



**GAZA, GUERNICA, PICASSO AND PAUL ROBESON:  
RESISTING RECEPTIVITY TO THE ORDINARINESS OF EVIL**

*Los Angeles Sentinel, 12-07-23, p.C-1*

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**I**T IS NOT ONLY THE COLD-BLOODED CALCULATED and vengeance-committed carnage that Israel's genocidal war against Palestinian children, women and men which has currently destroyed the lives of over 16,000, wounded over 50,000 and is a radical evil in itself. And it is not only the wanton intentional destruction of homes, hospitals, heritage sites and whole neighborhoods, schools, mosques, churches, emergency vehicles, food and water systems, sanitation systems, and power and energy systems and sources. But it is also the fact that all this intentional mass destruction of lives, livelihoods and the conditions and capacity for life is augmented by still another accompanying evil. Indeed, this imposed savagery and resultant suffering is augmented by the willful cultivation in so many, through media and message manipulation, an expanded receptivity to the *ordinariness of evil*, especially where the Palestinians are concerned.

By cultivating the sense and sensibility of the ordinariness of evil, I mean making evil, even radical evil, not only seem normal, but also a necessary practice, especially for the demonized, dehumanized and grossly hated. Nana Haji Malcolm concerned with what he defined as "the science of imaging making" by the oppressor, finds its current technological iteration in Israel's *hasbara*, permanent-war propaganda, which is pumped out and peddled by a global network, especially in the U.S. and Israel, of media, corporations, institutes, universities, think tanks and other allied structures. Through these networks, it seeks to construct and control sanitized and self-justifying narratives of its immoral, inhumane, illegal, indefensible occupation and vastly destructive genocidal war. Thus, what we see, hear and experience on the daily and nightly news is Israel's killing without moral conscience or political constraint, favored

and funded by its crime partners, the rulers of the U.S. and let loose to wage a rampage of revenge and utter ruin in Gaza Palestine. And those who dare to discuss or even note it are branded, whitelisted, and removed from their positions or worse.

Through these institutions, as Haji Malcolm taught concerning what all oppressors do; they make the victim a criminal and the criminal the victim. They seek not only to limit and eliminate the telling of the truth of their actions, but also to determine and diminish our receptivity to truth. They, like their allies and underwriters, see and engage lying as a way of life, and disinformation, misinformation, defactualization and media manipulation as not only normal, but also from their standpoint, necessary. For the truth will only expose and indict them. After all, what other state in the world could indict and condemn a whole people and kill them with such savage intensity and widespread destruction, use language of dehumanization reminiscent of Nazi and fascist forces and not be condemned by the so-called civilized European dominated countries of the world? Not even the U.S. can claim such racist and religious deference, even from its own citizens.

Seeing this continued cold-blooded carnage being brutally inflicted on the Palestinian People and the incipient and increasing signs of the rise of fascism around the world, even in this country, we are understandably reminded of World War II and sites of genocidal slaughter. Certainly, we find parallels of fascist Italy, as a prelude to WWII, bombing Ethiopian hospitals, villages and towns, turning them also into morgues and graveyards and falsely claiming they were all human shields. It was, one genocidist proclaimed, "the beauty of war" to kill with such effectiveness and to revenge their prior defeat by the Ethiopian

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people who defiantly and victoriously resisted occupation and colonization.

The carpet bombing and destruction of Guernica, a Basque town in Spain in 1937, also comes to mind, even though Gaza is a greater catastrophe and larger crime. Over a third of its population was killed and the town was destroyed. It was memorialized in Pablo Picasso's "Guernica" mural, which is a vivid statement against the horror, savagery and suffering of war and the fascist mentality and war machine that caused it. Moreover, it merits the study of African American history and their courageous role in the international resistance to fascism and Nazism with Spanish resistance to fascist dictatorship as a precursor to resistance in WWII.

And it calls to mind Nana Paul Robeson's call to resistance that reaffirms our ethical tradition's emphasis on the humanitarian urgency and moral imperative to resist the depraved disregard for human life, freedom and dignity whenever and wherever we find it. In such a world-impacting war, we cannot be neutral or practice a selective morality for White people or any people because of their race, religion or power to penalize, punish, isolate and eliminate its critics and resisters. Thus, Nana Robeson says "We must decide where (we) stand now. We have no alternative. There is no standing above the conflict". For we are, he says, challenged by the destruction of human lives and human heritage and "the propagation of false ideas of racial and national superiority". Indeed, he concludes that "the battlefield is everywhere. There is no sheltered rear".

Moreover, we know, as history teaches us, this mass killing without moral conscience or political restraint did not start in World War I or WW II. It began and found its most vicious, violent and bestial forms during the age of triumphant imperialism,

colonialism and enslavement where genocide and holocausts against Indigenous people all over the world were planned, sanctioned and called for and perversely pursued with religious, racist and resource-robbing zeal. As Nana Aimé Césaire in his classic *Discourse on Colonialism* notes, before Nazism in all its barbarism, there was colonialism in its various forms. And before Nazism engulfed Europe, Europeans tolerated its colonial anti-human practices and were in great part its accomplices. For "until then (it) had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the colonies of India and the Blacks of Africa". And also of course, it had been also practiced against Native Americans and other Indigenous, different and vulnerable peoples around the world.

Clearly, with any sense of decency and human sensibility to suffering, we cannot turn a blind eye to injustice or a deaf ear to truth because it, we think, does not involve us, or it's unpopular and costly to oppose and resist it in some meaningful way. Nana Fannie Lou Hamer taught us that one of the first things we must do to build a free, just and good society and world is to stop lying and begin to resist "every step of the way" to achieve this. Nana Dr. Martin Luther King taught us that we need peace, but not all at the price of injustice and that thus resistance to evil and injustice is not only the path to peace, but also a moral imperative. And Nana Haji Malcolm taught us that freedom is an essential and indispensable condition of life and we can't have justice or equality if we don't have freedom. Freedom, he taught, is the God-given and natural right of everyone and we are morally obligated to seek freedom, regardless of its costs to us and the viciousness and violence of the oppressor.

Thus, we must insist in words and action that Israel's genocidal and indiscriminate bombing must stop and the U.S. must

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stop its complicity and support with funds, military support and political cover. Humanitarian aid must not be weaponized and interrupted but increased. The settler colonial violence in West Bank Palestine against the Palestinian children, women and men and the violent seizure of their land must be stopped. Also, there must be an end to the siege and occupation of Palestine. Israeli hostages and Palestinian political prisoners and children hostages must be freed. And serious international efforts must be made to achieve conditions of self-determination, sovereignty, security and peace for both peoples.

**T**HE LONG DESERVED DAY WILL EVENTUALLY come when the Palestinians, the Haitians, the Rohingya, the Uighurs, the Sudanese and Africans everywhere, and all oppressed and struggling people will reclaim their history in freedom, justice, peace and security. And we all will help to create a world which will honor their, our and all peoples' refusal to be oppressed, defeated or destroyed. And it will raise up and praise all our models and gifts of resilience, resourcefulness and righteous resistance to expand and secure space for a new history and hope for humankind.▲

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