



Source: Helene Cooper, 'Few good options for US on Palestinian violence', *New York Times online*, 14/06/07.

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As if picking apples out of a crate or tossing old tomatoes after they've gone off, she proclaimed with certainty, 'most of them are bad.' But it was human beings to which she referred, not rotting fruit. Ones she'd never met. Ones she would likely never meet. It's strange how people get so comfortable with their dismissive generalizations. Based on nothing but meaningless phrases from a newspaper article or paranoid chatter among friends. It's always done with a wave of the hand. Nothing to it. Except for the pleasure it gives, which should be the first clue of its potency.

All her friends are in agreement. They email each other rabid editorials from right wing newspapers and call one another to share the latest news of alleged anti-Semitic rancour. A bus blown up on Ben Yehuda Street, a Jewish graveyard defaced in France, a mesmerizing Imam with a hooked hand in North London spouting venomous anti-Israel sermons, an academic at Columbia who equates Zionism with Racism. All enemies are equal. Jihadi suicide bombers, working class European skin-heads, Religious fanatics, Palestinian intellectuals, Jewish anti-Zionists, all one and the same, working towards the ultimate destruction of the Jews. One three day visit to my mother's southern Floridian, full comfort, air-conditioned universe and I come out convinced that no one is victimized quite like the Jews. The next holocaust is just around the bend.

The camps may have been liberated 62 years, 5 months, and 20 days ago, but for her it might as well have been yesterday. Well, yesterday with a colossal mass amnesia suffered by everyone around her except her close circle of friends who live in an enclave of gated communities and keep strictly to themselves. How could the world forget? How could the world let this happen again? How could no one see that there's another Jewish genocide about to take place? All the world seems to blame the Jews. They hold us to a higher standard, don't want us to be strong, to protect ourselves against our enemies. Do they expect us to go like lambs to the slaughter again? Would they rather see us dead? What do people know about living with the threat of suicide bombers every day? Can the people who criticize us even imagine what it must be like to be afraid to send your child off to school in the morning, or to meet for a coffee in an outside café? Do they know what kind of crazed maniacs lie in wait to ambush us and drive us into the sea? Mothers who raise their children to die, teachers who teach nothing but hate. Wouldn't they protect themselves if they were under the same threat?

It's so familiar to me that I can just spout off the spiel as if it were my own. It was. I grew up with it, immersed in it. I knew nothing else. We were taught to have an abiding affection for Israel and to fear and hate its enemies. Growing up in the suburbs of New York City, I never met a

single Arab, let alone a Palestinian, except to bargain with in the shuk of Jerusalem's old city, but they weren't people, they were fixtures who seemed to delight in ripping us off. What they weren't, to our young, uncomprehending minds, was our enemy. They seemed harmless enough. Foreign, strange, untrustworthy, but only so far as a few shekels were concerned.

This in fact, was the beginning of the rupture. Maybe I didn't realize it then. Nor when my beloved cousin came back from the Israeli army talking about the Jewish 'niggers' from Arab countries. But slowly it started to sink in. The racism and unreason registered on a level that I couldn't quite decipher but neither could I entirely ignore. It took years for me to be able to face it head on. Years of denial, avoidance, then shame. I learned Spanish. I went to Mexico. I dreamt of fighting with the Sandinistas. I forgot my Hebrew. I lost touch. I blamed it on being queer. My Israeli cousins wouldn't accept me, I told myself. They were farmers. Simple folk. Probably homophobic. I avoided them and everything related to them and blindly deleted my mother's persistent propagandistic emails. I knew no one who had been raised Zionist as I had, who shared my views. No one from my childhood who seemed to be questioning the righteousness of our stance. But there was something rancid in the rhetoric, something I couldn't trust. Hadn't it been said about the Jews that we were mostly all bad? Hadn't we been vilified as a threat to civilization, the rotten apples that needed to be routed out? Didn't we know better than to rely on such racist generalizations? Surely, they couldn't all, or even mostly, be bad.

I've since met others. Jews who have broken the cycle of fear, hatred and revenge. Who have found their voice and speak out against the injustices wrought by an overzealous, acquisitive, colonialist regime. Who refuse the Jewish right to return until it is granted to Palestinians as well. I have found soul mates and comrades who prefer the prospect of diasporic statelessness to the distorting traumas and moral turpitude that militarism brings. I have met Arabs who refuse to blame all Jews for the excesses of the Israeli state. Who reject racism against Jews just as they expect it to be rejected against them. I now know Jews, Christians, and Muslims who can all seem to distinguish the difference between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. I have found a way to be Jewish and proud that doesn't require an endless jeremiad of victimization to justify its existence. I have learned to find comfort in exile. I even find myself admiring sheep, who always seem to choose injustice reigned upon them, over reigning injustice upon others. But I'll admit, if those are the only choices, then indeed, 'most of them are bad.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Alisa Lebow.*