

For Ms. Niederhuber, from Amira Hass

Dear friends at the Bruno Kreisky foundation, dear guests of the award ceremony,

The accelerating deterioration of events in the Palestinian occupied territories has unfortunately prevented me from being here with you and accepting in person the Human Rights award, together with my friend Raji Sourani. So let me first thank you so much, even if it's in a written message only, for awarding me with your attention, encouragement and support.

As a socialist in post-war Austria and as a Jew Bruno Kreisky felt indebted to the attempts at reaching a peace solution in our tormented land - solution of which justice was part and parcel, not a four-letter word in use only by wierdos and naive idealists. That is why this award is especially moving, for me.

This award, given to a journalist, is a statement - a statement which I share; journalists are not "neutral", cannot be "objective" - as the legends claim.

First, journalism is or should be about monitoring Power, and Power is by definition arbitrary and excessive, and Occupation Power is cruel * and unjust by definition. That is why "neutrality" in regards to Power is collaborating with its Might and Dominance - be it in Apartheid South Africa, or Ceausescu's Romania or poverty-stricken cities in the United States.

Second, by the very fact of my Israeli-ness, I cannot be neutral, detached or "objective" when I report on the Israeli-Palestinian bloody conflict. No Israeli journalist can be neutral and detached - those who have served in the army or the Israeli intelligence services, interrogating Palestinians, those who send now their children to military service in occupied Palestinian communities and at checkpoints, and those who have lost relatives in suicide attacks in Israeli towns or had a narrow escape in such attacks.

Third, being a Jew by birth and by sentiments - I cannot be neutral, without my own opinions and feelings. Israel is a state where my

parents emigrated to, after they had been unable to live any more in the void created by the German Death Industry which reached their distant homes in Sarajevo and Suceava (Romania). They did not choose to emigrate, they were forced to, yet could not but love this place and its people. Luckily for me, they chose not to live in a house of Palestinian refugees, even before fully realizing the scope of the disaster 1948 and the establishment of the state of Israel had on the Palestinian people. So I grew up in an ever present contradiction. And I grew up in the Israeli community, this is my home, Hebrew is my language, Hebrew is the language of the landscapes I love, in Hebrew I describe the hot seasons and the scents of thyme and orange flowers. In Hebrew I describe how Israeli soldiers impose curfew and how they shot and killed a woman who was standing near the window and a child who threw stones. In Hebrew I describe the revenge cries of angry demonstrators and the black-humor jokes of Gazans and the criticism people have of their Palestinian leadership.

I cannot but care for my community - and I am worried for its future, if it continues to believe in the victory of military superiority. How, then, can I be neutral?

During the last ten years I have doubled, actually perfected my attachment to this land, when I started to work in the Gaza Strip and then moved to live there. The more closely I came to know Palestinians (and Israeli occupation methods), the stronger were my bonds to this land, and the more I cared for this other community. That is, the less and less "neutral" could I be.

Some of the field researchers, employees and the lawyers in the Palestinian Center for Human Rights were my very first contacts in Gaza, ten years ago. I am extremely un-objective, then, about them. They hosted me in their homes, they spoke Hebrew to me - without any fear or shyness - in front of other people, even though Hebrew is/was the language of the occupier. They made me hear so closely and love the Arabic that this land speaks. The language that the thyme and the orchards and the destroyed villages speak. And : they have provided me with accurate information about Israeli Occupation and ever-growing understanding of Palestinian society. Sharing the award with them makes it lovelier.