

Useless Protests in Gaza? “Human Solidarity Around the World”

Remember Sartre and Fanon

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Some say protests in Gaza are useless: No tangible results. Then, there are silly discussions about biased reporting, 1 as if “balance”, representing two sides equally, leads to truth. It doesn’t, at least not for questions that matter.

You don’t get objective truth by balancing available information. In fact, you may not get objective truth from true information. That view is naïve. It’s been known to be naïve for a long time: more than half a century by philosophers in the North and forever by some in the South.

It’s a simple point about how we know things: It depends on who you think you are. José Martí, who led a war for Latin America’s independence, political *and* human, said in his famous “Our America” that such naivete – about knowledge – is a bigger barrier to human freedom than US power.

He meant freedom for human beings. They need to be known.

Jean Paul Sartre knew this point. He told Europeans in the 60s that they wouldn’t understand Frantz Fanon by reading *Wretched of the Earth*. It wasn’t because Fanon is obscure. He’s not. It’s because the “wretched” didn’t count, and *that they didn’t count* was part of what it meant to be European.

It was European identity. It is well-known that we don’t understand that which, if we did understand it, fully, would undermine our sense of who we are. It is why some white folk don’t get racism and why the US will never understand Cuba, or Venezuela.

It is not about how much information is available and from how many sources.

Sartre knew that Europeans would not understand Fanon because if they did, as Sartre puts it, the ground would move beneath them. They’d be insecure. He urged Europeans to *let* the ground move beneath them, in order to learn.

Sartre urged Europeans to “enter into” Fanon’s work:

“At a respectful distance”, he wrote, “it is you who feel furtive, nightbound, and perished with cold. Turn and turn about; from these shadows from which a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombies”. 2

Palestinian teenager, Ahed Tamimi, also knows the point. She's in jail for slapping a heavily armed Israeli soldier, on her own land, after her young cousin was shot in the head, also while unarmed. Tamimi told Abby Martin of *Telesur* that what would most help Palestinian kids is human solidarity: from around the world. 3

She doesn't mean possessing information. Che Guevara said, famously, that

solidarity "has something of the bitter irony of the plebeians cheering on the gladiators in the Roman circus".

It is not enough "to wish the victim success ... One must join the victim in victory or death".

Or, at least, "turn and turn about". Lenin called it a "passage through dark waters".



Read Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to know the experience. It's the story of an escaped slave who kills her children to protect them from slavery. On the face of it, her choice is irrational. Nothing is gained, you might say. Her kid is dead. Slavery remains.

But *read* it and you find out that "used-to-be-slave", Sethe, is not irrational at all. And she's not morally irresponsible. This is clear when you know her. You know Sethe as a human being who knows herself as a human being. That's what dignity is.

The question, then, is not: What does she gain? Instead, it is: How is death an option for someone who is rational, loves her children and wants above all to protect them?

The answer is dehumanization. Sethe's good friend, Paul D, also a "used-to-be-slave", says:

"More frightening than what Sethe did was what Sethe claimed".

She claimed her humanity. It was frightening even to Paul D, who knew everything that could be known about slavery. He'd been a slave. He'd lived it.

Wretched of the Earth is about that claim: to be human. Fanon said resistance, sometimes violent, can be an act of self-creation. Sartre said Europeans wouldn't understand, at least not just by reading intellectually, and not easily. They didn't need self-creation, or so they thought.

"What is gained?" is not always useful. It is not even the question we ask ourselves when faced with important life choices, according to economists. 4 It is a simplistic view of human reasoning that says that what matters is results, and all we need to properly evaluate such results is a lot of data.

It ignores what Ramzy Baroud calls "the epic struggle to feel human". With his new book, *The Last Earth: A Palestinian Story* (Pluto Press 2018), readers can "turn and turn about" to know the dignity that drives that epic struggle in Gaza, rationally, and will continue to do so.

Martí knew that struggle. So did Fidel Castro. Fidel articulated it his entire life although some, even sympathetic to Cuba, didn't notice. At least occasionally, more frightening than

what Fidel did was what he claimed: that the poor matter, that the poor remember, that human beings “think and feel”.

Not everyone understood, even on the left, and even with piles of information. It’s one of those truths which, if we understand it fully, changes who we think we are, as human beings. It’s been the message of many philosophers – Martí, Che Guevara – who understood the Empire (and its allies)’s dehumanization. They’d lived it.

They knew the epic struggle. *The Last Earth* takes us there, again.

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Notes

1. CBC FM1 *Sunday Edition* Sunday, May 27, 2018
2. “Preface”, Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963)
3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yV1HwG1_phs
4. E.g. Pink, Dan (2010). The surprising truth about motivation.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6XAPnuFjlc>

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