

The Siren is Ashamed / Ariel Rubinstein (Hebrew: Haartez, April 22nd, 2024)

When the siren sounds this week on Holocaust Remembrance Day, I won't stand at attention.

I won't stand at attention because, at that very moment, the soldiers in my country's army will be standing at attention atop mounds of dirt overlooking the miserable tent encampments and ruins of the cities of Gaza. Armed with lethal weapons, dressed in full body armor and battle gear, and equipped with navigation and control apps produced by the best minds in Israeli industry, only their moral compasses are a bit lacking.

I won't stand at attention because upon hearing the siren, Civil Administration officials in "Judea and Samaria" will rise from their chairs, the siren interrupting their discussions on how to drive more Palestinians from their homes, make their lives more miserable, and transfer them to the "permitted area."

I won't stand at attention because I can't "wrap my head around" the fact that government ministers in my country take pride in depriving two million Gazans of basic living conditions. Even if the "two million" do not wish us well, they are human beings, just like me.

I won't stand at attention because after the siren, Israel's prime minister will release another propaganda video seeking to cast the Palestinians and critics of Israel as Nazis.

I won't stand at attention because Holocaust Remembrance Day instills in us the axiom that "the whole world is against us" – at a time when the world, including the Arab world, is nearly silent as Israel does almost anything it pleases in Gaza and the West Bank.

I won't stand at attention because it's a false show of national unity. In this show, I'm supposed to stand next to those whose values have nothing in common with mine. All we have in common is that fact that we speak the same language and (perhaps) have a similar genetic makeup. I'll refrain from standing and won't feel any pangs of conscience about withdrawing from the public. I still believe that Zionism is an appropriate response to the horrors of the exile. However, five decades of a regime of occupation and dispossession and now a war of vengeance in Gaza stir heretical thoughts.

I won't stand at attention because since the October 7th massacre, we've been mired in a cult of death. If there were some positive content for Holocaust Remembrance Day, we could use it to pay tribute to the earlier generations who refused to become addicted to loss and, instead of vengeance and retribution, chose to continue their lives, to give birth to us, and to build a state. If

Holocaust Remembrance Day were a day of learning lessons from history, we could focus on studying the roots of antisemitism and fascism, and the human tendency to follow the crowd and submit to dictators. But instead of examining the roots of antisemitism and the beastliness inherent in (all) human beings, Holocaust Remembrance Day has turned into a binge of nationalist sentiments.

I won't stand at attention because I feel no consolation. Yes, I've heard that the world is full of examples of nations that acted worse than us. But those aren't my nations. The loss of humanity does not require a Wannsee Conference or actions that fall under the legal definition of genocide. The fact that we haven't obliterated all of the residents of Gaza and "only" punished them mightily is no reason to award any commendation to the "most moral state in the world."

I won't stand at attention because the siren is an act of state worship, and I was taught not to worship idols.

I won't stand at attention because I recognize the absurdity: I hunch over the keyboard, enjoy the routine pleasures of life, even though I know (more or less) what is happening only tens of kilometers south and east of me. Standing at attention will turn this absurdity into something even more grotesque.

It's not often that a person feels dazed and tells himself honestly: "I can't do that." But what I actually have to say is that if the reader feels this dizzying absurdity in standing at attention during the siren on Holocaust Remembrance Day this year, he's not alone. The siren, too, is ashamed.