

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY IBRAHIM QURAIISHI

10.04.2023

The Occupation has Hijacked the Occupiers



Israeli protests in Tel Aviv. Photo: Amir Terkel.

A conversation on the current situation in Israel with eminent Israeli activists Neora Shem and Nimrod Kerrett

There are several topics that connect me to Neora Shem and Nimrod Kerrett. First of all, we had a mutual friend, the Israeli linguist and political thinker Tanya Reinhart. Tanya was one of the most outspoken critics of Israel's policies post-1967. She furiously argued that Israel must finally abandon the West Bank and Gaza and allow the Palestinian people to live in dignity. Noam Chomsky spoke of Reinhart's activism as "the front line of direct resistance to intolerable actions, an organiser and a participant, a stance that one cannot respect too highly." Her untimely death in 2007 has been a great personal and intellectual loss to not only to us, but to a whole community of intellectuals, political activists in Israel and Palestine and to academia throughout the globe. Another connection between Neora, Nimrod and I are our political ideas and thinking, mainly our commitment to equality,

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

mutual respect and basic justice, whether in our personal lives, our intellectual or political endeavours, even in rethinking and reevaluating fixed positions, because change, also change of thinking, behaviour and living is indeed possible as long as we respect the Other and acknowledge the Other in ourselves. Last but not least, we managed to make up after a conflict which seems to lay a solid foundation under a friendship. The conflict was rooted in an art project called *Landscapes* that I had initiated in 2003 with Israeli and Palestinian artists. In its core the project was a kind of an immersive visual response to the 9/11 tragedy. Neora was teaching cyber-culture at the Tel Aviv University and I was introduced to her and other colleagues by Rafi Gamzou, the Israeli diplomat and then the deputy mayor of Tel Aviv in-charge of culture. Neora was interested in my project and agreed to participate. On some levels the project was not really a success, due to a deep mutual mistrust between the Israeli and Palestinian artists, plus my directorial ideas often clashed with the theatrical realities and languages of the Israeli and Palestinian co-artists. After years of muted silence Neora and I restarted a dialogue. Reflecting on our artistic, political and human process we saw that our ideas are much closer than we ever imagined back then. We experienced that our ethical and moral stances against aggression, oppression, misogyny, hate and nationalism are one and the same actually.

The current developments in Israel made me re-read some of Tanya Reinhart's texts. Neora and Nimrod's engagement in the protests against Benjamin Netanyahu's judicial overhaul plans gave me an insight from within. Insights I would like to share.

How and where would you position yourselves in the current discussion regarding democracy in Israel?

Neora: How to get around the point to be labeled as something we are not? The complexities of living in the Middle East are hard to understand. We are part of a society that is terribly torn apart on many levels. This nation produces resistance and intellectuals who question the politics of that same nation. Simultaneously, we want to imagine a better and more inclusive Israel for everyone.

Nimrod: We have our views based on the actual facts on the grounds. But as for label-ing, the linguistics here can be very tricky. For example, until recently Itamar Ben-Gvir, the extreme right wing Minister of National Security, used the words "death to Arabs" but now he says "death to terrorists." There is a linguistic shift here. Rather than being a racist, he now calls everyone a terrorist who is not Jewish. A classic Hebrew play of words coming from the right wing that we simply cannot ignore. Personally, I rather not use any labels.

So, what does it mean for you to be part of a progressive movement in today's Israel?

Nimrod: Listen, when we go to a demonstration some 50 meters from where we are standing, there is a group that calls themselves, "Looking occupation in the eye." These people have a different focus. And yet, both of us believe, that there is no such thing as democracy when there is an occupation. They have made it their main focus, and we make it our focus to stand together with them. Like many other people, each have their own thing. Among the protesters there are religious people, we have atheists and we are standing together. If one of them is threatened, we are all there because we are the majority. The majority of the 'little' people. It's more like the 99% kind of 'little' people.

What would you say is the main issue in the current discussion?

Nimrod: Occupation is the main issue!

Neora: We were just watching the video of Yuval Noah Harari's lecture this week at Tel Aviv University. He is very critical. He states that the coming 75 years of Israel are going to be determined during this very month. The fact is that the Minister of National Security calls us, the protesters, terrorists now. He wants to have his own National Guard now. To control us.

Nimrod: There is more. There are two factions now in Israel that are against one other. Both think that they are pro-democracy. The pro-Netanyahu people who are in favour of this "coup" (meaning the judicial reforms, ed.) believe that what Likud is doing will save the nation. That it will save democracy because it will allow the numerical majority to do what it wants. And do it freely. Like, for example sending us to camps.

Camps?

