

Interview: Russell Brand and Gabor Mate, May 28, 2021

(Video 19:46) <https://youtu.be/pB1smnCTsms>

A Canadian doctor who survived the Nazi Holocaust discusses the Nazi Holocaust, Israel, Zionism and Palestine

Questions to answer to learn the background information needed to better understand this interview (short, general answers only are needed):

1. How were Jews treated in Europe and Russia before 1930?
2. What happened to Jews in Europe between 1933 and 1945?
3. What is the difference between Zionism and Judaism?
4. Which colonial power had control of Palestine before 1948?
5. When did Israel become a country?
6. Why did Israel become a country?

Do an internet search or read a Wikipedia page to get some answers to these questions, then listen to the interview. Read the transcript and study the vocabulary after you watch the video.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel> [日本語版](#)

Keep in mind that Wikipedia is good for checking basic factual information, but it becomes unreliable on topics such as Israel for which there are many passionately held opinions and interpretations.

The transcript starts on the next page.

TRANSCRIPT

Russell Brand: In yesterday's video, where I talked about Israel and Palestine, I spoke of my personal feeling about people that aren't directly affected or remain serene and calm and yield the floor to people that have personal investment and are closely and directly affected by these issues. That's why I've had a couple of conversations this week from, I suppose you'd have to say, opposing sides of this very serious matter, certainly a matter that I consider to be complex, but people on either side sometimes think, and directly claim, is a simple matter. This is sort of, I suppose, a further indication of how polarizing this matter is. The first of the conversations that took place on my podcast *Under the Skin* is with Dr. Gabor Mate, the therapist and writer, physician, and I would say, sort of modern-day shaman, but furthermore, and significantly, with regard to this matter, he is a Holocaust survivor. Many of his family members were killed in the Holocaust. He had this to say about the situation in Israel. It's one of the most beautiful profound and effective things I've ever seen anybody say about this conflict, and I fail to see how anybody could [disagree]. I think anybody who sees it will be deeply moved by Gabor Mate's wisdom and truth, his directness, his passion and his compassion.

Gabor Mate: This is one of the issues that's closest to my heart, and it has been for a long time. You know my history. I don't have to repeat it, but I'm personally a holocaust survivor. As an infant I barely survived. My grandparents were killed in Auschwitz, and most of my extended family was killed. That's my personal background. I grew up ashamed of my Jewishness. In Hungary, after the war, I was still bullied for being Jewish, and I remember one of my friends coming to my rescue once saying, "Leave him alone. It's not his fault that he's Jewish." It's a fault but it's not my fault. This was the defense, so I grew up with that.

My grandfather, a physician and an author, by the way, who died in Auschwitz, was a good friend of Vladimir Jabotinsky who was one of the major Zionist leaders and the founder of the party that became Likud, the current government of Israel. So that's my family. This is my background.

In my teenage years in Canada, I became a Zionist—this dream of the Jewish people resurrected in their historical homeland, the barbed wire of Auschwitz being replaced by the boundaries of a Jewish state with a powerful army. I found it liberating. It was exhilarating to believe in that dream, and I absorbed all that perspective, and all that point

of view. And I really believed in it. Then I found out that it wasn't exactly like that. In order to make this Jewish dream a reality, we had to visit a nightmare on the local population. There was a Zionist slogan called "a land without people for a people without a land," but there was no land without people. There were people living there who'd been living there for hundreds of years or even longer.

As a matter of fact, if you want to hear something really interesting, David Ben-Gurion, who was the first prime minister of Israel, actually subscribed to this. He said, "Who are the Palestinians?" In Roman times some of the Jews never left Palestine. Many of them stayed there and some of them, hundreds of years later, converted to Islam. So guess what? The Palestinians might be descendants of ancient Jews. They are our cousins, to say the least, no matter how you look at it.

There's no way you could have ever created a Jewish state without oppressing and expelling the local population, which is what they did in 1947, beginning in 1947. And first of all, with British imperial protection, but they did this. And then in 1948, Israeli historians, Jewish Israeli historians, have shown without a doubt that the expulsion of the Palestinians was persistent. It was pervasive. It was cruel. It was murderous and with deliberate intent. So that's what's called the *nakba* in Arabic, the disaster or the catastrophe. Now in Canada, there's a law that you cannot deny the Holocaust. I don't believe in such laws, by the way, but in Israel, you're not allowed to mention the *nakba* even though it's at the very basis of the foundation of the state.

