

GAZA: THE BAD, BAD NEIGHBOUR

What would you do – the Israeli historian Professor Fania Oz-Salzberger wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – if your neighbour constantly threw stones and Molotov cocktails at your apartment? Wouldn't you eventually pick up a gun and put an end to such activity? And if this neighbour surrounded himself with his children so you couldn't attack him, wouldn't you then use a gun with telescopic sights? Didn't Hamas behave in Gaza just like this neighbour when it fired rockets at Israeli cities? Therefore, wrote Professor Oz-Salzberger, Israel's current war against Gaza was a just war.

With such an example, one can indeed get across plenty of things with considerable clarity. For simplicity, let us call you and the family terrorized by the bad neighbour the landlord, and let us now look at the curious circumstances in the apartment house. The neighbouring apartment is Gaza.

1) Three years ago you took away your neighbour's key.

Without your approval as landlord, your neighbour's family is not allowed to leave the apartment, either for work or for study, or for travel or for shopping. Without your approval as landlord, your neighbour receives no mail, nothing to eat, no electricity, no gas and no visitors: the apartment is locked, you as the landlord have the key, and your bad, bad neighbour is locked in. All this since 2006, almost three years ago. Thereupon your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

What was the mistake made by the bad, bad neighbour and his friends in the other apartment house? They had voted for the wrong party!

And this, despite the fact that you were so nice to the neighbour four years ago in 2005, when you voluntarily moved off his balcony with the seaview which you'd taken away from him earlier. Of course, you didn't deign to give your neighbour a word or a look when you moved out. And you also demolished the balcony furniture. Whatever would become of us if we actually talked with our neighbours? And now you tell the whole world that you have vacated the balcony. But you don't mention that you still have the key to the apartment.

2) Two years ago you sent a gang of thugs to your neighbour.

In 2007, you and your North American friends from the Homeowners' Association quartered a bunch of thugs in the neighbour's apartment, the Mohammed Dahlan gang. This gang was supposed to deprive your bad neighbour of his apartment. However, nasty as he is, the bad neighbour defended himself successfully. And you were pretty bitter about it. Afterwards you tried to make everybody believe that the bad neighbour had violently and illegally taken control of his apartment without any reason. You yourself were surprised at how many journalists spread this lie. Thereupon your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

3) You have not invoiced the running costs correctly.

For years you, as landlord, have collected duties and taxes due to your neighbour, but have not paid them to the neighbour completely and on time. Thereupon your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

4) You have already killed many people from the neighbour's apartment.

That was in 2006. There were hundreds of dead in the neighbour's apartment. Fortunately the wind did not come from the south, otherwise the stench would have reached your apartment. Thereupon, your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

5) You took your neighbour's work and car away.

Once the neighbour used to go fishing. You stopped that. He once had factories. Those you bombed in 2006. He practised agriculture. You ruined that by forbidding exports. He once had an airport – built with funds from the European Union. You broke that up: bad neighbours don't need airports. The bad neighbour who only wants to shoot should not fish, should not work, should not till the fields, should not travel. Your bad neighbor should shoot at you so you can shoot back. And that is what he did.

6) Courts confirmed the neighbour's case.

Ignorant non-locals, alleged experts in Neighborhood Law, like Amnesty International, UN experts, Nobel peace prize winners unanimously say that your action as landlord towards your neighbour violates law and justice. Fortunately these people have no police to enforce their so-called law and justice. As Stalin already asked, 'How many divisions has the Pope?' Thereupon your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

7) For years you have driven your bad neighbour's friends out of their apartments.

