

EDITORIAL

When Do We Grieve? Who Do We Grieve?

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For the past three weeks, I have been in a state of grief. I have been listening, watching, reading, and in dialog with others. And these questions keep coming up for me: When do we grieve? Who do we grieve? And what does that say about us?

In *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* Judith Butler (2016) notes, “Precisely because a living being may die, it is necessary to care for that being so that it may live. Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus, grievability is the presupposition for the life that matters.”

This notion of grievability is central to our understandings of justice and injustice. Being reflexive about how we have responded in these moments, helps us become more aware of the values and beliefs that have been instilled in us. When do we condemn and when do we justify actions? Do we ask ourselves how much we know about a context before making a judgment? What are the limits of our knowledge? How have we come to know what we know?

On October 7, 2023, the attack on Israelis by Hamas sent shockwaves around the world. It wasn't that there was an attack that was shocking, given the long history of conflict between Israel and Palestine. The shock was more about who was attacked and how. These were people of all ages and abilities including young children and the elderly. It seemed that the lives that were taken and the hostages who were taken were grievable by the vast majority, including Arab people around the world and in Palestine. Their lives had value; their lives mattered.

Let me make it clear at the outset, I do not condone violence of any kind.

Almost as soon as the news sunk in, there were some people who took a strong stance for or against either side, based on long-held beliefs and values and on dominant narratives to which they had been exposed. Edward Said noted in *The Question of Palestine* that “discussion of the Arab world in general, and of the Palestinians in particular, is so confused and unfairly slanted in the West that a great effort has to be made to see things as, for better or worse, they actually are for Palestinians and for Arabs” (Robinson, 2023). So, what do the majority of music therapists actually know about the history of clashes between Palestine and Israel? Where has that information come from? Has this information been unfairly slanted? What steps have we taken to get perspectives from those most negatively impacted?

Right from the start, retaliation by the State of Israel seemed inevitable and the cost to Gazans would be devastating given the vast difference in military, economic, and

structural power. And we have now seen the devastating loss of life to innocent civilians of all ages and abilities including young children and the elderly. The bombing of important infrastructure and residential spaces. The shutting off of power, water, food, and aid to the Gazan people: A people whose lives should have value; whose lives should matter; who should be grievable.

However, as I listened, watched, read, and dialoged with others it was evident that some people equate Arab and Muslim with terrorist, thus almost justifying the disproportionate response that punished innocent people for the actions of Hamas. Someone made an analogy of someone murdering someone in a person's family and in response the person then takes revenge by killing not the person who committed the murder, but killing the person's whole family including the babies, the grandparents, the cousins, and even friends who might be visiting. Equating Arab and Muslim with terrorist erases the grievability of Arab people and Muslims. It dehumanizes them. It reduces the value of their lives.

As I listened, watched, read, and dialoged with others it also became evident that Arab and Muslim music therapists felt let down by the silence of their fellow music therapists. And that music therapists who brought a critical and a contextual lens to their analysis of the current crisis were often accused of being anti-Semitic, even those who are Jewish. Claiming anti-Semitism is usually taken to mean anti-Jewish and yet Semites are people whose languages include Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic, which means that a charge of anti-Semitism could include hatred towards Jews, Muslims, Christians, and atheists who speak those languages.

So, again, I come to this question: When do we grieve and who do we grieve?

For whom do we grieve when people are forcibly displaced from their ancestral lands? Do we grieve for Jewish people throughout Europe during World War II? Do we grieve for Africans displaced and enslaved during the middle passage? Do we grieve Palestinians who have been displaced in 1947-8 and again in 1967 largely to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and other countries around the world? Do we even understand each as grievable? Can we hold onto all of these truths without withholding our own grief for each?

For whom do we grieve when it comes to the genocide of a people? Did we grieve the Nazi genocide of Jewish people? Did we grieve the Nazi genocide of the Roma? the Sinti? the disabled people? Did we grieve the genocide of Rwandans? Tutsis? Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Australia? Serbs in Kosovo? Do we grieve the current genocide of Palestinians in Gaza? What stories have we been told? Whose histories have been untold? Or not attended to? The values and beliefs we hold have been biased towards those histories that have embedded within them judgements about who or what is grievable, what counts as genocide. To grieve in all of these contexts is to grieve the inhumanity that people have experienced and continue to experience.

I must say that in many ways it seems difficult to hold all of these truths in one place. To hold them together can be seen to be disloyal. In this current crisis, how can we both deplore the anti-Semitism shown to Jewish people across the diaspora and deplore the treatment of Gazans by the State of Israel? Can we critique Zionism and love the Israeli people? Can we critique Hamas and love the Palestinian people? Can we hold both that the Jewish people have been an oppressed and marginalized people and that the State of Israel is oppressing Palestinians? Can Palestinians, as Edward Said (Robinson, 2023) has said, be "victims of the victims"?

So, in this current crisis, how do we communicate with our Arab and Muslim music therapy colleagues to assure them that their lives matter, that they are grievable? How do we do this without alienating our Israeli colleagues, or even our Jewish colleagues more generally? How do we communicate with our Jewish music therapy colleagues that their lives matter, that they are grievable? How do we do this without alienating Arab and Muslim music therapy colleagues. And how do we communicate all of this without the

charge of committing moral equivalence? It reminds me of those in the U.S. who insisted that instead of supporting “Black Lives Matter,” that we should instead say “all lives matter.” Of course, we want to believe that all lives matter, but until those lives that are not being grieved—that are not considered grievable—matter, then all lives do not matter. To speak out about one form of injustice does not negate other forms of injustice. And as Martin Luther King, Jr. (1964) has famously stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (p. 177).

References

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