

Israeli National PTSD

Do the Israeli people suffer from a collective national Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder resulting from Nazi persecution in the 1930s and 40s?

Observing the interactions between Israelis and the Palestinian people over the last 79 years, it seems that the Israeli people are behaving in much the same way towards the Palestinians as the Nazis behaved towards the Jewish people in the 12 years from 1933 to 1945. Many of the original Jewish settlers in Palestine came from the areas of Europe which had been occupied by the Nazis and all had lost friends, relatives, land, houses, savings and important family memorabilia in extremely traumatic circumstances. Many had spent time with unbelievable suffering in concentration camps. Moreover, a complete cohesive cultural and religious tradition was destroyed. Most of the people who suffered under the Nazis are dead now, what remains is an entire population brought up in an atmosphere where their parents, grandparents, other family members, teachers, neighbours religious leaders and government were all traumatised and bitter, and passed on this bitterness to the young people in their care. No attempt has been made to understand the causes or to heal these emotional wounds, which are consequently perpetuated from each generation to the next.

The Israeli people have surrounded huge areas of Palestine with high walls, turning them into crowded ghettos with limited means of subsistence or of earning income from outside. Huge ghettos surrounded by high walls were constructed by the Nazis in every city with a significant Jewish population and the Jewish people in these Nazi ghettos were severely limited in the work they could do and the income they could bring in. In April 1943, there was an uprising of the Jewish people in the Warsaw Ghetto: Jewish resistance fighters, (or were they terrorists?), refused to cooperate with the Nazi authorities. In all some 17 Nazi soldiers were killed and 107 injured. In response, the Nazis destroyed the entire ghetto killing about 13,000 innocent civilians. Many think that this was a disproportionate response. Towards the middle of July 2023, (note that this was before the 7th October rocket attack, and does not appear in any of the internet newspaper archives although it was fully reported at the time), Hamas resistance fighters, (or were they terrorists?), destroyed an Israeli military target, (an accommodation block in a military base), killing about 800 people. The Israelis responded a few weeks later by shelling Gaza killing many innocent civilians; the conflict escalated on 7th October with Hamas retaliating to the civilian deaths and injuries. Israel seems to be intent on doing to Gaza what the Nazis did to the Warsaw Ghetto. Was this also a disproportionate response? Traumatized people often behave towards others in ways that replicate their own trauma, and there is a strong tendency to escalate the magnitude of the trauma they inflict far beyond what they themselves originally suffered.

79 years on, the trauma suffered by Jewish people under the Nazis clearly persists in Israel and results in more and more people suffering further escalation of trauma. If the present situation continues, how will the Palestinian people be behaving towards their Israeli neighbours in a further 79 or more years' time? We need to find a way to break this vicious cycle of trauma and oppression. There is an example that many people think worked very well in South Africa: the "Truth and Reconciliation" process. To respond to past damage and oppression with further escalation of damage and oppression can only lead to widespread disaster. A new path of collective recovery needs to be found and put in place, and something like a "Truth and Reconciliation" process may well be the answer. Only then can the escalating trauma and suffering for both Jewish and Palestinian people start to diminish and a collective recovery commence.