Unfortunately the bad neighbour still has telephones and mobiles. Thus he learns every day how his friends and

relatives who live in the West Bank apartment houses are being driven out of their apartments. One of the ways you have of doing this is building a big wall, meant basically for your protection – at least that is what you claimed in your building application. But actually you built this wall not around your apartments, but right through the apartments of your bad neighbour's friends. What do they need two living rooms for? One is quite sufficient. In the other one your friends could live – demented Americans who are so forgetful that already after only one day of living in somebody else's apartment claim this to be their true home. And if the relatives of your bad, bad neighbour, in their own little apartment, have to go through a security check on their way from the living room to the bathroom, what is the problem? In the end, all of life is a waiting-room! And who ever demonstrates peacefully against it may get the Ossietzky Peace Prize in Germany, but at home will get tear gas again, and with bad luck may get shot for security reasons while demonstrating. Naturally, some friends of your bad neighbour went to court on account of the partition through their apartment. The then Foreign Minister of Germany, a complacent man named Fischer, called that 'not helpful'. Naturally, your bad, bad neighbour won the case, but again, naturally, there are no police to enforce the law. Thereupon your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

8) You took possession of the neighbour's house sixty years ago.

A long, long time ago your neighbour's grandfather was the owner of the whole house. At that time your grandparents came into the house, in despair, persecuted; it was a good shelter against the storm. Soon they built a house in the courtyard; after all, the courtyard did

not belong to anybody, did it? The fact that the others were no longer getting from one house to another – did that matter so much? After all, they were only Arabs. Occasionally a few humanistic weirdos came by, named Ahad Ha'am, Martin Buber, Hannah Arendt, and a few more, who said one should live with those house owners in peace, but, in the name of Marx and Bakunin, these Arabs were certainly too primitive for living together in communal flats, and one cannot be friends with such yokels. And later when Marx was no longer in fashion, one said: for God's sake, these Arabs have the wrong religion, what do they actually want here in this Holy House? There are enough other houses; they can go elsewhere.

And then, from 1947 on, your parents took away most of the apartments from the parents of your bad, bad neighbour, when these fled in fear, panicking in the face of the armed terror of your parents. And now many descendents of these people live in this one apartment, in the most densely populated spot on earth, in Gaza. Well, just why is it so densely populated?

Thereupon your bad, bad neighbour became furious.

And therefore the German Chancellor and Professor Oz-Salzberger said: The exclusive responsibility for this war rests on your bad, bad neighbour.

9) Concluding remarks

In 1890 when the first Zionists came to what is today Israel, they were fleeing discrimination, pillage and murderous pogroms in the Russian czarist empire, and searching for a free, self-determined life they were not allowed to live in their old homeland. This was not a conflict of good against evil, but rather the struggle

for a piece of land that was home to the Palestinian Arabs and at the same time appeared as the only possible homeland to the immigrants.

The struggle was won by the Jewish side, at the price of a constant state of war. However, a peace plan has been on the table for a long time. It consists of the Two-State Solution, with Israel's borders those of 1967, and a mutually acceptable regulation of the problem of the Palestinian refugees, and a mutually acceptable agreement on Jerusalem. This was proposed to Israel in 2002 by the member states of the Arab League and recently reconfirmed. Israel does not agree, because it cannot decide whether it would rather keep the illegally occupied land on the West Bank and extend it. As long as Israel does not say 'yes, we'd rather have peace, and end the occupation,' there will be no peace.

The position of Germany in this conflict is ambivalent. But can the fact that we European Jews were victims of a great injustice that was perpetrated by Germany give the Jewish state the right to commit injustice to others now? Do German politicians really believe that it is a compensation for the murder of my Jewish relatives that Israel now can do anything it wants, without limits and without restraint?

On the contrary, it would do Israel infinite good if it could be shown the way out of its fantasy position of eternal victim and become, like every other state, part of a network within an international system of law. This means that the occupation of the West Bank, the years-long siege of Gaza and the mass murder of the inhabitants of Gaza since the 27 December 2008 should give rise to sanctions and boycotts. The

European Union should assess Israel on its progress in observing international law and human rights, just as it does – justifiably or not – Serbia and Turkey. And a legal assessment in the cases of Olmert, Barak and Livni should take

place in the same way as those of Milosevic, Mladic and Karadzic – in The Hague.

This text, in its German original, will soon appear in the new edition of the book by Rolf Verleger "Israels Irrweg. Eine jüdische Sicht" ("Israel's wrong way. A Jewish view", PapyRossa-Verlag, Cologne). It was first published in a slightly changed version on January 5, 2009 at www.hintergrund.de.

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