Nimrod: That's what they would like to do, yes, sending the Israeli left and civil society to camps. Of course! Listen, if they get what they want, women will not even have the right to vote. Only Jewish men will have rights. Actually, it is important to know what will happen in the next elections. What this new situation will create. Maybe elections will not even occur because nobody will have the right to vote.

Is that even a serious option? Come on.

Neora: If we don't resist now, yes, it is that serious.

Nimrod: The good thing about Harari's lecture is that he is a historian first and foremost and this kind of "coup" has actually happened many times before.

You mean to put the discussion in an historical context?

Nimrod: If you have no check and balances, you must assume the other side is never wrong and has pure intentions, but nobody is like that. Nobody, including Harari. If he could do what he wanted, that would also be extremely dangerous.

What does it mean for you to be physically present on Kaplan Street in front of the army headquarters?

Neora: At some point, I realised that I cannot shout louder or stronger than we are already doing. So, this is why I started this movement of meditation in the middle of the demonstrations. And it's going quite well. There are more and more people joining us. We are just sitting there in silence. It's a hard silence. What we are doing is "sumoud" in Arabic, "sumoud" means something like standing together in unity. It is staying where you are without moving. It is an Arabic word and it comes in relations to talking about solidarity. About being together. That is what the Palestinians believe. They are holding on just because they are together, because they are standing in spite of being shot down constantly. We also believe in standing together. That's why last week, we went to stay at night in Wadi, with the Palestinian people. Their area was taken by Israeli settlers by force. These settlers take more and more land that belongs to Palestinian families, from before 1948. Now, just as a provocation, the settlers started doing their sports day, their marathon, in Wadi of all places. Just to take control over the area. The Wadi was the only place where Palestinians were allowed to go to their family picnics, since it is forbidden for Palestinians to go to beaches or other places to relax. Now the Israeli army blocks the Palestinians from going to Wadi, their own area, in their own territories. You asked me about my physical presence in the demonstrations? There at the Wadi, it was almost the only moment I was feeling good with myself. Because of this "sumoud", the unity feeling that we are together with our co-Palestinians supporting their struggle against occupation and violence. We both are children from Shoah survivors. This whole thing is not easy to talk about. The idea of occupied territories, forbidden access to beaches or even a place to relax. We can factually say that these are ghettos like "H2" in Hebron. We have State sanctioned pogroms like in Huwara and Masafer Yatta. It is very painful for us. Our parents are totally outraged by the repetition in history.

It makes me also think about what Tanya Reinhart called "the deterioration of the constructive engagement". Allow me to shortly bring in Tanya Reinhart. When did you actually met her?

Neora: In the eighties. We had a mutual friend, professor Yosi Grudjinski. Both Tanya and Yosi were favourite students of Chomsky. They were extremely smart and surprising.

Has Tanya been an important inspiration when it comes to your political thinking about Israel and the occupation?

Neora: Yes, I admired talking and grasping her ideas when related to language and activism.

In 2002 in her book "Israel/Palestine: How To End the War of 1948", Tanya saw how the "constructive engagement" had totally deteriorated and was thus allowing the Israeli position of non-compliance to the Dayton Accords harden. Although she described herself as a post-Zionist, she was also patriot for her country, and a deep believer in the expansion of Israeli democracy to be applicable to everyone, whether Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Atheist. For her the Israel experiment indeed should become a beautiful implementation and hope for both Arabs and Jews and for both Palestinians and Israeli's. How much hope for democracy is there right now in Israel?

Neora: Only now, after all these years of the occupation, most Israeli's start to understand what the Palestinians go through for all these years. And these are only little things, I mean not only 50 people got arrested yesterday in the Tel Aviv protests, also many people got stinky clothes. I am not talking about the killing of people or injuring them. I am only talking about Israelis getting their own garbage in their own face. The Netanyahu Government brought all these trucks to spray all this ugly stuff on us, like they do on the Palestinians.

Nimrod: You have to understand that for us being Israeli, we are always protected by Israeli law. Even in a place under military law. Unlike the Palestinians. Suppose, I have a disagreement with a Palestinian then the Palestinian is judged under military law and I, being an Israeli, even as a "lefti" Israeli, I am under the Israeli law. That is why we are such a problem for the Israeli army when we are in the Palestinian occupied territories. Because there, the army cannot do anything to us.

Neora: The bottom line of this is, that the army is always protecting the settlers. Allowing them to do whatever they want to do to the Palestinian people. Like breaking their arms, burning their houses, beating them up and shooting them. The army just watches and even walks away.

