

And so the terrible atrocities in Gaza/Israel continue. Mr Bush appeared to behave himself very well in the final days of his presidency, but the Israelis certainly made up for it. I wonder if their bombing campaign was a last-gasp effort in case President Obama doesn't give them the support his predecessor did?

I'm not in a position to judge, and suspect we only hear some of what is going on. I am in no doubt that there is good and bad on both sides. There are Israelis and there are Palestinians who support and who abhor their respective governments' behaviour. Just like there are people in this country who support and who abhor our government's policy of supplying these countries with the weapons they are using.

You wonder how and when the troubles are going to end. Just like Northern Ireland only a few years ago, the hate and anger on both sides is so powerful that a solution seems somehow impossible.

The benefit of hindsight is a wonderful thing. Imagine if Israel had never been created in the first place? What if the displaced Jews from the Second World War had been resettled across the world instead of having their own country created? Or what if we had created countries for the homosexuals or the travelling people who were also victims of the Nazis? Who would they have displaced? Would they still be battling it out now?

My point is that what has been done has been done. Israel exists and cannot be uncreated. Just as the partition of Ireland happened. Just as British Imperialism happened. And slavery. And the clearances. And the Union of the Crowns. Our world today has been shaped by what happened in the past, just as our actions individually and collectively are shaped by our and our ancestors' experiences.

We will not and should not dismiss the past, but as we move forward we need to use our experience in a positive way. At the risk of joining the hero-worship of

President Obama, he is a powerful example of how a people can move forward from their history and he is a wonderful role model for black and mixed-race people across the world.

Understanding what is driving behaviour is the key to change. The anger felt by many Jews, just like the anger felt by many Muslims can be traced back to injustices in their peoples' history. What I am less clear about is the link between their experiences and the resulting behaviour.

I can remember attending a showing of *The Hard Man*, a play about murderer Jimmy Boyle's reaction to his treatment in Peterhead prison. It was followed by a debate on some of the issues raised. One wee woman in the audience pointed out that she had raised four sons in the same poverty and in the same street as Jimmy Boyle, and they hadn't turned to crime.

She suggested that their upbringing had made them ambitious, determined to improve their lot in life. I suspect as their mother she played a large part in how her boys turned out. As I am sure their father, grandparents and teachers had a role too.

Yes, I can see why Israelis and Palestinians are so angry. They have a turbulent history and many have real hardships now. Some of them are angry and seek violent solutions to their situation, just as Jimmy Boyle did. Others are like the elderly lady's sons and seek a more acceptable way out. Sadly though, the balance is towards the violent solution just now. I have little faith in Tony Blair as a peace envoy for the Middle East. I'm not even sure such a role can make a difference no matter who does it. Maybe we should send Jimmy Boyle over to sort them out.