

# MY LAND, MY PAIN.

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There are photographs hanging on the walls of my dressing room in the Staatsoper Berlin, photographs that remind me of what I see when I look out the windows of my house in Jerusalem. They are slightly faded, and here and there the paper is crumbling, but one can easily recognize the views. The Old City, the Dome of the Rock with its shining cupola, the walls, the gates.

Sometimes I sit in this room before a performance, looking at these pictures and thinking of Jerusalem, of Israel, my home. Before 1989, this room was supposedly a refuge of the East German Stasi, the state police; if I happened to be a sentimental person, that fact would surely help me to become unsentimental, but I am not a sentimental person. The situation in the Middle East is much too close to me, much too personal to be able to be sentimental about it.

#### FOUR PASSPORTS

Since 1952 I have owned an Israeli passport. Since I was 15 years old, I have traveled the world as a musician. I have lived in London and in Paris and I commuted for years between Chicago and Berlin. Before I had an Israeli passport, I had an Argentinean one; later I acquired a Spanish one. And in 2007, I became the only Israeli in the world who can also show a Palestinian passport at an Israeli border crossing.

I am, so to speak, living evidence of the fact that only a pragmatic two-state

solution (or better yet, absurd as it sounds, a federation of three states: Israel, Palestine and Jordan) can bring peace to the region.

My answer to those who say I am naïve, only an artist? That I am not a political person, even if I shook the hands of David Ben-Gurion and Shimon Peres as a child: Not politics, but humanity has always concerned me. In that sense I feel able and, as an artist, especially qualified to analyze the situation.

Both my paternal and maternal grandparents were Russian Jews who fled to Buenos Aires in the pogroms of 1904. Unfortunately, I never asked my parents much about our family's history.

The story of my maternal grandparents, however, is a very special one. When they arrived in the harbor of Buenos Aires (he was 16, she 14) after the miserably long trip, it was announced that only families would be allowed to disembark; the quota for all others had been exhausted.

They were both alone, and my grandfather took my grandmother and said, "let's get married!" And they did. Once on land, they went their separate ways. After two or three years they met again by coincidence, fell in love and spent the rest of their lives with one another.

This grandmother was a fervent Zionist. Already in 1929, she went to Palestine for half a year with her three daughters — including my 17-year-old mother — to see if one could live there.

My father's family, on the other hand, had completely assimilated; the "Holy Land" had no significance for them, at least not until they discovered that I was musically talented. Suddenly it seemed important to my parents that I, as a future artist, should grow up as part of a majority and not as part of a minority somewhere in the diaspora. The conviction that normality would be a fundamental element of my intellectual development was, so to speak, fuel for the fire of my grandmother's Zionism: The Barenboim family resolved to emigrate to Israel.

#### JEWISH PROBLEM

Our first stop on the long journey was Salzburg, where I participated in the final concert of conductor Igor Markewitsch's summer master class. As a nine-year-old I spoke only Spanish and a bit of Yiddish, which I had learned from my grandmother. This was not especially problematic as we did not plan to stay in Austria, and I would be mostly in the company of musicians. While I had not been aware of any Jewish problem in Buenos Aires, I began to take notice of one in Salzburg.

Jewish friends took me along to Bad Gastein one day to a great waterfall and told me that during the Nazi era Jews had been thrown into it. Here I received my first inkling of the fate of the Jewish people; the stories my parents had told me about the Holocaust also deeply disturbed me, although I was unable to fully understand them at the time.

In December 1952 we reached Israel. It was winter, the school year had started long before, and I had to learn a new alphabet and a new language. It was anything but easy, but since I was an uncomplicated and extroverted child, I adapted quickly, and it was the beginning of a wonderful and very intense new life.

Strictly speaking, the length of time that I have spent in Israel is not substantial. It was mainly restricted to the years between 1952 and 1954, and between 1956 and the early '60s. When I was not in school, I was on concert tours in Zürich, Amsterdam or Bournemouth.

The Europe of the '50s was deeply scarred by the consequences of the war. Being a traveler between both worlds, I found the contrast between Europe and Israel especially stark. Israel was at the time the most social, idealistic state imaginable. It was lucky for Israel and for us that we were young at the same time.

Nobody had the feeling of working "for the state," because there was no such thing. The state literally evolved before our eyes and fed on our idealism, our daily commitment, our work. To live in Israel as a Jew meant no longer pursuing only the so-called free professions as in the diaspora (artist, lawyer, doctor, banker), but also becoming farmers, police officers, soldiers or, as the case may be, even criminals. State and home, home and state melded into one unit.

In 1966 I met the cellist Jacqueline du Pré in London. We felt immediately attracted to one another, both personally and musically, and two or three months later, we decided to get married. Without any influence on my part, Jacqueline took it upon herself to convert to Judaism.

In June 1967 we got married in Jerusalem, shortly after the Six-Day War. Ben-Gurion, who did not think much of music, was present at our wedding. He was impressed that a non-Jewish, English girl could identify with his country so strongly.

On May 31, when the war had seemed inevitable, we had flown to Israel with one of the last passenger planes. We had given concerts almost every evening. The last one took place on June 5 in Beersheba, a town halfway between Tel Aviv and the Egyptian border. As we were leaving the concert to drive home, the first

tanks began to come toward us.

