

RE Mapping PALESTINE

Remapping Palestine – comment to criticism published in the Wiener Zeitung, print edition 25.8.2011, page 8, online edition 24.8.2011.



In the course of preparation and announcement of our “Remapping Palestine” event from 19 to 21 October 2011 at the Albert Schweitzer House, together with Palestinian agreement we received a great deal of positive feedback from diverse sources, above all from the Christian world and from Jewish voices.

To a theme such as the Near East conflict there are also naturally differing opinions, such as, for example, the one expressed a few days ago by a representative of the Austria-Israel Society (Wiener Zeitung, print edition 25.8.2011, page 8, and online (see footnote [1])).

Because such a volatile theme as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be stimulated by a lively and controversial discussion, we take pleasure in the critical comments that enable us to bring our own argumentation to

discussion. For this reason we wish above all to extend a heartfelt welcome to the spokesperson of the Austria-Israel Society, Ms Shaked, to discuss together with us her concerns as presented.

We wish to briefly address some of these points of criticism given on 24 August 2011 in the Wiener Zeitung and present again our point of view to the event and our political endeavours.

We are unfortunately unable to comprehend the accusation in this form that the (Re)mapping Palestine conference will be a “one-sided symposium that allows for not one Israeli voice”.

Although the focal content of the conference is the reconstruction of the history of Palestine before 1948, this intention was inspired above all by Israeli scholars and activists, who since the 1980s have themselves shown through their courageous efforts in Israel that acknowledgment of the respective ‘other’ side is an essential step towards a peaceful solution to the conflict.

This was also the motivation for us to invite to Vienna the Israeli “Zochrot” (Hebraic for “Remembering”) NGO, which has built bridges between Israeli and Palestinian history with its civil endeavours. That the Israeli “Zochrot” NGO decided to send as a delegate Mr Umar al-Ghubari, an Arab-Israeli, makes clear in an exemplary way how cooperation is a matter of course between Jews and Arabs among some Israeli NGOs.

To this extent it is incorrect that no Israeli opinions will be given at our event. As in every society, there are also differing points of view in Israel. There is also the point of view of the Peace Movement, which acknowledges injustice to Palestinians, and its members are also very happy to sit together around a table with Palestinians voices. The same is true of Professor Ilan Pappé.

From the article “Israel-Kritiker sorgt für Aufregung” (“Israel Critic Stirs Up Agitation”) by Simon Pötschko (Wiener Zeitung, 24.8.2011) we read that Pappé is a well-known and renowned historian, but nevertheless has a “reputation for being unserious and one-sided”.

We share the estimation that Professor Ilan Pappé is a renowned scholar because he had enjoyed a prestigious education at universities in Israel. As can be seen in his curriculum, he has studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and gained his doctorate at Oxford University. At the time of the Oslo Peace Process he founded and directed the Academic Institute for Peace in Givat Haviva in Israel. From 1984 to 2006 he was senior lecturer at the Institute for Middle Eastern History and at the Institute for Political Science at the University of Haifa. He is currently director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at Exeter University, one of the leading universities in Europe.

It is therefore beyond our understanding why Ms Shaked doubts the scholarly expertise of Professor Pappé. Unfortunately from the cited opinion we are unable to understand why Professor Pappé is a “doubtful” scholar and we would be happy if his critics were to present their points of view with a degree of content.

Ilan Pappé, whose parents were forced to flee from National Socialist Germany in the 1930s and could find no other refuge than in Israel, said in relation to the ban on freedom of speech that he has been threatened with: *“As a German Jew my father was brought to silence in a similar way in the 1930s, and it is sad to witness the return of the same censorship in 2009”*. [2].

It is above all because citizens of a country with a National Socialist past, which due to their religious and so-called “ethnic” affiliation were persecuted, tortured and murdered in their millions, we see it as our anti-racist duty to foster a democratic policy of open dialogue to counteract the crimes and policy against freedom of speech and censorship that prevailed in the 1930s and 1940s of the last century.

With great concern we are obliged to assume from the Austria Israel Society statement that the title of our symposium – “Remapping Palestine” – has been falsely interpreted as “Reoccupation of Palestine”.

