

Maya

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Trimester 3

Blood Brothers Distinctions Project

Palestine and Israel: A story of a brotherhood torn apart

Blood Brothers by Elias Chacour is about the arrival of the Zionists to Palestine. Elias' family is Christian and lived in Biram, Palestine, in peace with their Jewish neighbors. When World War II ended, many Jews began to flee Europe in search of a homeland. With the help of the United Nations, a subset of the Jewish Europeans, the Zionists, took control of the majority of Palestine. This began the yet unresolved conflict between Israel and Palestine. Elias' family was forced out of Biram and eventually Elias left Palestine altogether to continue his religious studies. Eventually he returned and tried to create change, using understanding and compassion. **Elias' unique experience as a Palestinian Christian shaped his view on the Zionists and the meaning of the word "terrorist" in many ways.** His experience was shaped by his father's empathy for everyone (including the Zionists), his religious education and striving to "be Christian", and by international perceptions.

Throughout the book, Elias' father Michael, was unwavering in his compassion for Jews and his desire for brotherhood. "[Our father taught us that] our lives were bound together with the other people who inhabited Palestine--the Jews. We had suffered together under the Romans, Persians, Crusaders and Turks, and had learned to share the simple elements of human existence--faith, reverence for life, hospitality. These, Father said, were the things that caused people to live happily together//Father told his story unvaryingly" (38). Although at the time, Elias could not understand his father's perspective, he respected it. But as he aged, he began to agree with his father. Before being forced out of Biram, their family had owned a fig farm that was passed through the generations and was cherished by Michael. After they left, Michael and his oldest sons began to work at the fig

farm. Elias could not understand why his father would go work on his own farm every day, where he was paid very little and treated very poorly. “[If] someone hurts you, you can curse him. But this would be useless. Instead you have to ask the Lord to bless the man who makes himself your enemy. And do you know what will happen? The Lord will bless you with inner peace--and perhaps your enemy will turn from his wickedness. If not, the Lord will deal with him” (67). Michael helped Elias see a different perspective, even if Elias’ perspective was understandable.

This lesson that Michael taught Elias stayed with him throughout the book. As Elias got older and continued his studies, his identity as a Christian changed with him. He began to understand the lessons his father tried to teach him with growing clarity. “For the first time, that twisting dark feeling inside me was matched--if not totally overruled--by another feeling: the ache of compassion. It was as if some calming hand was beginning to tame a wild creature within me. I hurt for the Jewish people. Why had the civilized world allowed them to be persecuted?” (118). Elias began to understand that his mission was to be compassionate. But he wasn’t sure how to really create change. On page 133, Elias graduated from school and questioned “As a Christian do you speak out against the actions of your enemies--or do you allow them to crush the life out of you? So many seemed to think that submitting to humiliation was the only Christian alternative. Should you not, sometimes, be stringing and preserving like salt?” he aimed to learn how to speak out while still being Christian. He knew violence was not his path, but he spent many years searching for his own way.

When Elias traveled to France to continue his studies, he learned many things about the world’s opinions of Israel and Palestine. He had to pretend to be Israeli because Palestinians were branded as “dirty” and “terrorists” (112). Elias felt he had to constantly defend Palestinians to others. “[All] Palestinians are not fighters. Nor are we the terrorists. We have been *terrorized*. French history your people rebelled against oppression. They became known as heroes just because they won. Had they lost, they would have been called rebels and traitors” (110). But it was not just in the West that perceptions were skewed. Within Palestine and Israel, there was a lot of hatred for Palestinians and propropaganda that

made citizens believe that a much larger percent of Palestinians were fighters than actually were. "You are rebels. Tell us where your guns are hidden. We know you are fighters--Palestinian terrorists" (55). They were labeled as terrorists by the Zionists. This caused other countries in the Middle East to reject Palestinian refugees, which meant that many Palestinians had nowhere to go.

Elias' view of his own country and his path was shaped by the word "terrorism" and how others applied it. Some applied it to him and his people, some applied it to the Zionists. Others applied it to all Jewish people within the region. As an American Jewish person, my perception of the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict," as I grew up hearing it referred to, was very different. I grew up in a pro-Israel environment. While I understood that Israel was founded--with the support of the United Nations--after World War II ended in order for a place for Jews to be safe, I did not understand many other factors of the situation. I did not understand that there was not already a Jewish majority nation there. I believed that the region was already owned and controlled by a Jewish people who welcomed Holocaust victims to their land. Reading *Blood Brothers* has given me the opportunity to hear from a very different perspective. I also believe that because Elias is Christian, even though the vast majority of Palestians were Muslim, that *Blood Brothers* was told from an even more unique perspective. The fact that Elias could go to Europe for seminary school changed his life in so many ways, as did how his beliefs related to Judaism.

Blood Brothers gave me the opportunity to revise my views on the origins of the Israel-Palestine conflict and to incorporate multiple perspectives into it. Overtime, some Palestinians committed acts of violence against civilian locations in Israel as a way to fight back. But this violence was internationally perceived as worse than the violence perpetrated by the Israelis, while many Palestinians perceived this violence as entirely just. Learning the Palestinian perspective has helped me to see that neither of these viewpoints are right, and that the situation cannot be entirely one sided.

Rough outline:

- Page 38, **“This was Father’s most effective way of teaching us two things. First, we should love and respect our Galilean soil, for our people had long struggled to survive her. We were rooted like poppies and wild, blue irises that thrust up among the rocks. Our family had tilled this land, had worshipped here longer than anyone could remember. And second, our lives were bound together with the other people who inhabited Palestine--the Jews. We had suffered together under the Romans, Persians, Crusaders and Turks, and had learned to share the simple elements of human existence--faith, reverence for life, hospitality. These, Father said, were the things that caused people to live happily together//Father told his story unvaryingly.”**
- 39. “Since the announcement of their coming, the soldiers had sent word to the village *mukhtars* that they would stay for only a few days and they would take nothing. They were just looking over the land. Father accepted their word as a gentleman. If need be, these Jews from Europe could settle in our village and farm the land that lay open beside our own fields.”
- 43. “The Zionists were given possession of the *majority* of Palestine--54 percent--even though they owned only 7 percent of the land! In five major areas that were being handed over, well over half the people--up to 70 and 80, even 99 percent--were Palestinians.” The UN did this as a “compromise”
- 55-57. Palestinians were branded terrorists.
- **67, 68. Michael not wanting to curse the Zionists but pray for them and going to work at his own Fig farm.**
- 112. Elias had to pretend to be Jewish from Israel when in Paris because being from Palestine was deemed a shameful thing in the West.
- **118. “For the first time, that twisting dark feeling inside me was matched--if not totally overruled--by another feeling: the ache of compassion. It was as if some calming hand was beginning to tame a wild creature within me. I hurt for the Jewish people. Why had the civilized world allowed them to be persecuted?**
 - “Other questions were just as troubling. Why did the world allow my people to be driven into diaspora only a few years after the Holocaust? Surely the Jews knew the horror of militarism--why had they used such violence against my people? How had the minds of the nations been poisoned to think of Palestinians as an idle, worthless people capable of nothing but violence?”
- 133. 150. How to be Christian and peaceful but speak out. God’s path for Elias.
- 146. God leaving Christians.