

At the outset, I too would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people on whose land this forum takes place.

Where is Peace to come from? The weapons companies tell us that Peace comes when we are fully armed, when we have the latest and best weapons that money can buy. Peace comes when you are so fully armed, that no one would dare to attack you. This is the peace that the Zionists and the current State of Israel aspire to. It is a peace, when there is no Peace. It is the peace marketed by the weapons manufacturers who have infiltrated the upper levels of our defence department and have undue and secretive influence on our major political parties.

It is also the peace of empire and subsequently colonisation. When I was young, I was taught at school that Empire, and particularly the British Empire was a good thing. I am sure that there are people in this room who can remember being shown maps of the world and having it explained that the sun never sets on the British Empire. There are still people who think empires are good, who believe in the Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome. The peace of Rome was good for rich Roman men, but not so good for anyone else.

Of course, in the last 50 years this world view has been challenged, not least by the great Palestinian thinker Edward Said, who has pointed out in some detail how Western culture has been distorted by Imperialism, but also the ways the injustices of colonisation have been justified, mythologised or ignored.

Unfortunately, this is not a lesson yet to be learned in Australia by our major political parties, who continue to be in thrall to American Imperial power, as evidenced by the ongoing AUKUS debacle as well as their failure to consistently depart from American policy in regard Israel and Palestine.

Last week, at the Garema Place rally, I heard Mussa point out that the current war in Palestine is not a war of religion, of Jew versus Muslim. With this I wholeheartedly agree. It is a war, to use Said's terminology, a war of colonisation, and in a sense it is a continuation of the West's wars of colonisation. As in nearly all wars, the parties try to use religion to justify their murderous actions, but this is not at the heart of the conflict.

At the heart of the conflict is injustice. An injustice done in the first instance to the Palestinian people by the whole world community in the establishment of Israel in the way it was, and an injustice perpetrated by the Israeli State, with its allies since then.

Our challenge, and I think it is the great challenge of our age, is how do we bring about justice, without falling into the trap of using the instruments of empire and oppression. This is an old problem. The three Abrahamic faiths all have stories of Moses, and how he worked to free our ancestors from the oppression of the Egyptian empire, and yet our ancestors were deeply ambivalent about leaving the security of empire and trusting in another way.

They failed often to see what the contemporary South African Muslim scholar Farid Esack has pointed out that justice "is the natural state of the universe and humankind is obligated to act in a fair, equitable manner with others and to avoid partaking in oppression, as this would run contrary to the nature of God." The atheist philosopher, Jacques Derrida makes a similar point without the God language, when he argues that when you peel away, peel away, peel away all the interpretations of our world, what comes flying up at you is justice, the undesconstructable. But justice in this form is beyond law and without force and depends on us to implement it.

This is the core of peacemaking. It is about realistically looking at the world. It is about casting aside the distorted lenses of the mainstream media, particularly Murdoch and his allies. It is about questioning deeply held Western mythologies of the superiority of the West and the necessity for lethal force to ensure order. And at a very basic level it is about growing a capacity that is often seen as irrelevant in world affairs, the capacity for empathy.

Empathy is painful. As we watch what is happening in Palestine and don't turn away, we deeply mourn, and the mourning goes on and on. ... In the midst of this mourning we realise that we are not alone in our mourning. This mourning reaches across cultures, and languages and ethnicities. It goes deep, into the fabric of life itself. It is deep calling to deep. And there is a flame that burns, which both destroys and creates. And out of this mourning comes a renewed commitment to justice.

All empires claim that there is nothing that can be done to oppose them. This is the way life is, so suck it up. The history of resistance says that this is nonsense. The world was not designed for people to be oppressed. People are oppressed because some people are oppressors, and this can be changed. The work of resistance is hard. And sometimes the wait is long. No one knows this better than the Palestinian people. Yet, always there are little steps of resistance that we can take that feed into the bigger picture. However this can only happen if we continue to stand in solidarity with the oppressed, if we refuse to look away when we become uncomfortable or sad. While acting in the present we need to take the long view, for as Martin Luther King pointed out, many years ago:” The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

Len Baglow, Facilitator, Against the Wind