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VICTIM'S VICTIMS

Photographs of Sameh Habeeb from the recent Israeli assault on Gaza Strip

Slavoj Žižek¹

The twists of contemporary politics render palpable a kind of Hegelian dialectical law: a fundamental historical task that "naturally" expresses the orientation of one political block can only be accomplished by the opposite block.

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Jean-Claude Milner says that "The birth of the State of Israel proved that victory and justice can go hand in hand."² What this statement obliterates is the way the constitution of the State of Israel was, from the standpoint of Europe, the realized "final solution" of the Jewish problem entertained by the Nazis themselves. That is to say, was the State of Israel not, to turn Clausewitz around, the continuation of the war against Jews with other (political) means? Is this not the "stain of injustice" that pertains to the State of Israel? 26 September 1937 is a date anyone interested in the history of anti-Semitism should remember: on that day, Adolf Eichmann and his assistant boarded a train in Berlin in order to visit Palestine: Heydrich himself gave Eichmann permission to accept the invitation of Feivel Polkes, a high member of Hagana (the Zionist secret organization), to visit Tel Aviv and discuss there the coordination of German and Jewish organizations to facilitate the emigration of Jews to Palestine.

Both Germans and Zionists wanted as many Jews as possible to move to Palestine: Germans preferred them out of Western Europe, and Zionists themselves wanted the Jews in Palestine to outnumber the Arabs as fast as possible. (The visit failed because, due to some violent unrests, the British blocked the access to Palestine; but Eichmann and Polkes did meet days later in Cairo and discussed the coordination of German and Zionist activities.)³ Is this weird incident not the supreme case of how the Nazis and the radical Zionists did share a common interest - in both cases, the purpose was a kind of "ethnic cleansing," i.e., to change violently the ratio of ethnic groups in the population? Are not today rather the Palestinians, these "Jews among the Arabs," who are a kind of object a, the intersection of the two sets of Israelis and Arabs, the obstacle to their peace? The irony missed by Milner is that, today, it is Muslims, not Jews, who are perceived as a threat and obstacle to globalization: it is a journalistic commonplace to point out that all great world religions found a way to live with capitalist modernization, with the exception of Islam, which is why the present conflict is often described as the one between the democratic West and the "Islamic Fascism."

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The big mystery apropos of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is: why does it persist for so long when everybody knows the only viable solution - the withdrawal of the Israelis from the West Bank and Gaza, the establishment of a Palestinian state, the renunciation by the Palestinians of the right of their refugees to return within

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the borders of the pre-1967 Israel, as well as some kind of a compromise concerning Jerusalem? Whenever the agreement seemed at hand, it inexplicably withdrew. How often does it happen that, when peace seems just a matter of finding a proper formulation for some minor statements, everything suddenly falls apart, displaying the frailty of the negotiated compromise? There is effectively something of a neurotic symptom in the Middle East conflict - everyone sees the way to get rid of the obstacle, and yet, nonetheless, no one wants to remove it, as if there is some kind of pathological libidinal profit gained by persisting in the deadlock.

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To describe Palestine, one is tempted to speak of a symptomal knot: is it not that, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the standard roles are somehow inverted, twisted around as in a knot? Israel - officially representing Western liberal modernity in the area - legitimizes itself in the terms of its ethnic-religious identity, while the Palestinians - decried as pre-modern "fundamentalists" - legitimize their demands in the terms of secular citizenship. So, we have the paradox of the State of Israel, the island of alleged liberal democratic modernity in the Middle East, countering the Arab demands with an even more "fundamentalist" ethnic-religious claim to their sacred land.

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For the injustice of today's world: Palestinians, Guantanamo prisoners, Palestine is today the site of a potential event precisely because all the standard "pragmatic" solutions to the "Middle East crisis" repeatedly fail, so that a utopian invention of a new space is the only "realistic" choice. Furthermore, Palestinians are a good candidate on account of their paradoxical position of being the victims of the ultimate Victims themselves (Jews), which, of course, puts them in an extremely difficult spot: when they resist, their resistance can immediately be denounced as a prolongation of anti-Semitism, as a secret solidarity with the Nazi "final solution." Indeed, if - as Lacanian Zionists like to claim - Jews are the objet petit a among nations, the troubling excess of Western history, how can one resist them with impunity? Is it possible to be the objet a of objet a itself? It is precisely this ethical blackmail that one should reject.

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1. Complied, Žižek, The Parallax View, New York, MIT Press, 2006.
2. Jean-Claude Milner, Les penchants criminels de l'Europe démocratique, Paris: Editions Verdier, 2003.
3. Heinz Hoehne, The Order of the Death's Head. The Story of Hitler's SS, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000, p. 336-337.