

Reflections on the State of Israel and the Israel-Palestine Conflict

Sophie Dulesh

THE JEWS ARE A PECULIAR PEOPLE: THINGS PERMITTED TO OTHER NATIONS ARE FORBIDDEN TO the Jews. Other nations drive out thousands, even millions of people, and there is no refugee problem. Russia did it. Poland and Czechoslovakia did it. Turkey threw out a million Greeks and Algeria a million Frenchmen. Indonesia threw out heaven knows how many Chinese – and no one says a word about refugees. But in the case of Israel, the displaced Arabs have become eternal refugees. Everyone insists that Israel must take back every single Arab. Arnold Toynbee calls the displacement of the Arabs an atrocity greater than any committed by the Nazis... Everyone expects the Jews to be the only real Christians in this world.

– Eric Hoffer, (non-Jewish) social philosopher, *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1968.

The existence of Israel must be seen in the context of global anti-Semitism. The pronouncements of the early Christian fathers (e.g., Augustine, Bishop of Hippo; St. John Chrysostom) were replete with calls to hate the Jews for being Jews. Many Popes over the ages were no slackers when it came to anti-Semitism and this tradition was carried on by the Protestants. Pope Paul IV forced the Jews into a ghetto, required them to wear yellow hats, and allowed them to trade only in food and second-hand clothing. Under the Papal Bull of July 17, 1555, these and innumerable other regulations were to remain in effect for the next three centuries. In the five short years of his pontificate, the Jewish population of Rome was halved. Martin Luther, Father of the Reformation, promoted the burning of Jewish schools and synagogues, the

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razing of their homes and destruction of their prayer books, among other suggestions. John Calvin, another Reformation leader, thought that Jews deserved to be “oppressed unendingly and without measure or end and that they die in their misery without the pity of anyone.”¹ That the Holocaust was built on this millennia-old Christian anti-Semitism is undeniable. Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil Fackenheim highlighted the intensity of this hatred: “Eichman redirected trains heading to the collapsing Russian front back to the Auschwitz transports, the death of Jews being more important than the lives of German soldiers who were dying from lack of supplies.”² Christian Jew-hating dogma probably underlay the refusal of Pope Pius XII to endorse the actions of those brave Christians, including priests and nuns, who hid Jews and

Roma during the years of the Holocaust at the risk of their own lives.

Mahatma Gandhi, who did not understand the appeal for a Jewish homeland, asked in 1938: “Why should [the Jews] not, like other peoples of the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood?”³ Gandhi appears not to have been very well-versed in the dark history of anti-Semitism.

There have been, according to Wikipedia, 109 expulsions of Jews since 250 CE. There are no remotely comparable figures for any other ethnic group. Among the larger expulsions were those by Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Ferdinand I of Austria, Holy Roman Emperor Leopold I of

Austria, and King Manuel of Portugal. There were also pogroms and massacres, including the mass slaughter of German Jews after they were accused of poisoning the wells during the Black Death (1346–53). Jews, unlike all those “other peoples” mentioned by Gandhi, never had the luxury of being accepted by birthright, despite speaking the language of their country as their mother tongue and making great contributions to the culture and economy. Jews in pre-Hitler Germany were said to be “more pro-Germany” than non-Jewish Germans.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 181 (with 33 votes in favour, 13 against, 10 abstentions, and one member absent). This Resolution would have seen the partition of the British-ruled Palestine Mandate into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Jews accepted it, the Arabs did not. The creation of Israel in 1948 saw the expulsion of Jews from nearly every Arab and Muslim land and the newly created country was forced to accommodate approximately 800,000 refugees. (This fact alone should answer Gandhi’s question: it’s not that Jews don’t want to make the country where they are born their home; it’s that they never know when or where some event somewhere will deprive them

of their birthright.) Tiny Israel, without any significant amount of resources and – unlike many of its hostile Arab neighbours without oil as a money-maker – built a modern country from scratch within one generation. Given the relentless attacks Israel has been subjected to by hostile neighbours since its inception, the fact that it is heavily militarized – for which it is often reprimanded – is simply a necessity for survival.

