

Israeli ambassador vandalizes artwork at Swedish museum

Brian Smith
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Last month's vandalising of a work of art by the Israeli ambassador to Sweden speaks volumes as to the social and political physiology of the Sharon government.

Ambassador Zvi Mazel was attending the opening of an exhibition at the Museum of Antiquities in Stockholm entitled *Making Differences*, which was a part of an international conference on genocide hosted by the Swedish government.

The piece—an installation by Israeli born artist Dror Feiler and his Swedish wife Gunilla Skoeld-Feiler—is entitled *Snow White and the Madness of Truth*, and consists of a small white boat floating on pool of red water designed to look like blood. The sail of the boat is made from a photograph of Palestinian suicide bomber Hanadi Jaradat, who killed herself and 19 Israelis on October 4 last year at a restaurant in Haifa, Israel.

When he saw the piece, which is set in a snow-covered garden at the museum, Mazel flew into a fit of rage and demanded that it be removed. The museum refused, at which point he pushed a spotlight into the water causing the installation to short circuit. He was subsequently escorted from the building.

Mazel has said that he thought to himself, "What does it mean, that there's this sea of still-fresh blood and she's smiling, and then I read the title I saw that she's Snow White, meaning her sins have been washed away—and this is the blood of my brothers, my people."

Mazel called the piece "intolerable and an insult to the families of the victims." He told Dror Feiler that he was ashamed that Feiler was Jewish.

The Feilers have made their own positions clear. "You're doing exactly what you do in Nablus", Dror Feiler told Mazel. "This is a free country, and I can say what I want to say here, not like you in your apartheid country."

He later noted, "My family lives in Israel—why should I like suicide bombers? The fact that we try to explain terrorism doesn't mean that we forgive it. It feels ridiculous to have to say it, but we condemn suicidal bombings." The piece calls to attention how "weak, lonely people can be

capable of horrible things."

Gunilla concurred, explaining that the work was "not a glorification of a suicide bomber." Rather she "wanted to show how incomprehensible it is that a mother-of-two, who is a lawyer no less, can do such a thing." She added that "when I saw her picture in the paper, I thought she looked like Snow White, that's why I gave that name to the piece."

The installation was accompanied by the playing of Bach's 199 Cantata, *Mein Herze Schwimmt im Blut* (My Heart Swims in Blood). The cantata begins: "My heart swims in blood since in God's holy eyes, the multitude of my sins makes me a monster."

The following text was shown on posters on the adjoining walls, interspersing lines from the Snow White fairytale with comments on the suicide bomber Hanadi Jaradat:

Once upon a time in the middle of winter
For the June 12 deaths of her brother, and her cousin
and three drops of blood fell
She was also a woman
as white as snow, as red as blood, and her hair was as black
as ebony
Seemingly innocent with universal non-violent character,
less suspicious of intentions
and the red looked beautiful upon the white
The murderer will yet pay the price and we will not be the
only ones who are crying
like a weed in her heart until she had no peace day and night
Hanadi Jaradat was a 29-year old lawyer
I will run away into the wild forest, and never come home
again
Before the engagement took place, he was killed in an
encounter with the Israeli security forces
and she ran over the sharp stones and through thorns
She said: Your blood will not have been shed in vain
and was about to pierce Snow White's innocent heart
She was hospitalised, prostrate with grief, after witnessing
the shootings
The wild beasts will soon have devoured you
After his death, she became the breadwinner and she

devoted herself solely to that goal
“Yes”, said Snow White “with all my heart”
Weeping bitterly, she added: “If our nation cannot realise its dream and the goals of the victims, and live in freedom and dignity, then let the whole world be erased”
Run away, then, you poor child
She secretly crossed into Israel, charged into a Haifa restaurant, shot a security guard, blew herself up and murdered 19 innocent civilians
as white as snow, as red as blood, and her hair was as black as ebony
And many people are indeed crying: the Zer Aviv family, the Almog family, and all the relatives and friends of the dead and the wounded
and the red looked beautiful upon the white

The museum’s director, Kristian Berg, called the work “an invitation to think about why such things happen in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Dror Feiler agrees. Jaradat is another example of how the inhumanity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict perpetuates itself, he noted. “That’s what happens when you push someone into a corner. That person becomes a monster.”

Mazel is not a man who wants anyone to think about what is happening in the Occupied Territories, however, and especially when it comes to considering that it is Israeli repression which breeds terrorist violence. He chose to ignore both the music and text and portrayed the piece as anti-Semitic and as an incitement to suicide bombers: “For me it was intolerable and an insult to the families of the victims. As ambassador to Israel I could not remain indifferent to such obscene misrepresentation of reality.”

Feiler was born on a kibbutz but has lived in Sweden since 1973. He is active in Jews for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, a Stockholm based group critical of the Israeli government’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. He believes that the attack was far from spontaneous. He believes that people who call the installation anti-Semitic are attempting to silence criticism of Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories. “When critics are threatened with being branded anti-Semites many are frightened into silence,” he noted.

As well as intimidating its critics, the Sharon government is employing the classic methods of the far right in seeking to whip up prejudice and fear amongst the more politically backward layers of the Israeli population. They can then be mobilised against anyone seeking an alternative to the official Zionist state policy based on brutal suppression of the Palestinians and economic austerity measures directed against Israeli workers.

Death threats have been made against the artists, and a legislator from Haifa has said that he will lobby the city to change the name of its Sweden Street. The Israeli

government has demanded the removal of the installation. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon himself has enthusiastically supported Mazel’s actions, saying that he had “thanked him for his strength in dealing with increasing anti-Semitism, and told him that the entire government stands behind him.... I think Ambassador Mazel behaved in an appropriate way.... I think the phenomenon is so serious that it would have been forbidden not to have acted on the spot.”

Public Security Minister Tzachi Hanegbi called for Mazel to be awarded a citation. “If there is a situation in which an ambassador should act in an undiplomatic manner, this is it,” he said.

The right-wing journal *Hatzofe* is backing Mazel saying that his actions are “worthy of much appreciation and imitation by other ambassadors in Europe”. The *Jerusalem Post* also applauded. “A formal protest would merely have been ‘duly registered’, filtered and lost in the back channels of European diplomacy,” it claimed. “So Mr. Mazel chose to scream ... the only option Europe now gives Israel.”

Such constant accusations of European anti-Semitism serve an essential political purpose for Sharon. Anti-Semitism is defined as any view expressing a critical stand towards Israel’s violent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This becomes a way of rubbishing the widely held view within Europe, one which is shared by many European Jews, that there must be a search for a political alternative after decades of internecine conflict. It reinforces the belief that the Israeli people are under siege on all sides and must rally round the government, even when its policies are producing a social and economic disaster. Finally it aids Sharon and the most right wing Zionist elements in their efforts to portray the Bush administration and its Christian fundamentalist constituency as the only true friend of Israel.

Accusations of anti-Semitism, particularly when combined with anti-European sentiments, is intended to invoke memories of German fascism and the Holocaust. But this must not be allowed to conceal the bitter reality that it is the actions of the Israeli ambassador and the support he has received from the government—including the demands for censorship, an intolerance to criticism and the witch-hunting of dissenting voices—that truly recalls the political psychology of fascism.



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