

Young men in Berlin-Neukölln cheer the Hamas massacre of hundreds of Israelis. Israeli Na'aman Hirschfeld also lives in the same neighborhood. In an interview, he tells how he witnessed the action - and why he worries about German society.

It is Saturday, October 7, 2023, when the Islamist terrorist militia Hamas attacks Israel from all sides, killing hundreds of people, kidnapping, torturing, abusing dozens. This day goes down as the worst massacre in Israel since the Yom Kippur War 50 years ago. Videos are spreading on the Internet of tortured women, dead soldiers, children and families held captive. The bodies of at least 260 people are found in the desert not far from the Gaza border, murdered during a music festival. Meanwhile, young men in Germany celebrate the atrocities and hand out candy in the streets.

Na'aman Hirschfeld is Israeli and lives not far from Sonnenallee in Berlin. Arab men gathered in front of his house over the weekend, loudly rejoicing for the terrorists and admiring the murders of Jews - the same place Hirschfeld's great-grandfather was deported to Auschwitz in 1942.

WELT: Mr. Hirschfeld, thousands of rockets and drones flew at your homeland Israel over the weekend. People were abducted, tortured and murdered in the most horrible way. How do you feel?

Hirschfeld: I am shocked and feel terrible. I am angry and feel deep disgust for the acts. I have lived in Berlin with my wife and children for eleven years. But my entire family except for one brother is in Israel. Fortunately, my closest relatives are safe. But I know people whose relatives were killed. That is indescribably hard. When I see photos and videos on social media, I feel slain, like someone is ripping out my insides.

WELT: At the same time, people with Arab roots are taking to the streets in your street to celebrate the killings. Some were even sitting outside your house. What happened exactly?

Hirschfeld: On Sunday, six young men gathered in a square in front of my house. They were probably second-generation Arabs, they spoke German, which I also understand. They cheered the Palestinians and that they managed to kill Israelis. One said, "Did you see how they besieged the Israeli tanks?" They boasted that Hamas had embarrassed the Israelis.

WELT: What were you thinking at that moment?

Hirschfeld: I was angry because I saw this concentrated hatred. The young men obviously grew up in Germany and yet they feel such hostility toward Jews. In the Middle East, feelings have been simmering for decades, whole generations have been caught up in the conflict, in the senseless violence, the bloody clashes, the apartheid. But here in Germany? Presumably, the young men have not even had any personal hostile experiences. It shocked me that so many people would attack others for no reason. Whoever sees the pictures of the abused and killed Israelis and feels nothing - he is an animal in my opinion. I can no longer imagine that we can coexist with these people here in Berlin.

WELT: Did you have the feeling before that living together would work?

Hirschfeld: Yes, I always felt comfortable and safe in Berlin until now. I started a family and my children grew up here. It was a hard lesson for me to see that things are changing. Not all at once, of course: already a year ago my son was threatened. A Muslim boy in his class asked where his family was from. He said, "From Israel," because I taught my children not to be afraid. To this the boy said that he would get his friends and beat him up. My son then ran away and hid.

WELT: Did you experience similar incidents yourself?

Hirschfeld: I was insulted a few times because I spoke Hebrew on the street. An elderly man once spat on the ground next to me. But what particularly concerns me is the collective cowardice that I experienced in threatening situations, even in Israel. I was working as a cook in Jerusalem at the time. Many of my colleagues in the kitchen were Arabs. We were friends. One day young Arabs came to the restaurant and I sensed they were looking for trouble. They threatened me and tried to attack me with a knife. And what did my colleagues do? Nothing. They don't say a word. I was able to talk my way out in the end and they left. But to see that no one would help me tore my heart.

WELT: Do you feel similarly after the incidents in Neukölln? Nobody dissolved the actions or showed solidarity with the victims. Do you believe that you would get support in dangerous situations?

Hirschfeld: What I can say for sure is that more has to happen than lighting up the Brandenburg Gate in Israel colors. The collective hatred continues and the government as well as the public do not know how to deal with it. I sense a tendency for the incidents to be ignored - causing the situation to quickly worsen. We have to ask ourselves whether we do something about the hatred and violence or whether we just let it fester. At the moment, I have the feeling that politicians lack the sincerity to admit the problems. Germany adorns itself with the fact that it protects Jews. But what is really happening? There is a demographic change that I think will lead to a major crisis. The AfD is coming, and as long as politicians continue to ignore reality, its strengthening is inevitable.

WELT: Would you leave Germany if it came to a crisis?

Hirschfeld: I don't want to leave, Germany is my historical home. My great-grandfather was a long-established Berliner who grew up not far from Sonnenallee. My grandfather, on the other hand, moved to Mandate Palestine in 1932, which was then under British control. He saved the lives of his descendants. My great-grandfather was deported to Auschwitz in 1942 and murdered. Some of my relatives were shocked that I moved to Germany, of all places. But I was not afraid because times changed - and now they do again. However, it gives me security to know that I could leave at any time. I emigrated once, I can do it again. In my opinion, German society is developing in a very problematic direction. There has been too much identity politics,

too much positioning to the right or left. I wonder how Germany is going to deal with reactionary movements like Pegida or the AfD without fomenting hatred and racism. I can't answer that. And I fear that politicians can't either.

WELT: How do you think the situation in Israel will develop?

Hirschfeld: I can't predict that. But the moment I saw the first news about the attacks, it became clear that these events would be worse than anything before. I experienced the first and second Intifada, I experienced Palestinians going after Israelis in my neighborhood with knives and killing them. But this was different.

WELT: In what way?

Hirschfeld: Because it was inconceivable that Hamas could advance so far into Israel. One journalist called it a "pogrom." The attackers managed to cut the communication channels and attack Israel from all four sides: from the air, from the sea, underground and above ground. It was a systematically organized attack with highly trained soldiers. They came and slaughtered. In the music festival alone, 260 people were murdered. The scale is unbelievable.

On the street we meet a friend of Hirschfeld, also Israeli. She tells us that the parents of her friends were murdered. Families who were friends are now trying to come to her in Germany to seek safety. She has no words to describe her feelings. She cannot believe the pictures showing abducted children the age of her three-year-old son - they were "slaughtered," she says.

Hirschfeld: The scale of the catastrophe shows once again how dysfunctional Israel is. Everything is held together with spit. The apparently strongest army in the world needed hours to get to the sites of the fighting. 1973 repeats itself. Then, too, the government had indications that a large-scale attack was imminent. But no one did anything about it. They were too confident, thought Arabs were stupid, weak and incompetent. It is the same with today's government, they are racists. Netanyahu (Israel's prime minister, editor's note) was so focused on breaking the judicial system and getting even more power that in the end he was the weak one. It's hopeless.