Some of those who oppose the existence of Israel think that Jews should be content to live as citizens in a united Palestine. For Jews, this would mean accepting second-class (or worse) citizenship as well as constant insecurity of the person, as is now suffered by minority

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Christians in Muslim countries, of whom an estimated 100,000 are killed annually.⁴ Islamic anti-Semitism more than matches Christian anti-Semitism. The Koran devotes 61% of its text to “the Kafir” or non-believer⁵, who is referred to, among many other things, as “the vilest of all creatures” (Koran 98:6). Unlike Jesus Christ, the founder (real or imaginary) and role model of Christianity, the founder of Islam, Mohammad, fought Jews, killed them, took their land, and his dying wish was for Arabia to be cleansed of Jews and Christians, a wish that was carried out by his followers. Islamic anti-Semitism is showing no signs of attenuation in our times. On the contrary, the rapid rise of anti-Semitism in Europe today, including the murder of Jews, the most recent [Not anymore. *Ed.*] being at a kosher grocery store following the Charlie Hebdo massacre, is largely fuelled by Muslim immigrants. It is completely unrealistic to speak about the existence of the state of Israel while ignoring the global resurgence of Islamic jihad (war on the Kafir) in general, a major component of which is not only the elimination of the state of Israel but of Jews in general.

While the need for Jews to have their own homeland is self-explanatory under the circumstances, it is nevertheless true that the state of

Israel was created on land that already had inhabitants. (We will not here consider that those inhabitants themselves were invaders 14 centuries ago, when the Muslim conquerors from Arabia overran and colonized a primarily Christian Middle East.) Some of the inhabitants of what we now call Palestine were forcibly displaced when modern Israel was created. But this was not the first time in history that prior inhabitants were displaced by newcomers. How does the reaction to the “Jewish occupation of Palestine” compare to the occupation of other lands, and why has Israel received what would objectively seem to be an inordinate amount of attention? Since there is

no “absolute justice” in this universe, the only approach to assess the forced displacement of Arabs in the creation of Israel is to compare it with other displacements.

Mass migrations, land appropriations and re-populations have been a regular historical occurrence. Spanish conquistadors and the Europeans who came to the Americas and Australia took land away from the natives and are unlikely to ever give it back. In 1923, some 400,000 Muslims were forced to relocate from Greece to Turkey and three times as many Orthodox Greeks from Turkey to Greece. During World War Two, 1.4 million people were relocated between Poland and Ukraine. Afterwards, 12 million ethnic Germans were evicted from Eastern Europe. Over 7 million Muslims left India for Pakistan after Partition (1947), and over 7 million Hindus relocated from Pakistan to India, another half-million were murdered on both sides. More recently, about a million people were exchanged between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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Seven million people have been forced to migrate in the Balkans within the last two decades. Historically, Tibet has been in and out of China’s control. The policy had been to encourage hundreds of thousands of Chinese to permanently resettle in Tibet to provide justification for China to grab Tibet, and this re-population policy is working. A similar policy of repopulating the Crimean Peninsula with Russians after expelling the native Tatars has been carried out by Russia for centuries and is being continued by current President Vladimir Putin.

Imperialist colonization of Africa by the Arabs has been a continuous process since the founding of

Islam. Semi-nomadic Arab herders have used the sword to expropriate indigenous agrarian black Africans of their fertile land, either killing them en masse or driving them into the desert. As reported by Wikipedia: “...Elders of the Zaghawa people of Sudan complained that they were victims of an intensifying Arab apartheid campaign. Sudanese Arabs are widely referred to as practising apartheid against Sudan’s non-Arab citizens.” Close to half a million, possibly more, people have died in the Sudanese conflict in Darfur.⁶ The Boston Globe of November 30, 2008, reported that “Tens of thousands of black Africans in the country’s southern region, most of them Christians or Animists, have been abducted and sold into slavery by Arab militias backed by the Islamist regime in Khartoum.”

