

# JEWSWEEK

OPINIONS

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## The ugly truth

Occasionally, as in these perverse times, the "victim" may be the bully. He may also be a liar -- or even a murderer.

by Frimet Roth

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AUTO SHOW: A news photographer snaps pictures of a car on fire, blown up by Israeli forces near the northern West Bank town of Qalqilya, Wednesday, March 12, 2003. According to Israeli army spokesman, undercover troops shot and wounded two wanted Palestinians that were in the car before arresting them. The army found two bombs in the car and they set off a controlled explosion.

Anyone with a conscience chooses a side. You don't just sit on the bleachers watching two fellows beat the living daylights out of each other.

Who can argue with the Red Cross slogan "The worst tragedy is indifference"? You've got to get involved and root for someone: preferably, for the victim.

So you trot out your trusty litmus test for victimhood and the familiar jargon of days gone by: Civil rights, Jim Crow laws, racism, apartheid, Bantustans, colonialism, freedom-fighters.

Then you apply them to current conflicts - like the Palestinian - Israeli one. And voila - you have your victim.

Or do you?

Occasionally, as in these perverse times, the "victim" may be the bully. He may also be a liar - or even a murderer.

My daughter Malki's murderers are often mistaken for victims. A book called *Shahidas* was recently published in French by an American writer, Barbara Victor. In it, she profiles the Palestinian woman - now incarcerated in an Israeli jail - who planned and executed the murder of my daughter and of the other innocent victims in the Sbarro pizza store. Victor's book includes profiles of other female Palestinian terrorists. It has snapshots of their parents and their babies

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and descriptions of their childhoods and their aspirations. All this alongside an account of my Malki's last day in this world. One large grab-bag of victims.

The truth is far more complex and elusive. But it is out there and it surfaces occasionally. If only it weren't buried so quickly by those who find it disconcerting.

Take, for example, these overlooked facts. Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat made Forbes magazine's rich 500 list in its current issue. This revelation might have stopped Israel-bashers in their tracks once upon a time. Yet these days, when those activists are hailing Saddam Hussein - an uncontested mass murderer - as a victim, it is understandable that a mere \$300 million in stolen money fails to move them.

But let's leave the leaders to their antics. What about the Palestinians, the victimized masses yearning for peace? Do we know the truth about them?

Probably not, if you haven't heard about Ichlas Chuli. She is a 35-year-old Palestinian mother of seven from Tulkarm, and the first woman murdered by Al Aqsa Martyr activists for the alleged crime of collaboration with Israel. Her 17-year-old son, Harim Bachir, maintains that he concocted the story of her involvement with Israelis after members of that terror group captured and tortured him with electrical cords. And has the scars to prove it.

Haaretz journalist, Amira Hass, is a pro-Palestinian Jewish Israeli who has lived in Ramallah for several years. The fact that she is still alive and writing attests to her staunch pro-Palestinian stand. Nevertheless, in November, 2002 she reported that the Al Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades in Tulkarm had killed no fewer than 15 alleged collaborators in their town. The brother of one of those victims, a doctor of internal medicine, told Hass: "There is no law here." The killers, he said, "are the real collaborators... They are the real criminals."

The murderers themselves, as Haas wrote "...have no regrets and do not think that there was anything wrong in their acting as judge, jury and executioner."

Photos of Palestinian women, planted in front of a pile of rubble and with arms outstretched to the heavens, have become a familiar newspaper item. But how many are aware that those houses served as shelters for terrorists? About two dozen members of the Al Aqsa Martyr's Brigades, for example, live in Tulkarm "in underground-like conditions," writes Amira Haas, "staying over in other people's homes... people willingly put themselves at risk to host them and see this as natural, as something to be taken for granted."

At what point, then, does an innocent, peace-loving neighbor become an accomplice to terror? Perhaps when he voluntarily offers a known terrorist shelter?