So once I became aware of all this, I said OK, well, yeah, we created this beautiful dream, but we imposed a nightmare on somebody else. Then I visited the occupied territories during the first intifada. I cried every day for two weeks at what I saw—the brutality of the occupation, the petty harassment, the murderousness of it, the burning down, or cutting down of Palestinian olive groves, the denial of water rights, the humiliations. And this went on, and it's much worse now than it was then.

So this is the background, and it couldn't have been any other way because, again, you couldn't have created that exclusive Jewish state without oppressing or expelling the local population. It's the longest ethnic cleansing operation in the 20th and 21st centuries. It's still going on. And who are these people in Gaza? You have to go to Gaza. You have to go there to really appreciate it. It's a small area where there are these multiple hundreds

of thousands of people. Who are those people? The direct children or grandchildren of the people that were expelled from Israel or what is Israel now. Where's the outrage?

And I'd like your Zionist friend to explain this. I, as a Jew, could land in Tel Aviv tomorrow and demand citizenship under the law of the right of return, but my Palestinian friend in Vancouver, Hannah, who was born in Jerusalem, can't even visit. Now if I have the right to return after 2,000 years—if that history is even the way it is [said to be] which is itself questionable, but let's assume that it is—if I have the right to return after 2,000 years, how come Hannah hasn't got the right to return after 70 years? So what sense does it make now? So who is in Gaza, this desperate, blockaded people... let me stop again. Am I talking too long about this? I'm sorry. This is so important to me, and I know so much about it that I don't even know where to stop.

Russell Brand: No, carry on, Gabor, please.

Gabor Mate: So then you have these miserable people packed into this horrible place that people call the world's largest outdoor prison, which is what it is. There is incredible poverty, 50% unemployment. Hamas is an Islamic organization that was originally encouraged by Israel and supported by Israel as a counterweight to the secular Palestine Liberation Organization which Israel didn't want to deal with. Given those conditions, of course people will go for extremist leadership. That's what people do when they're miserable and hopeless, and deprived of any possibility whatsoever. You don't have to support Hamas policies to stand up for Palestinian rights. That's a complete falsity. But there were free elections monitored by the international community [in 2006]. They were declared to be the freest elections ever held in the in the Arab world and Hamas happened to win. Hamas won that election, then Israel and the United States immediately organized their military coup against them, which Hamas defeated, for which the punishment was this blockade that deprives Gaza of food, medical supplies, sufficient water. I could go on and on and on and on, and then you have this conflict.

Then every time there's a conflict, Israel "mows the lawn." That's the expression they use. They call it "mowing the lawn" by which they mean the mass murder of Palestinian civilians. Now is it true that the Gazans shoot rockets into Israel killing innocent civilians? Yes, it is. Do I support that? No, I don't, but when it comes to the death of innocent civilians, Israel killed 20,000 Lebanese civilians in 1982 using illegal weapons like cluster bombs in a war that had no justification whatsoever. I could go on and on and

on, except I'll say that the disproportion of power and responsibility and oppression is so markedly on one side that you can take worst thing you can say about Hamas, multiply it by a thousand times, and it still will not meet the Israeli repression and killing and dispossession of Palestinians. Now that's my view of it.

As to this argument that I'm not a practicing Jew, your friend can come and visit my family when we have Passover every year with our families. And we talk about how the liberation of the Jews from Egypt cannot just be a Jewish symbol. It has to be an international symbol. If after 2000 years we can look for liberation and freedom, why can't the Palestinians? So for him to confuse Zionism with Judaism is a big disservice. And to argue because it's not true... and because there were Jews all along right from the beginning... there was a Hebrew, a Jewish philosopher and writer called [name indistinct] who in 1895 said if we continue to treat the Arabs like this, we're going to have disaster. He said this in 1895! So there were Jews all along [saying this]. So for him to conflate Judaism and Jewishness with Zionism is absolutely false, and for him to say that Jews who oppose Israel are not Jews is a slander. And for him to say that anybody who criticizes Israel is an anti-Semite is simply an egregious attempt to intimidate good non-Jews who are willing to stand up for what is true. And as for the final argument that Israel is subjected to standards that other people are not, it's the other way around.

