

# Brownie with the Enemy



By Sabrin Hasbun

On Sunday morning I spoke with my father by phone about the escalating brutality in Palestine. It is a disturbing subject, and since I had to go to a meeting with a new friend, I cut the call short. I had organised my lunch with Grace some days ago and I had warned her that Frome doesn't have much to offer on a Sunday. It is just a small town: working-class families, middle-class families, New Age families. There is nothing but the countryside and a hippieish atmosphere. I'd checked the town's calendar and discovered an event called How to Change the World. There was no further description. "Better than nothing," I thought, "let's go there."

The actual event is, exactly like the ad, without any precise aim. It is not clear how they want to change the world. There is an old couple playing violin and guitar, free Indian food, a stand selling knitting works, two or three debates about how we can live a greener life, organic fruits and vegetables for sale, and a lottery. Amongst this strange hotchpotch of stuff, there is a stall with an abundance of material on Palestine. Obviously, I stop and look, if only to find a bit of familiarity in the middle of the jumble. I start to share a bit with Grace about my origins, my half-land – half because I'm just half Palestinian and because, honestly, there is not much land left. She seems really interested and so I take advantage of the products on display, make her taste *za'atar u zeit* (eaten by dipping toasted bread first in olive oil and then in fresh thyme mixed with roasted sesame seeds), tell her about the *marmaon* (a Middle-Eastern hand-made couscous),

and let her smell the strange perfume of the olive oil soap. Behind the stall is a poster showing the different phases of the expropriation of Palestinian land. I recognize the longitudinal black spot that is becoming thinner until it nearly disappears while a huge white space is taking its place. It doesn't exactly make a good impression on me: it causes the familiar feeling of uneasiness, the same feeling of helplessness I felt while on the phone with my dad this morning. Better to go on with my explanation about traditional dishes: it's easier to be Palestinian if you think just about the delicious cuisine.

difficulties of defining yourself as a writer, university... We even order a brownie for two, sharing also the guilt of a few too many calories. And while we are sitting there with this piece of cake between us, little forks sometimes touching (a soft version of Lady and the Tramp with their spaghetti), it comes to my mind to speak about religion. Why? I am not sure. Is it not considered impolite to inquire about someone's religion? We are in the middle of our chocolate idyll and I must ask about her religious faith? I'm an atheist, for heaven's sake!

"My family and I are Jewish," she says.

Deadly silence. I pull my little fork back. Thoughts are racing through my mind. "Why the hell didn't you tell me that before? Why didn't you declare yourself while I was talking and talking about the *za'atar* and the olive oil soap? Why were you indifferent to my gaze being distracted by the thinner and thinner black spot? Were you? The whole world thinks that we are fighting, that we hate each other, and yet you dare to play Lady and the Tramp with me and a chocolate cake? Should we not insult each other, tear each other's hair out, take our little forks and stick them in each other's eyes?"

Well, I did a good job: we are hungry now. We find a cosy little café and order tea and sandwiches (oh so British) and speak about this and that: our families, love relationships, the importance of being open to new experiences, the

My brain has, in very slow motion, briefly imagined this scene. Now it is starting to work again: "*You're taken in, aren't you? You believe that too, don't you? Well then, if you do, it must be true: it's true that you hate all the Jews*"





*just because they are Jewish, you are a fucking new Nazi. Public opinion is right then: you, Palestinian, you are just repugnant terrorists, extremists, wishing death to all the infidels...*

I stick my little fork in the brownie, just near hers. Less than one second has passed since her declaration, but in my mind half a century of history has passed. I continue to wonder why she didn't tell me that before, if it means something for her, if she feels involved, or if she is just aware (or unaware) of the brutality of the Israeli occupation. If she is aware, why didn't she say anything in front of that poster?

I continue to wonder about this and about many other things, but I come to one certainty: no, I don't hate her. I don't hate her or any other Jews. There is a huge difference between being Jewish and being Israeli. It would be like no longer eating any kind of vegetable just because I don't like rocket. It simply is nonsense. And no, I don't even hate Israelis. I would just like to freely and honestly say why that black spot, my half-land, Palestine, is becoming thinner and thinner. And I would really like to understand why public opinion is so crushed, so dazed that I am forced to duck the issue about my origins and defend myself from the accusation of being violent or racist, just because I am Palestinian.

So here I am, sharing a brownie with my "enemy." Because even this act, I'm sure – and maybe Grace would agree with me – is an act of resistance. At least against misinformation.

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