**THE SKEPTIC ARENA**

**July 26, 2014**

**Conservative Christian Myopia: Israel Edition**

**By Hännah Ettinger**

***It’s really hard for me to get caught up on the details of the invasion of Gaza by Israel over the last couple of weeks. Growing up in conservative Christianity, we had a myopic, distanced, and deliberately ignorant understanding of politics in the Middle East, and so now, I find myself at a loss for where to start in understanding news reports like this one:***

**Hannah, before I read your excerpt, I am wondering if you bothered to investigate the source you chose to quote?**

**Well I did.**

**RT.COM is a Russian propaganda site. No one has ever accused the Russians of having a free press. Russians have almost always taken the side, opposite to that, of America.**

**As you quote your Russian propaganda source (which is little more than Putin's Facebook page) I will take the liberty of interspersing my comments.**

***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***

***"Over 350 Palestinians have been killed in Israel’s ongoing operation to root out Hamas fighters it says are hiding in Gaza tunnels.***

**RT.COM, well that was certainly a well-balanced and fair opening. How many Israelis were killed by the missiles that Hamas fired at Israel to begin the shooting war? Or are you going to start the recording when Israel returned fire? How many Israelis were killed in the invasion? Don't really care, do you?**

***Meanwhile, tens of thousands came out to protest the victims of the invasion, almost 80 percent of whom are civilians.***

**RT.COM, it isn't surprising that most of the victims are civilians. What is surprising is how anyone could be so biased as to ignore the fact that it is Hamas who is responsible for those deaths by intentionally positioning their fighters in hospitals, mosques, and civilian centers. I don't see any mention of that anywhere in this article. Why is that?**

***The United Nations mission in Gaza says that more than 60,000 people have been displaced as a result of the escalating conflict. Israel has warned Palestinians living in over half of the country that they may come under fire either from the ground, air or sea.***

**RT.COM, and did the Palestinians give the other half of the country that warning? I can't remember reading anything that indicated that they did. Maybe I just missed it?**

**And while you are on the subject of the United Nations, you seemed to have omitted the part of the story about the ceasefire that was agreed to by Israel, the Arab League, and the United Nations, but was rejected by Hamas. Why did you leave that part out?**

***Together with the mounting death toll, the Palestinian health authorities say that over 2,000 people have been injured. Around a quarter of the reported victims have been children."***

**RT.COM, that was the part I was waiting for ... "the children." Are the lives of men and women any less valuable?**

**No.**

**You saved the children for the end so you could use them as an "Appeal to Emotion."**

**But that tactic will backfire because the evidence that Hamas is using women and children as human shields, and then trying to blame Israel for their deaths, is strong.**

[**http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/23/world/meast/human-shields-mideast-controversy/**](http://www.cnn.com/2014/07/23/world/meast/human-shields-mideast-controversy/)

**Nice job of reporting, RT.COM. It was just about as fair and balanced as the American propaganda network ... Fox News.**

***\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_***

***The bloodshed is grievous and I wish I understood more of what was going on. The understanding I grew up with was a primitive and ahistorical one that went like this:***

***Israel (the Jews) were God’s chosen people according to the Bible (which we believed was inerrant). God said in the Bible that he was giving them the geographical land of Canaan for their home (elide the narrative bits in Joshua and Judges about the Israel-lead genocide of the natives), and the land would belong to the Jews and their descendants for the rest of known history. And the Jews believe in the same God we do, so we need to support them in keeping their homeland. The end.***

**Hannah, after World War 2 when the Allies had to create the state of Israel, didn't that tip you off that the Bible was a mishmash of misinformation?**

**It should have.**

***I even knew conservative Christians who were so enamored with Israel that they appropriated Jewish traditions for their Christian practices and called themselves “Messianic” Jews — a concept that has always made me distinctly uncomfortable. To a lesser extent, I also grew up with the uncomfortable awareness that my parents (of German descent) chose to name me with an anglicization of the Hebrew pronunciation of the name Hannah, partly because they liked the sound, and partly because of their specific practice of faith. It’s unique, but it’s also cultural appropriation and I have to live with that.***

***I’m pretty disappointed that this Christian-centric narrative is all I knew of Palestine and Israel growing up and that my education hasn’t been significantly improved on the subject since.***

**Hannah, I understand your consternation at the brainwashing you received as a child, but I'm confused as to whom you are blaming for your lack of significant educational improvement since then?**

**The internet has provided all of us with access to the world's accumulated knowledge. Granted, you have to navigate through all the lies and bullshit, but with diligence, you can get to the truth. However, if you continue to rely on propaganda web sites to provide your information, you might as well cancel your internet connection and use the money on homeopathy pills.**