Critics of Israel swallow the notion that the terrorists are fringe elements in their society and that the Palestinian Authority has done its utmost to rein them in and that it condemns their activities. But they seem to have missed the disconcerting truth about the PA, a truth that even Hass acknowledges: After the failure of the Oslo accords, Arafat and his apparatchiks stood to lose their grip on power. Dreading the prospect of relinquishing "the benefits of being a ruling movement," as Hass puts it, they opted to allow armed groups to employ "popular but disastrous" methods in their name. She interviewed one such Arafat lackey, a senior Fatah man in Gaza, who "personally benefited from the creature comforts devolving to him and his entire class through their support of the Oslo agreements. Thanks to the Al Aqsa martyrs, they don't kill us," he admitted with frank honesty in her interview with him. "Thanks to their existence, we stay alive."

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So which is it? "Thanks" or "condemn"? Or has someone been having us on?

Some of the foreign "cheerleaders" have immunized themselves so thoroughly against the ugly truth they have actually jumped into the ring for their victim's sake. The so-called International Solidarity Movement primes young activists from all over the world to serve as human shields in Palestinian areas. In a three-day crash course, these idealistic volunteers are treated to a potpourri of propaganda:

First comes a lexicon of common expressions. "Settler" = "colonialist." "The Israel Defense Forces" = "Israeli Occupation Forces." And so on.

Then in another lecture, the volunteers are reminded of their legal rights in the event of arrest and are urged to remain silent until release. A Palestinian who addresses them on "Palestinian Culture" cautions: "Women should avoid shaking a man's hand. Women teach children; Men have control... Family is of central importance." On the final day, they are urged to hide their sentiments about suicide bombers. "Don't say 'It's stupid.' They are sacrificing their lives for their land and nation, and even if you and I disagree with this method, you must be sensitive and respectful."

The government of Israel has granted visas to hundreds of these blinkered dreamers. It has expelled only 48 of them to date. Considering the obvious hazard they pose to Israeli soldiers struggling to catch terrorists with a minimum of innocent casualties, one can only marvel at Israel's tolerance.

Fighting an enemy who hides among foreign human shields and behind his own women and children has pushed the restraint of Israeli soldiers to its limits. Proponents of the Palestinian case never tire of stories about their innocents dying in cross-fire or through occasional errors. But the compassion shown by Israeli soldiers' is one of those well-buried disconcerting truths that rarely emerges.

Residents of the Jerusalem street where I live are painfully aware of that compassion. In August 2001, it was rocked by the loss of my daughter and her best friend, who lived on this street as well, while both stood on line to buy a pizza for lunch. Last week, it was singled out again. Shachar, our neighbor from four buildings down, was the son of a quiet couple, a retired bus driver and a bookkeeper. At 24, he was an army officer serving in Shechem (Nablus). One evening, he oversaw the detonation of a suspected car-bomb in the center of Bethlehem. After the controlled explosion was carried out, he remained at the site to ensure that the fire had been fully extinguished and to prevent injury or damage to Palestinians and their property. He paid dearly for this concern, and his parents will go on paying for the rest of their lives. A Palestinian sniper killed him with a bullet to the neck.

My battered street, my tortured nation, have watched for two and half years as the truths about this war are systematically buried. Now we watch as the truth about Iraq suffers the same fate. Salima Kazim, an Iraqi grandmother enjoyed a brief audience with a popular "peace" advocate, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, at a recent anti-war rally. She tried to tell him how Saddam Hussein had murdered her three sons because they had been dissidents in the Ba'ath Party; about how one of her grandsons had died in the war Saddam had launched against Kuwait in 1990. She requested a chance to address the crowd. But the visibly displeased Jackson refused. "Today is not about Saddam Hussein," he snapped. "Today is about Bush and Blair and the massacre they plan in Iraq."

Reading her account, I was reminded of the day my husband and I, together with four other Israeli bereaved families, were invited by the Israeli foreign ministry to relate our painful experiences to Jackson in Jerusalem after his visit with Palestinians. His response was a sermon: Concentrate on what you have left; do not neglect your surviving children. Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Perhaps, like the reverend, one can effectively spew platitudes and bury painful truths. But not indefinitely. I have no doubt that one day the ghosts of those truths will rise up to haunt all who ignored them.



**Frimet Roth** is a New York-born Israeli whose daughter Malki, 15, was murdered by Palestinian Arab terrorists in the massacre at the Sbarro restaurant on August 9, 2001.



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