
NOTE FROM THE FRONT LINE

Revolutionary psychoanalysts with Palestine

Ian Parker*  Red Clinic, <https://redclinic.org/>

ABSTRACT

This piece was prepared for a Red Clinic online meeting ‘Palestine Solidarity: Speak Out/Talk Back’ which took place in October 2023. The Red Clinic is a collective of communist mental health workers. This piece addresses psychoanalytic questions of the internationalist space we inhabit, the place of contradiction in our conception of the world, and the importance of time in our understanding of historical events.

KEYWORDS: Palestine; Gaza; solidarity

How do we revolutionary psychoanalysts respond to this crisis? There are a number of ways that we can think psychoanalytically about what is happening now in the ongoing genocidal attacks by the Israeli state against the Palestinians; and, remember, this is not only taking place against the Palestinians of Gaza, but also in the West Bank.

A first aspect that we focus on is to do with the space we inhabit as revolutionaries and psychoanalysts. Psychoanalysis is profoundly internationalist. It refuses to attach itself to particular nation states. That is something very clear in Freud’s response to Zionist calls to support the nationalist project. Yes, he was subject to antisemitism, and, yes, he valued his heritage and identity as a Jew, but he rejected attempts by colleagues who had emigrated to Palestine to construct Jewish nation-state institutions in the name of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the main funder of Freud’s psychoanalytic publishing house in Europe, Max Eitingon also moved to Palestine and funded psychoanalysis there, and, a little noticed fact, Max Eitingon also gave significant funding to the Palestine communist party.

*Contact details: discourseunit@gmail.com

A second aspect concerns contradiction. We have a small group supporting the Red Clinic here in Manchester, UK; a group of comrades from different parts of the world who have been active now in the Palestine solidarity protests. They are clear that not all Palestinians support Hamas, and not all Jews support Israel. Not all of us locals among them support the British state, by the way, and we aim to dismantle it. The point is that there is no such thing as a homogeneous identity—we are all divided subjects—and a culturally or ethnically homogeneous state is anathema to us. Our task is to oppose and to replace nation-state structures here at home and act in solidarity with our comrades inside the Israeli state who are opposing that state.

The third aspect concerns time. A potent ideological motif now is ‘condemnation’, what one colleague in the Red Clinic has termed the ‘condemnation discourse’ that freezes us and locks us into a permanent present. This has been voiced in recent commentaries in the mass media that explicitly refuse to step back from what happened in the Hamas attacks and insist that we stay, as they put it, ‘in the moment’, to dwell on the event to do justice to it. Psychoanalytic approaches to trauma are very different, analysing instead the conditions that bring about such violence. We analyse how this past projects itself into the future, and as revolutionaries we do not merely predict, but act. In the words of Marek Edelman, leader and survivor of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising, it is a case of ‘always being with the oppressed, and never the oppressors’.

Now in 2023, after an event we could not predict and we are told to condemn, to condemn and do nothing more, we are in the midst of a slow drawn-out process of mass-murder by a racist apartheid state, mass-murder that we can prevent.

The Israeli state defines itself now in its nation-state law as a state of the Jewish people, nationalist, homogeneous, and set on condemnation and revenge. Additionally, it is dead set on continuing a process that commenced with the Nakba, wiping out the Palestinian people, driving them out of Gaza as the next step in this vicious process. To be silent about this is to be complicit in repression and oppression. Standing with the Palestinian people now must go beyond sympathy for them as victims, and build solidarity with them as active agents, with all of their contradictions, forging their own liberation.

So, the Red Clinic stands in solidarity with the Palestinians against Israeli state terror.

STATEMENT

This statement was drawn up by members of the Red Clinic in preparation for our next public online meeting (date to be arranged), at which we would like members of different psychoanalytic organisations around the world to speak about the institutional obstacles and responses to the task of standing in solidarity with Gaza. Would you please sign, and be

part of the process of putting together a speaker list for the meeting. Please be in contact with us about this, as individuals or as psychoanalytic organisations willing to sign, at redclingenquiries@gmail.com

Figure 1. London demonstration, 14 October 2023 (photo by author).



Psychoanalysis in solidarity with Gaza

We are members of psychoanalytic organisations in solidarity with our colleagues in Gaza, standing with Palestine against the genocide currently being waged by the Israeli state. This current onslaught, which has already resulted to date in the death of more than 10,000 people in Gaza, and many murders by settlers of Palestinians in the West Bank, is being conducted with the support of regimes in the global north that care nothing for human life. The Israeli state and those who deliberately abet it care nothing for those they portray as sub-human, and whom they tolerate, at best, as powerless victims.

We are also aware of instances of clinical practitioners inside the Israeli state siding with that state and causing obstructions in the contracted supervision of Arab psychotherapists, with consequent effects on already traumatised Arab patients. This is unconscionable complicity in oppression, a betrayal of the ethics of psychoanalytic practice. This context, as many international organisations and local Israeli organisations have declared for many years, is apartheid. Still worse are the proclamations of psychoanalysts inside and outside Israel that instrumentalise the 7 October attacks in order to support the ongoing invasion of Gaza.

Critical support does not preclude unconditional support for a people dispossessed of their land for 75 years (nor condemnation of the Hamas attacks). Ambivalence about organisations and slogans engaging in resistance does not warrant hypocritical 'neutrality' over the rights of the Palestinian people. Our task is to resist the ideological and state offensive carried out against the Palestinians. We call on our colleagues to dissociate themselves from the war on Gaza, and to state unequivocally that they will speak and act for Palestine. This is no time to be silent. Yes to resistance.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Ian Parker is a psychoanalyst and revolutionary Marxist in Manchester, UK.