***But also, I’m realizing that this mindset is a pretty old one among American Christians.***

**Hannah, you are completely ignoring America's long history of anti-Semitism. The Ku Klux Klan is just one example of a Christian organization that contradicts your statement.**

***Curious how far back this goes, I dug around and found a press release from 1967 about Billy Graham and the Six Day War:***

***Mr. Graham revealed that, during and immediately after the Six-Day Mideast war, he had been in touch privately with American political figures, urging support for Israel’s right to survival.***

**Hannah, did you ever wonder why a man of God, like Graham, who apparently has a direct line into Heaven, would instead ask human politicians to provide guns and ammo; especially considering what you said earlier about God promising that Jews would occupy their homeland for the rest of known history. Did God forget to mention that He would need American military assistance to keep that promise?**

***He said he had delayed making any public statements because of the pleas of evangelical Christians in Arab countries who feared reprisal from their host governments.***

**Hannah, I wonder why Graham didn't just pray to God to protect them? He doesn't sound like a man a much faith, does he?**

***“The Jews are God’s chosen people,” Mr. Graham declared in the article. “We cannot place ourselves in opposition to Israel without detriment to ourselves.”***

**Hannah, Graham is one of the few Christian leaders in America who can actually make Pat Robertson seem sane.**

***This mindset hasn’t gone away, though. This simplistic mindset is the one I learned in the 90s, and we’re still arguing these points today in the American Christian community.***

***Obviously, things need to change in how Christians see the Israel narrative, and I grew up with a single story. So: where should I (and others who have a similarly limited knowledge of the conflict) start to fix my education on this subject?***

**Hannah, I would recommend Pat Condell's Godless Comedy channel.**

**And here is an example of a propaganda piece from Russian television.**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdQ6QP6jja8**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdQ6QP6jja8)

**What is tragic about that video is that Abby Martin is completely blind to her own hypocrisy as she blasts the media for biased coverage, while she (a member of the media) does exactly the same thing for the other side. Can you spell H-Y-P-O-C-R-I-T-E?**

***Your feedback is appreciated, especially so I don’t have to avoid all conversations about a very important topic:***

**Hannah, if you find any statements made by Condell that you think are wrong, feel free to email him and ask for clarification.**

**I'm sure he would love to hear from you.**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**How our brains store recent memories**

**Confirming what neurocomputational theorists have long suspected, researchers report that the human brain locks down episodic memories in the hippocampus, committing each recollection to a distinct, distributed fraction of individual cells.**

**To really understand how the brain represents memory, we must understand how memory is represented by the fundamental computational units of the brain -- single neurons -- and their networks. Knowing the mechanism of memory storage and retrieval is a critical step in understanding how to better treat the dementing illnesses affecting our growing elderly population.**

**Scientists assessed nine patients with epilepsy whose brains had been implanted with electrodes to monitor seizures. The monitoring recorded activity at the level of single neurons.**

**The patients memorized a list of words on a computer screen, then viewed a second, longer list that contained those words and others. They were asked to identify words they had seen earlier, and to indicate how well they remembered them. The observed difference in the cell-firing activity between words seen on the first list and those not on the list clearly indicated that cells in the hippocampus were representing the patients' memories of the words.**

**The researchers found that recently viewed words were stored in a distributed fashion throughout the hippocampus, with a small fraction of cells, about 2 percent, responding to any one word, and a small fraction of words, about 3 percent, producing a strong change in firing in these cells.**

**Intuitively, one might expect to find that any neuron that responds to one item from the list would also respond to the other items from the list, but their results did not look anything like that. The amazing thing about these counterintuitive findings is that they could not be more in line with what influential neurocomputational theorists long ago predicted must be true.**

**Although only a small fraction of cells coded recent memory for any one word, the scientists said that the absolute number of cells coding memory for each word was large nonetheless -- on the order of hundreds of thousands at least. Thus, the loss of any one cell would have a negligible impact on a person's ability to remember specific words recently seen.**

**Ultimately, scientists said that their goal is to fully understand how the human brain forms and represents memories of places and things in everyday life, which cells are involved, and how those cells are affected by illness and disease. Researchers will next attempt to determine whether similar coding is involved in memories of pictures of people and landmarks and how hippocampal cells representing memory are impacted in patients with more severe forms of epilepsy.**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS**

**(no biography - previously quoted)**

**“Islamophobia is a word created by fascists,**

**and used by cowards,**

**to manipulate morons.”**