The New Black Magazine, on September 23, 2009, reported that the late Muammar Gadhafi of Libya said the following in a 2001 speech to the Arab League: “The third of the Arab community living outside Africa should move in with

the two-thirds living on the continent and join the African Union, which is the only space we have...It is a call for the final phase of the 15 centuries old Arab Lebensraum war on Africans – a war to Islamize and conquer all of Africa, from Cairo to the Cape and from Senegal to Somalia, and to then enslave all the conquered Africans.”

What splendid candour! And yet, a Jerusalem Post article of March 26, 2014, reported that while the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) was debating five (5!) separate resolutions critical of Israel, “during the entire

25th session this month, UNHRC was voting on only one resolution on Syria even though over 120,000 people have been killed in its ongoing civil war.” There is no BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) movement against any country but Israel.

Indeed, there are many vocal advocates of BDS who single out Israel for condemnation with no reference whatsoever to the rest of the world, all the while vigorously denying any anti-Semitism on their part. But it is anti-Semitic and a glaring double-standard to condemn Israel for its failure to achieve perfection while showing leniency in judging far more flagrant abuses by others. The penalties imposed by BDS are very severe in the age of globalization and affect primarily the most economically vulnerable. BDS paints Israelis (and Jews) as bogeymen. (“They must be really evil to deserve THAT!”) BDS promotes a resurrection of Western anti-Semitism, fuels fear and hatred toward Jews of the Palestinians, and makes Israelis more resentful and less liberal. It further divides two peoples who are badly in need of ways to live cooperatively and in peace. Much of the language of the BDS movement is demagoguery, and it avoids

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comparisons because these would reflect very favourably on Israel.

It is – indeed it must be – permissible to criticize Israel. But such criticism must be just and for that the injustices of Israel must be considered in comparison with those of other countries. A comparative approach is a moral and legal imperative. The European Court of Justice has recognized the principle of proportionality as one of the five foundational general principles of European Union law, as the duty under the Civil Procedure Rules since the 1950s.⁷

And it is actually very simple:

to be just, a punishment must be proportional to the wrong done. When we reject the amputation of hands and feet as a punishment for theft as demanded by sharia law, we are not denying that a wrong was committed, but only that the punishment is grossly disproportional to the offence. But how can one speak of proportionality without a comparison? The very idea of the first is based on the second. Isn't it self-evident? Without comparison any punishment is doomed to be unjust due to being disproportional.

Today, there are over 50 million people who are recognized as refugees by the United Nations, the highest number since WWII. From the point of view of the World Refugee Organization, Israel has accommodated more refugees than it has created, and is therefore a net benefactor from a global perspective. Of the 50 million recognized refugees, Palestinians are the only ones that continue to demand the right of return, rather than re-settling in other Arab lands. Why would that be? It is because religious and nationalistic oil money-rich powers use Palestinians as their pawns and sectarian violence as a tool to pursue their own interests.

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In 1959, the Arab League passed Resolution #1457, which stated: “The Arab countries will not grant citizenship to applicants of Palestinian origin in order to prevent their assimilation into the host countries.” This was a very cynical move.

The Arab League was happy to see the Palestinians rot as refugees for generations in order to keep this toxic position of hate boiling and to use it to advance political and religious agendas. So much for their “brotherhood.” And yet, no one seems to be calling out the Arab League, let alone condemning it, for turning its back on its Palestinian “brothers” and treating Palestinians like second-class squatters when they come to Arab countries as refugees. It is only when Palestinians come to Western countries that they become full citizens with equal rights.

Hamas is equally cynical in its use of the people of Gaza, who elected it to power. Global anti-Semitism flared up in response to the conflict between Gaza and Israel in 2014 because the number of Gazans killed was much greater than the Israeli death toll. In August, 2014, prominent Canadian journalist, Ali Rizvi, originally from Pakistan, asked,

