

Shouting down civility



by Phyllis Chesler

How can one be heard over noise? How can one's voice be considered or debated when ear-splitting, earth-shattering drums, whistles, megaphones and non-stop chanted screams drown out everything but their own chaotic, terrifying sound.

That's the whole point. Those who demonstrate in this way do not want to hear—and do not want anyone else to hear—any point of view other than their own. One cannot even hear these demonstrators being interviewed because of the relentless noise. This noise might even qualify as a form of torture. It is intense, loud, angry, ballistic, military. The time for talking is long over. It is time for war.

We might call this “cancel culture” on the move, raging adolescent-style acting out, brownshirts occupying our peace

of mind, banishing all civility—and all in the name of democracy.

I carefully watched the videos of the Israeli and American Jews who demonstrated against Israel's democratically elected government in New York City. They were at the [Metropolitan Museum](#), the Regency Hotel where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was staying and at the United Nations.

Please understand: I have pioneered many of the issues that such demonstrators have turned into a horror-movie carnival. I have paid the price for fighting for women's sex-based rights, including Jewish women's religious rights. I have fought against femicide in every culture. I have rescued countless mothers and children from extreme danger.

I have always favored modernization and separation of religion and state, not only in Israel but also in Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. I continue to oppose the control exerted by a corrupt and misogynistic Israeli rabbinate over marriage and divorce in Israel. I condemn all the human rights atrocities sanctioned by totalitarian communist leaders. Finally, except for potential Torah geniuses, I strongly favor drafting *haredi* Israelis, both male and female, into military or national service.

But I am horrified, saddened and disgusted by the way in which these values are being so poorly served by street demonstrations all across America and Israel. Such a hot civil war between Jews must gladden the hearts of our many enemies. Such ear-splitting tactics have been used by *haredim* at the Kotel to drown out the voices of Jewish women raised in prayer.

Do you really want to go there? Is there no other way that Jews can talk to each other, even listen to each other?

The [civil rights](#), [anti-war](#) and feminist demonstrations of 1960s America were mainly quiet, often dignified. The police

were far more violent than the demonstrators ever were. I was there. I marched. I demonstrated. I have reviewed videos of marches from that decade and suggest that you do too.

In the 1980s, [gay male “Act Up” demonstrators](#) were far more aggressive as they demanded a cure for the plague of AIDS than pro-abortion female demonstrators ever were.

In the 21st century, such street theater has borrowed, assimilated and “cannibalized” older styles of protest and changed them into tactics that are essentially violent. I am talking about “storming” a conference or an academic panel Palestinian jihad-style; collective yelling so that no one can hear the words of an invited speaker; up close and personal, non-stop and very ugly harassment of someone whose views one opposes at his or her home or in a restaurant where they are dining.

Given my track record, you’d think that I’d be a good “bridge” person with whom to talk.

Not so. For daring to question the means chosen for this end—the overthrow of a democratically elected government—I’ve recently been the recipient of extremely angry emails, blistering attacks from Israeli friends hell-bent on shaming me. One might think they would listen to a voice such as mine—but no.

I hate to say this, but I think it’s true: Those who favor the noise of the drums have been brainwashed by hyperbole, rendered paranoid and hysterical, perhaps even hijacked by a psychotic cult. I do think that there is a legitimate debate to be had between those who are anti-religion and those who are ultra-religious, between feminists and misogynists, between homophobes and gay liberationists, and so on.

We are engaged in a serious battle between secular atheism or paganism and traditional religion, between barbarism and post-Enlightenment values, between talking an issue through very,

very carefully and storming the Bastille.

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