



THE ETHICS OF DISSENT

Thoughts on a tendency to a certain fanaticism of ideas – creeping but no less damaging – in some of our “Western world.” This is an invitation, especially for doctors, to not lose sight of the moral necessity that people are always more important than absolute ideas and health is a right for everyone, without exception.

TEXT BY / BENEDETTO SARACENO / LISBON INSTITUTE OF GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH

IF FANATICISM IS IN A SUIT AND TIE

A few thoughts on the fanaticism spreading today in Europe and the United States. This type of fanaticism is worrisome because it does not declare itself in loud, extreme, easy-to-condemn manifestations but in understated tones of supposed common sense and calls to universal values of peace and democracy. We could call it fanaticism in a suit and tie, which is to say that expressed by ruling classes that appeal to “values.” These “values” are said to be Western values, European values, universal values, etc. What these values actually are is not so clear considering the wars in Iraq started by the U.S. and Britain, the South American dictatorships supported by the U.S. over the last 100 years, the European acquiescence to Israel's occupation of Palestine, the business that the EU and the U.S. do every day with dictatorships and rogue states. We struggle to see Western, European values actually embodied in ethically acceptable and defensible policies. These days, we see this suit-and-tie fanaticism applied on a regular basis to the conflict between the state of Israel and the denied state of Palestine.

IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Hamas fascists are now in the service of Iran's violent fascists. The Palestinian people need to free themselves from Hamas and rediscover the secular roots of their historic struggle against Israel's illegal occupation.

The support that Hamas gets is the result of years of weakening the fight to create a Palestinian state, due not only to the corruption of Fatah leaders but also to the self-serving support that Israel has given to Hamas with an anti-Palestinian purpose.

Netanyahu's fascists are at the service of a colonial, expansionist, and racist ideology that denies Palestinians the right to be free citizens, control their own lands, and be independent as a people/nation. It is urgent that the Jewish people in Israel and around the world finally accept criticism of the colonial policy of apartheid imposed on the Palestinians without silencing such criticism as “anti-Semitism.”

Israel has the right to exist safely and in peace. Palestinians have the right to land and independence. Palestinian rights do not justify Islamic terrorism against innocent Israeli citizens.

The political, instrumental use of anti-Semitism to justify Israel's violence must cease. The carnage in Gaza is unacceptable under any international humanitarian law and is made even more inhumane by the continuous evocation of the Shoah by the government of Israel as if the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis constituted immunity and impunity for the governments of the state of Israel. The political and instrumental use of criticism of Zionism to justify Hamas' violence and legitimize any anti-Semitic inclinations.

May hatred of Israel not fuel new anti-Semitism. May revenge against Hamas not kill an entire people. May Israeli settlers cease violence against Palestinians in the West Bank illegally occupied by settlements that destroy the possibility of a legitimate Palestinian state. May those who really want peace not display the Israeli and Palestinian flags but support resuming the Oslo agreements.

FOR AN ETHICS OF DISSENT

Yet, those who make the arguments summed up in these few words would be condemned these days either as a monstrous anti-Semite or as a pro-Israel imperialist. Condemned by all sides. This is simply because those who make these arguments would not be fanatics but rather dissenters from the mainstreams on the right and the left. They would be criticized by the traditionally anti-Semitic right that displays Israeli flags as an anti-Palestinian statement and by the often anti-Semitic left that displays Palestinian flags as an anti-Israeli statement. Fanaticism dominates and few try to escape it.

Every doctor makes the commitment of the Hippocratic oath (“All houses which I enter, I will enter to benefit the sick...”). This means “all houses” without distinguishing between friends or enemies, between those who are like us and those who are different, between rich or poor. Who can say if when doctors make the oath, they understand that they are also adopting a moral guideline against that fanaticism that cuts with a sharp blade, separating “us” from “them,” the good from the bad, never stopping to question and look at the man, woman, or child forced into the tragic role of the “other,” the enemy.

We doctors ought to send the message to everyone that living beings are more important than big, absolute ideas. We ought to learn and teach how to be dissenters.



GAZA: IF THIS IS NOT GENOCIDE...

The situation for civilians in Gaza is worsening by the day. The level of conflict with Israel is rising, and international institutions seem unable to act decisively to bring a resolution to the conflict.

TEXT BY / GAVINO MACIOCCO / DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF FLORENCE

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) was a doctor, psychiatrist, and author of a seminal book on colonialism *The Wretched of the Earth*. His words about the relationship between colonizers and colonized people describe the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians exactly. “At times this Manicheism goes to its logical conclusion and dehumanizes the native, or to speak plainly, it turns him into an animal. In fact, the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms.” This is exactly like what Yoav Gallant, Israeli Minister of Defense, said in the aftermath of October 7, “We are putting a complete siege on Gaza.

No electricity, no food, no water, no gas – it’s all closed.” He added, “We are fighting human animals and acting accordingly.” These words spoken by a member of the Israeli government were part of what led the International Court of Justice to accept in part the demand for “urgent measures” made by South Africa, which accused the Israeli state of violating the Convention against Genocide in its war against Hamas. The judges in The Hague recognized that there is a case to be assessed – rejecting Israel’s request for dismissal – and that the situation in Gaza requires rapid intervention to protect civilians. But they did not go so far as to impose an immediate ceasefire, which was South Africa’s first demand.

Almost a month has passed since January 26, when the Hague Court decided not to close the case against Israel, whose government was asked to prevent genocidal acts and to take immediate measures to allow the provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance in the Gaza Strip. The January 26 sentence did not change the course of the war: the slaughter of civilians has continued along with attacks on the few still functioning health facilities. The people’s living conditions have worsened dramatically due to the absolute lack of essential resources and malnutrition among children is increasingly widespread.

While I am writing these words, I read on the BBC “The World Food Programme has paused “life-saving” food deliveries to northern Gaza,” leaving the 300,000 people left in the northern part of the Gaza Strip without food. What should we call this?

Dissenters from the Ethics, the Values, the Ideologies, and the Faiths. It is the capital letters that should make us suspicious. We need a dissenter’s manual that reminds us that good is not being right in “everything” and that the “just battle” (and there are and have been just and sacrosanct battles) remains just only to the extent that it remains human.

Radical dissidence is calling us. There is no choice but that of truth and the doubts that come with it. We need an ethics of dissent.

We doctors have a lofty task: to remind everyone that before history there are the houses of everyone (“...all the houses I will enter, I will enter for the benefit of the sick...”).

Because the justifications of history are often just tanks that crush all life they encounter.