

Response to Ozick on Rachel Corrie

December 6, 2006

Hi friends, The New Republic ran a very nasty, inaccurate, biased review by Cynthia Ozick of the play, My Name is Rachel Corrie, in its latest issue. Below is my response. I encourage you all to check it out (but DON'T subscribe!) online at <http://www.tnr.com/index.mhtml>, and send letters to online@tnr.com. And if you're looking for a good book on the subject, clear, credible and knowledgeable, Jimmie Carter's new book, Palestine, Peace, Not Apartheid is excellent and gives a solid overview of the last thirty years of history as well as a very accurate picture of what life in the Occupied Territories is like. He's getting criticism for his use of the term 'apartheid', and it took a lot of courage for him to write so honestly and strongly. Thanks, Starhawk

Response to Ozick on Rachel Corrie

Dear New Republic,

I was shocked that the New Republic would publish a review so biased, inaccurate and vitriolic, one more worthy of Fox News than a magazine which courts intellectuals and progressives. In the past, I've been moved by Ozick's work and respect her considerable literary gifts. This piece, however, had the shrill, defensive tone of an abuser attacking the victim who brings an abuse to light.

I know that her review is inaccurate because I have volunteered with the International Solidarity Movement myself on four occasions since 2002. I did so because I saw their courageous, nonviolent actions as a ray of hope in a hopeless situation. And I went because, having been born and raised an American Jew, I wanted to see what the world looked like from the other side of the wall, to meet the people I had been taught to think of as enemies, and to take a stand for the justice that I had also been taught was core to the Jewish tradition.

The ISM has no connection to any of the Palestinian political parties or factions. It works closely with groups such as the Christian Peacemaker Teams, Rabbis for Human Rights, and the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition, in defense of human rights accorded Palestinians by international law and U.N. resolutions.

There is a strong and continuous tradition of nonviolent civil resistance among Palestinians, and there are many who choose nonviolent methods to wage their struggle for justice. I have participated in some of the demonstrations Ozick—who undoubtedly has never been to one—terms 'riots', and seen women, children and men kneeling in prayer met by tear gas, rubber bullets, beatings, and arrests. When internationals are present, however, the military is less likely to use real bullets. That is the premise of the ISM—that we can put our privilege at the service of those who are less privileged,

keep open the possibility of nonviolent protest, and draw media attention to the nonviolent movement, which otherwise remains invisible.

Volunteers for the ISM knowingly and willingly put ourselves at risk, just as did the many nonviolent activists in the civil rights movement, the peace movement, and other movements for social justice. There are no ‘handlers’—every volunteer has a free choice about where to go and how much risk to assume, and volunteers are trained in de-escalation and self-protection.

I never met Rachel, but I went down to Rafah to support the team that was with her when she was killed. I walked the same streets, slept in some of the same houses—those that had not yet been bulldozed. And yes, the bulldozers were destroying houses, not brush. No tunnels or weapons were ever discovered in the house Rachel was defending, nor were the owners, Samir and Khaled Nasrallah, ever accused of terrorism or of any crime other than living in a place the Israeli military had decided was inconvenient for them. Most of the people in the border neighborhoods were farmers, many of them from the original families who had lived in Rafah before the flood of refugees in 1948. They had already lost their fields, their orange groves and olive groves with no compensation offered. I spent nights sheltering with the children trying to do their homework as bullets thudded into the walls, and watched them make a game out of jumping through shell holes into what was left of the garden.

Yes, Rachel was young, and she was idealistic. She cared about things and people beyond herself and her own tribe. The measure of her sincerity is simply this—she did something about what she believed in. She was no saint, and she never meant to be a martyr. We will never know how she might have matured as a poet, an activist, a lover or a mother. Those possibilities were cut short by a bulldozer operator who, moments before, had been talking with her, and who definitely knew she was there when he chose to go forward.

For all those of us born Jewish into a post-Holocaust world, the issue of Israel and Palestine is a deeply painful one. We were raised to think of Israel as our great hope, our security in a hostile world, our dream of redemption fulfilled. Palestinian nonviolence is, perhaps, more deeply threatening than suicide bombers, for it challenges our myths and our picture of ourselves as the always innocent victims, righteous and good, justified in anything we do as long as we call it ‘self-defense’. To give up that myth and face the ugly reality of injustice, to admit that we who were so oppressed can become oppressors, is excruciating. I understand Ozick’s attachment to the worldview of our childhood. However, as a writer and a shaper of opinion, she has an obligation to seek truth. And the New Republic has an obligation, at minimum, to check facts and to refrain from giving airtime to blatant and destructive propaganda.

This piece demeans Ms. Ozick's talents and your magazine's credibility.

Sincerely,
Starhawk

Author of, among others, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, *Webs of Power*, *The Earth Path*. Starhawk is an activist, organizer, and author of *The Earth Path*, as well as *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*; and eight other books on feminism, politics and earth-based spirituality. She teaches Earth Activist Trainings that combine permaculture design and activist skills, and works with the RANT trainer's collective, www.rantcollective.org that offers training and support for mobilizations around global justice and peace issues.

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