After 1967 Israel turned very much toward the United States — not necessarily to its own advantage. The traditionalists said, "We will not give up the newly occupied territories." The religious Jews said, "These are not occupied but liberated, biblical territories." And with that the end of Socialism in Israel was sealed. Since then the conflict in the Middle East has been instrumentalized by world politics.

#### ISRAELIS DREAM

For decades we have seen headlines about exploding violence; one war and terrorist act follows another. This has cemented the situation in people's minds. Today, in the times of Iraq and Iran, one hardly reads anything more about it, which is even worse.

Many Israelis dream that when they wake up, the Palestinians will be gone, and the Palestinians dream that when they wake up, the Israelis will be gone. Both sides can no longer differentiate between dream and reality, and this is the psychological core of the problem.

#### MORALLY UNACCEPTABLE

Since the '60s I have no longer felt comfortable in Israel. Of course it is my home; my parents lived there and are both buried in Jerusalem. Whenever there was war in Israel, I played there: 1956, 1967, 1973. Music was my language, my "weapon."

However, after the black September of 1970, Golda Meir said, what is this talk of the Palestinians? We are the Palestinian people! At that point it clicked in my mind: This was morally unacceptable.

Yes, the Jews had a right to their own state, and they had a right to this state. This demand was made even stronger by the Holocaust and the guilt of the Europeans after 1945. It is all too easily forgotten, however, that there was a moderate Zionism, there were people like Martin Buber who said from the beginning that the right to a Jewish state must be made acceptable to the existent population, the non-Jews. Militant Zionism, on the other hand, did not develop any further in its thinking. Even today, it is still based on a lie: that the land that the Jews settled was empty.

Today, many Israelis have no idea what it must feel like to be Palestinian —



how it is to live in a city like Nablus, a prison for 180,000 people. There are no restaurants there, no cafés, no cinemas. What has become of the famous Jewish intellect here? I am not even speaking of justice or love. Why does one continue to feed the hate in the Gaza Strip?

There will never be a military solution. Two peoples are fighting over one and the same land. No matter how strong Israel becomes, there will always be insecurity and fear. The conflict is eating away at itself and at the Jewish soul, and it has been allowed to do so.

We wanted to own land that had never belonged to Jews and built settlements there. The Palestinians see this as imperialistic provocation, and rightly so. Their resistance is absolutely understandable — not the means they use to this end, not the violence nor the wanton inhumanity — but their “no.”

We Israelis must finally find the courage to not react to this violence, the courage to stand by our history.

The Palestinians cannot expect that we should have been able to take care of anyone besides ourselves after the Holocaust; we had to survive. Now that we have done so, we must both look forward collectively. The Israeli prime minister who can do this has not yet been born.

#### WHAT CYNICISM

Today, people in Israel speak of separation, of divorce in respect to a two-state solution: What cynicism! Divorce is normally only possible between people who once loved each other.

I suffer from this situation, and everything I do has something to do with this suffering, whether I am conducting Wagner in Israel (and I was by no means the first to do so!), citing the Israeli Constitution in the Knesset, founding the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra with the writer Edward Said, establishing a music kindergarten in Berlin, or — as recently in Jerusalem — performing a concert for two peoples.

I do as I do because it drives me crazy to see how much injustice we Jews commit daily, and how much we endanger the future existence of Israel.

#### WHAT IS A JEW

For many years now I have not lived in Israel, and I am very conscious of my outsider's perspective. Sometimes people ask me, “what is a Jew?” The answer

is the following: A Jew who has anti-Semitic experiences in Berlin in 2008 is different from the Jew who had anti-Semitic experiences in 1940. The Jew of 1940 felt threatened; the Jew of today can think of his own land, of Israel.

Today I can say, "Either you learn to deal with me, you anti-Semite, or we go our separate ways, period." That makes an existential difference. I am a short-term pessimist about the Middle East, but a long-term optimist.

Either we will find a way to live with each other or we will kill each other. What gives me hope? Music-making. Because, before a Beethoven symphony, Mozart's Don Giovanni or Wagner's Tristan and Isolde, all human beings are equal.

Daniel Barenboim is one of the leading conductors worldwide.  
He is General Music Director of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden and  
Principal Guest Conductor at The La Scala Opera House in Milan. In 1999  
he created *The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra* together with the writer  
Edward W. Said. The members of this symphonic orchestra are young musicians  
of Egyptian, Iranian, Israeli, Jordanian, Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian origins.  
The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra embodies the belief that music can  
bring down barriers. Barriers that long have been perceived as insurmountable.

Daniel Barenboim and The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra  
on a giant flat screen. Live. On the lawn next to The Jewish Theatre,  
Djurgårdsbrunn, Stockholm. Thursday, August 21, 7 PM. Welcome.

## J T P E R F O R M A N C E A R T S P A C E

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Take the local red 69 bus – direction Blockhusudden – to the Djurgårdsbrunn stop.  
Food and beverages for sale on location. Feel free to bring a blanket. [www.judiskateatern.se](http://www.judiskateatern.se)*