Nimrod: Another example is what happened in Huwara. People like us, Israeli Jews, tried to enter Huwara to help the besieged Palestinians. Some of us, all Israeli peaceniks, were treated with minor violations, like they got physically pushed and pulled by the Israeli soldiers. Nothing serious, I mean, nothing compared to the violence that the Palestinians face every-day. Nevertheless, the Israelis in our group were shocked. Telling the soldiers:

“Why do you treat me like this, I have the right to demonstrate, I am a citizen of a democracy.” Stuff like that. But you know, this is not a democracy, it’s only a democracy for us. For Israeli Jews only. The Israeli soldiers together with the settlers behave in the Palestinian lands like they always do. They usually don’t see people like us. So suddenly they see people like themselves, Israeli Jews, siding with the Palestinians who have no rights. That’s already a shock. That is a problem to the system itself.

Neora: At the moment many Israelis are learning the hard way about the truth in our country. As I mentioned before, this military method called makhtazit (it’s Hebrew for water cannons. ed.) where the soldiers drive these huge trucks and spray liquids from the sewers on the protesters. The smell is just disgusting, you can’t get it off. It’s impossible to wash it out of your clothes. We have seen this on Fridays, when we went to demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem where the Israeli military takes the houses from Palestinian people. Just demolishes them without any notice. There, the army is trying to control the situation with the makhtazit. They spray this horrible sewage on the Palestinian children who have to go to school the next day. They cannot get the smell out of their clothes, their houses, from the curtains, anywhere. It is shocking the way they fight innocent people. Children.

Nimrod: It’s humiliating.

Neora: Very humiliating. So now, also in the demonstrations in Tel Aviv they brought these makhtazit cannons. So actually now ...

Nimrod: Occupation is occupying itself. The occupation has hijacked the occupiers.

Neora: I would say that the power structures that were created in order to maintain the occupation, suddenly started being used inside pre-67 Israeli borders, targeting Israeli Jews.

The opposition between the left and the right has become extreme in Israel right now, or is it the opposition between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem? The secular verses the religious? Or is it the opposition of the settlers and the Mizrahi’s versus the intelligentsia, the academia and the elite?

Neora: In a way, it’s all that.

Nimrod: And the amazing thing is, that those settlers, these ultra-right-wingers, Mizrahi’s and the ultra-religious also believe that they are fighting for democracy. And they even believe that they are morally on the right side with God.

Could a civil war emerge from this?

Neora: We don’t know.

Nimrod: Indeed, we don't know, but this is a situation where the army could storm the Knesset and say you are all under arrest because you are all breaking the law. But as it looks now, even right after Bibi (Netanyahu, ed) "promised" to stop legislation in exchange for a "cease fire" until Ben Gvir's storm troopers (the proposed "New National Guard, ed)" get time to organise. Many new laws have been passed in the last days. For example, a law that is allowing political appointment of judges which effectively is making sure that Bibi will be never found guilty when his corruption cases reach the Supreme Court. Harari and others have been speculating that one of the things that the Supreme Court can do is a veto of all those laws. Since we don't have a constitution, the only thing that we have for check and balances is the Supreme Court...

Neora: Yes, but also one of the laws is to take away the power of the Supreme Court from the Supreme Court.

Nimrod: In that case, if the Supreme Court says "this law" should not be passed and the government would pass that law anyway, it means that the government is putting themselves above the law. What will the army do then? The police? The secret services? Do they side with the law or with the people who think they are above the law?

One change in the juridical law has passed already. Right?

Neora: Yes, just the other day, yesterday (March 23) we woke up to know that the law has passed that you cannot make Netanyahu leave his post. Under no circumstances can we make Netanyahu leave his seat. This new law was passed in the night, while people are sleeping. Usually, you need three acts to pass the law. It takes a few days or few weeks between each passage. They took a few hours between each act and by the morning it was passed. It was done.

Nimrod: Technically speaking there has to be at-least six hours between 2 votes for a law to pass. So, it took exactly six hours.

Neora: So, in this country nowadays you can wake with a new law that has passed overnight, which is really frightening.

Do you think we are at a point where you can call it the "Israel Spring?" Like the "Arab spring?"

Nimrod: Right now it's more like the Israel Winter. (Both laughing). The protests will not stop. I think every week more and more people will come to protest. Yesterday, in the morning I joined the drummers demonstrations as a drummer, in the evening we were part of the main demonstrations. At noon, I went with Neora to the police station where some people were arrested. Still, people are very creative. Without joking, by now we already

know that several high-ranking officers and reservists refused to serve. And that led to Bibi firing the minister of defence Galant. On the other hand, that Ben Gvir is really having his private army. Perhaps this might be really handy for him if there are differences with the “traditional” forces.

