek ways to fight their oppressor. The imprisoned Gaza Palestinians found a way to disturb the life of the Israelis in the vicinity of the Strip, by launching home-made Qassam rockets across the Gaza wall against Israeli towns bordering the Strip. These primitive rockets lack the precision to focus on a target, and have rarely caused Israeli casualties; they do however cause physical and psychological damage and seriously disturb life in the targeted Israeli neighbourhoods. In the eyes of many Palestinians, the Qassams are a response to the war Israel has declared on them. As a student from Gaza said to the New York Times, "Why should we be the only ones who live in fear? With these rockets, the Israelis feel fear, too. We will have to live in peace together, or live in fear together."¹

A final argument by Hart, which exposes his defence of Israeli war crimes, is that casualty figures do not matter... and then I wonder if he ever heard about something called proportionality of response. If I punch you, is it justified to take a gun and kill me? Isn't it a sick logic to say, "ah, have you had a gun you should have done the same"? Unfortunately, this sick logic is ubiquitous in the Western media.

¹ www.anarkismo.net

VI.

His final verdict on the play reveals, as if it was not clear enough, that Hart views are solely based in his own political agenda, to which his job as an Art critic provided a mere excuse:

“Seven Jewish Children isn’t art, it’s straitjacketed political orthodoxy. No surprises, no challenges, no risks. Only the enclosed, fetid, smug, self-congratulating and entirely irrelevant little world of contemporary political theatre.”

Now you can imagine a poor crazed Christopher Hart writing his rant with a foaming mouth. He is unable to give an honest account of the play, blinded by his own bias and resorts to as many adjectives as he may know (and probably had he have had more space in the supplement he may have used it in this paragraph to add a couple more of insults). His piece is not the work of an Arts critic, but a piece of cheap propaganda. It is nothing but “predictable, self-congratulating, cheap, fetid” propaganda, to use his own vehement jargon. It is nothing but pro-Zionist political orthodoxy.

VII.

To prove that it has nothing to do with theatre but all to do with his support for War Criminals, he can’t miss the chance to end up with a final tongue in cheek comment on Hamas and Gaza:

“Meanwhile, donating to Medical Aid for Palestinians seems a good idea. I just hope the supplies get through. Two weeks ago, the UN suspended all food aid to Gaza after 10 lorryloads of supplies, 3,500 blankets and 400 food boxes were stolen at gunpoint. By Hamas.”

Hart is obviously blinded by his obsession on Hamas, or any Palestinian who resists for that matter. He, the man of the lofty understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian “complexities” gives us account of only half the story: it is true that Hamas robbed the supplies on February 7th, after claiming that the UN was selectively providing it to Fatah supporters and neglecting Hamas supporters². This impasse was discussed with the UN, which protested in strong terms, and this minor crisis was solved after one day and half, when Hamas apologized and returned the stolen supplies, and after UN proved they had no particular bias in delivering aid³.

But again, he fails to mention that it is Israel which has systematically blockaded humanitarian aid to Gaza, as UN officials have repeatedly complained⁴. Neither does he mention that in early January the UN had to stop food deliveries because Israel actually killed a lorry driver of a UN convoy with humanitarian aid⁵.

After giving out so much on Churchill for supposedly not playing fair on both sides, Hart himself proves to be an extremely unfair player on Palestinians! It is important to notice here what Archbishop Desmond Tutu said once **“If you are neutral in situations of injustice,**

² news.bbc.co.uk www.haaretz.com

³ www.un.org

⁴ www.cnn.com www.un.org electronicintifada.net

⁵ www.iht.com

you have chosen the side of the oppressor", which Hart clearly has chosen, even though he does not make much of an effort to appear as "neutral" contrary to his initial claims. He's quite comfortable defending war crimes.

At the end, I cannot but agree that the introduction to the article is spot on: **Gaza's myths remain unchallenged** and the likes of Hart keep busy at perpetuating those myths in ill-informed and hatred-filled articles.

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