We chose the title for this event following the example of Edward Said's efforts for bringing Israeli and Palestinian scholars together for reappraisal of the shared history of the country [3]. If one takes to hand a customary atlas, one will discover that the Palestinian territory of 1967 is not marked. In this respect, (Re)mapping Palestine is an attempt to place the state-forming process of Palestine on the political agenda because in our opinion no peaceful solution can be found without making such an effort.

The criticism that our symposium on the "Scholars for Peace in the Middle East" was put forward in our website [4], in which our symposium is mentioned as a part of the Israeli protest movement at the camp site on Rothschild Boulevard, can thus only give us a feeling of optimism!

Utterly contrary to Chava Gurion's judgement that it is a matter of "naive leftists", we find this protest movement to be an important step for building bridges between Israeli and Palestinian citizens in Israel. This is above all true because it shows that Israel and its civil population cannot be seen from a European perspective as a uniform, monolithic creation, and above all increasingly more voices in Israel are to be heard that demand critical confrontation with the government's policy of occupation.

We wish nevertheless to again emphasise the obvious!

As an antiracist association, we would always and with great energy be opposed to every form of anti-Semitism. Those wishing to misuse our symposium as a platform for extreme right-wing and/or anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, xenophobic, racist and sexist ideas will have nothing to find and nothing to seek at one of our events.

In the selection of our speakers we naturally take care that they are also of this persuasion. There are a great many Jewish people here in Europe, in Israel and all over the world whose opinions are the same or similar to those given at our event and we look forward to the support from the critical Jewish voice (Austria) given to the event and have announced their participation.

Naturally at our event the procedure of those responsible in Israel will be criticised in respect of the occupation, the building of settlements in West Jordan, dealings with the Arab minority and also the prevailing historic and scholarly mainstream attitude in Israel, which unfortunately legitimises the occupation of West Jordan and negates the Arab experience. It is important to us – and for this reason we are holding the conference – to also allow the Palestinian views to be made vocal.

Above all in the course of a future peace process and the setting up of a Palestinian state adjacent to the Israeli, we also see acknowledgement of Palestinian history as being necessary.

The way in which this could take place, which perspectives could be considered in this respect, and so on, should definitely be a part of our conference. In this respect we also naturally hope that the Austrian Israel Society, to which we have previously had no contact, will meet with us in dialogue. We will also be very happy if they were to participate in our conference.

Furthermore, the conference will be supported by various bodies. The MA 7 culture department promotes the event (the concert and the dance group), the Anna Lindh Foundation Austria, Pax Christi Austria, the Association for Austrian-Arab Relations and the Coordination Forum for the Support of Palestine will all be present as political supporters and have lent their logos for our publications in this respect.

Naturally the Albert Schweitzer House also gives support through the hire of the event premises.

We also feel that the event is broadly covered and, as already mentioned, will find great interest among those interested in the politics of the Near East. We are aware that discussion will repeatedly arise, above all to the theme of the Near East conflict. We feel that it should be possible in Austria, and by no means “unnecessary”, to hold these discussions. The situation in the Palestinian territories is tense and difficult enough, and every attempt undertaken for talks should be supported.

More about the event and about the union can be found at www.dar-al-janub.net. Some while ago on our homepage we gave our opinion to various points of criticism and accusations against our union, and these statements can also be readily seen.

We wish in this way to also extend a heartfelt welcome to the conference so that everyone and all those interested can form their own view or also present differing points of view.

The Dar al Janub – Centre for Intercultural Encounter at Kleistgasse 8/3, 1030 Vienna in Austria, reopens on 9.9.2011 after the two-month summer pause, as usual every Friday from 6.30pm and extends a heartfelt welcome for discussion. We can also be reached on the telephone number 0676 7893413 and naturally also by e-mail.

Vienna, 25 August 2011: Union for Antiracism and Peace Policy (Dar al Janub)



Footnotes

(1) www.wienerzeitung.at/themen_channel/wzwien/stadtleben/391693_Israel-Kritiker-sorgt-fuer-Aufregung.html

(3) <http://www.ag-friedensforschung.de/science/pappe.html>

(3) Edward Said, “Palestinians under Siege: putting Palestine on the map”, London Review of Books, Vol. 22, No. 24, 14 December 2000, (<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v22/n24/edward-said/palestinians-under-siege>).

(4) www.spme.net/cgi-bin/articles.cgi?ID=8332