Neora: I can tell you another thing about how we feel inside. We are really finding ourselves more and more as an oppressed minority. The more the government gets away with changing the laws, the more people believe that they have to leave this country. That they have to find solutions elsewhere.

Nimrod: So many young are going to America and Europe.

Neora: They are getting attractive offers. Especially in the high tech industry. And who could blame them for wanting to live in a real democracy? But we believe that the only way to survive is to be in good connection with the local communities. The fact that we live here in Tel Aviv, in a neighbourhood with all kind of different people, different colours, different belief systems, makes that we believe in inclusivity and diversity. Even with a right wing majority now in our country and, especially with a profound consideration of the Palestinians, we have to find a solution that is just for all of us. Not for one group over the other. That’s the only solution for the success of Israel. We recently found ourselves, singing a famous hippy, Israeli song : Ani Ve Ata – אריק איינשטיין – “אני ואתה”, you and I will change the world.”

Biographies

Neora Shem has explored the borders between technology and culture. She was the author of the fiction novel “Digital Affair”, the editor of “Zombit” youth magazine for technology and column writer in several journals including Haaretz, Globes and Ha’Ir. Neora held the two international hackers conferences in Israel, promoting open source concepts and taught cyber-culture at Tel Aviv University and Shenkar School of Art. Neora has also created, produced and directed the play “MedeaEx_”. Other recent interactive projects include “Ayuni” experiencing telepresence for Palestinians abroad and “Alonely” about the loneliness in the social networks. Neora has also developed “Sidelang” a software project that helps multilingual sites enable linguistic justice by representing content (for example: Israeli military laws in Palestine) in two languages (Hebrew and Arabic) in order to ease access to people who otherwise confront a language barrier (for example: Palestinian lawyers and the victims they represent). Neora also compiled the complete online archives of the former Israeli Prime-Minister Golda

Meir, Uri Avnery, Hanoch Levin and Shmuel Agnon among others. These projects were often based on infrastructure developed by Nimrod Kerrett <https://neora.pro>

Nimrod Kerrett is a hacker, maker, activist and artist. In the late 80s he worked in AI based hardware diagnosis systems (ClickSoftware). In the nineties he was involved in early AI-based online trading (in a Geneva based investment bank), and was part of the development of the first firewalls (checkpoint ltd.) Nimrod also used these skills on online and offline activism – from building the websites of Gush-Shalom (Uri avnery’s Peace movement), Bavel, No2Bio, Legalize Israel, Indymedia Israel, Ale-Yarok, Cable2Graph (wikileaks infographics for journalists) and many many more. From its inception, Nimrod has been an advocate of open source culture and practice in Israel. Currently, Nimrod has taken a step back from technologies and is creating interactive electronic crafts and jewelry. He is an ongoing active supporter of Palestinian-Israeli collaborations like Engaged Dharma and Kulna Yaffa as well as a drummer in ‘Standing Together’ movement that has great impact in the 2023 protest for democracy. <https://zzzen.com>

Tanya Reinhart (1943 – 2007) was known as one of the most renowned theoretical linguists. She held the Interface of Language and the Systems of Use Chair at Utrecht University, Netherlands. Having received her B.A. and M.A. in Philosophy & Comparative Literature from The Hebrew University Jerusalem. She further received her Ph.D. in Linguistics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with Noam Chomsky as her advisor. Her dissertation on The Syntactic Domain of Anaphora (1976) was widely acclaimed. More recently she is known for her work in diverse areas: syntax, semantics, discourse analysis and psycholinguistics. Reinhart has been on the editorial boards of journals in diverse linguistic disciplines, such as Natural Language Semantics, Language Acquisition and Discourse Studies. Among her most influential studies are “Pragmatics and linguistics: an Analysis of Sentence Topics” in *Philosophica* (1981); “Reflexivity”, with Eric Reuland, in *Linguistic Inquiry* (1993) and “Quantifier-Scope: How labor is divided between QR and choice functions” in *Linguistics and Philosophy* (1997). She had taught extensively including MIT, Columbia University, Université de Paris 8, Utrecht University and for over twenty years at Tel Aviv University. Her untimely death occurred while she was in New York at the distinguished Global Professor at New York University.

Ibrahim Quraishi is a conceptual artist and writer dividing his time between Berlin and Amsterdam. His work has been exhibited extensively across Europe, South/East Asia and the Middle East. He is a regular cultural-political contributor to the German newspaper

TAZ : die tageszeitung. His first historical novel, “being everywhere, being no where” (part I of a trilogy), is forthcoming from Seven Stories Press, NY.<

CounterPunch 07.04.2023