Look at the Western press: when Hong Kong demonstrators throw stones at the police in Hong Kong, that's considered to be heroism in the American press. When in Myanmar the demonstrators shoot slingshots at the army, they are considered to be heroes in the Western press. When Palestinian kids throw stones at Israeli soldiers, they're called terrorists. Israel gets away with a lot more with much less criticism in the Western press than any other country.

I'll say one more thing. I was recently contacted by a Palestinian woman from Jericho. She runs a program for Palestinian children who spent time in Israeli jail—14, 15, 16-year-olds jailed for months or years. Sometimes they can't see their families for months, and she runs a program for them. You know what she does? She meditates with them. She does Sufi dervish dancing with them, swirling dancing to bring them out of their stress. She says, "We don't have post-traumatic stress disorder here because the trauma is never 'post.' The trauma is daily." I just wish your Zionist friend would visit the occupied territories in Gaza like I have and let him speak the way he speaks now." If he got any ounce of humanity left, he would cry like I did for two weeks when I was there.

Do you remember who Albert Speer was?

Russell Brand: The architect [of genocide policies] for the Nazis.

Gabor Mate: Speer was a Nazi armaments minister and economics minister, and Hitler's personal architect. He was a war criminal and condemned as such. He wasn't executed. He spent 40 years in Spandau Prison after the war, and he had kind of a transformation. I read his autobiography, and he said he was often asked, "What did you know?" And he said what he knew wasn't the right question. He was talking about the Nazi crimes, the genocide, the brutality, the war atrocities that the Nazis committed, and specifically the genocide, the murder of the Jewish people. And he said the question wasn't what he knew. The question is what he could have known if he had wanted to. He said he had plenty of hints. And he describes, for example, how in one of the armaments factories he ran across some concentration camp prisoners who were seconded to the factory, and he asked them, "Would you rather be here or in the camp?" And he saw the shock on their faces. And he never asked why they looked so shocked by that question. One time, he said to a German general, "I should visit the east sometime," and this general said, "You don't want to see what's going on there." And Speer says he never asked why. So the question is not what he knew. It is what he could have known had he wanted to know.

We're not living in Nazi Germany. Anybody can go on YouTube and listen to Elon Poppy [spelling?], an Israeli historian who is totally eloquent on Israeli history, who is living in England now because life became too difficult for him in Israel. Anybody can listen to Norman Finkelstein, a Jewish professor, world expert on Gaza, who was denied tenure at his university because of his public speaking against Israeli policy. You can listen to any number of Israeli Defense Forces soldiers who talk about the brutality that they now regret having committed. You can listen to Israeli pilots who talk about why they refuse to fly over Gaza because of the atrocities they're made to commit. You can get all the information you want, so if anybody these days doesn't know, it's not because the information is not available. It's not what you know. It's what you could know if you wanted to find out.

Now I can understand the warmth that Jews have for Israel. I used to be in that same camp. I can understand after the horrors of the Nazi genocide how we desperately wanted some protection. I can understand all that, but none of that excuses what we're doing, and

none of that excuses not knowing the truth and this deliberate attempt to silence anybody who speaks, Jewish or non-Jewish.

And you know what? There are no “two sides.” It’s always a complex question, but in terms of power and control, it’s pretty straightforward. There was a land with people living there, and other people wanted it. They took it over, and they continue to take it over, and they continue to discriminate against, oppress and dispossess those other people. That’s what happened, and that’s what’s happening.

Russell Brand: Gabor, you are magnificent.

Gabor Mate: And I really wish that non-Jews of goodwill would stand up against the calumny and not be intimidated by this charge of anti-Semitism. I really wish that. It’s not a question of being pro-Palestinian. I’m not pro-Palestinian. I’m pro-truth, and ultimately, I think what’s going on right now is going to be a disaster for Israelis in the long term because this cannot be sustained. And there are a lot of good people in Israel who feel exactly the same way that I do. It’s not a question of being pro-Palestinian. It’s a question of whether you are in favor of justice, liberty, freedom and truth, or are you not?

Russell Brand: That’s an extract of my conversation with Dr. Gabor Mate from my podcast *Under the Skin* on Luminary. That’ll be out on Saturday [2021/05/29] if you want to listen to it in its entirety. And coming up soon I have an episode with someone who has a vastly different opinion on the same matter. Thanks very much.

<https://youtu.be/pB1smnCTsms>

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