Why is everything so much worse when there are Jews involved? Over 700 people have died in Gaza as of this writing. Muslims have woken up around the world. But is it really because of the numbers? Bashar al-Assad has killed over 180,000 Syrians, mostly Muslim, in two years – more than the number killed in Palestine in two decades. Thousands of Muslims in Iraq and Syria have been killed by ISIS in the last two months. Tens of thousands have been killed by the Taliban. Half a million black Muslims were killed by Arab Muslims in Sudan. The list goes on. But Gaza makes Muslims around

the world, both Sunni and Shia, speak up in a way they never do otherwise.⁸

Rizvi goes on to cite a BBC report that many of the pictures of dead children circulated by Hamas and attributed to Israeli bombardment were in fact Syrian children killed by Assad, who is supported by Iran, which also funds Hezbollah and Hamas. “What could be more exploitative of dead children than attributing the pictures of innocents killed by your own supporters to your enemy simply because you weren’t paying enough attention when your own were killing your own?” asks Rizvi. Questioning why Israel would target civilians when it makes it “[look] like a monster” and “draws the ire of even its closest allies,” Rizvi then addresses Hamas’ objectives:

It isn’t just speculation anymore that Hamas puts its civilians in the line of fire. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri plainly admitted on Gazan national TV that the human shield strategy has proven “very effective.” The UN relief organization UNRWA issued a furious condemnation of Hamas after discovering hidden rockets in not one, but two schools in Gaza last week. Hamas fires thousands of rockets into Israel, rarely killing any civilians or causing any serious damage. It launches them from densely populated areas, including hospitals and schools. Why launch rockets without causing any real damage to the other side, inviting great damage to your own people, then putting your own civilians in the line of fire when the response comes? Even when the IDF warns civilians to evacuate their homes before a strike, why does Hamas tell them to stay put? Because Hamas knows its cause is helped when Gazans die. If there is one thing that helps Hamas most – one thing that gives it any legitimacy – it is dead civilians.

Ali Rizvi ends his remarks by examining the cynicism of Hamas and some possibly self-destructive policies of Israel:

In 2005, Israel ended the occupation in Gaza. It pulled out every last Israeli soldier. It dismantled every last settlement. Many Israeli settlers who refused to leave

were forcefully evicted from their homes, kicking and screaming. This was a unilateral move by Israel, part of a disengagement plan intended to reduce friction between Israelis and Palestinians. It wasn't perfect – Israel was still to control Gaza's borders, coastline, and airspace – but considering the history of the region, it was a pretty significant first step. After the evacuation, Israel opened up border crossings to facilitate commerce. The Palestinians were also given 3,000 greenhouses which had already been producing fruit and flowers for export for many years. But Hamas chose not to invest in schools, trade, or infrastructure. Instead, it built an extensive network of tunnels to house thousands upon thousands of rockets and weapons, including newer, sophisticated ones from Iran and Syria. All the greenhouses were destroyed. Hamas did not build any bomb shelters for its people. It did, however, build a few for its leaders to hide out in during airstrikes. Civilians are not given access to these shelters for precisely the same reason Hamas tells them to stay home when the bombs come... If Hamas is so bad, why isn't everyone pro-Israel in this conflict? Because Israel's flaws, while smaller in number, are massive in impact... To hold Israel up to a higher standard would mean approaching the Palestinians with the racism of lowered expectations... Israel is leading itself toward increasing international isolation and national suicide because of two things: 1. The occupation; and 2. Settlement expansion...

To repeat Gandhi's question: "Why should [the Jews] not, like other peoples of the earth, make that country their home where they are born and where they earn their livelihood?" The answer is playing out in Europe right now. Europe has seen a large influx of Muslim immigrants, many of whom harbor strong anti-Semitic feelings, and may be helping to rekindle old anti-Semitic sentiments there. Immigration to Israel is up 150%. The Anti-Defamation League commissioned First International Resources to research attitudes and opinions toward Jews in 101 countries and territories around the world. For this survey, 53,100 adults – representing 4,161,578,905 people or 88.4% of the world's adult population – were interviewed between July 2013 and February 2014. The survey indicates that some 1.1 billion adults

[26% of global population] are "deeply affected by anti-Semitism." Of these, 70% have never met a Jew in person, but were still indoctrinated to hate the bogeyman. (Well-known writer Ayaan Hirsi Ali has described how she was raised on such anti-Semitism, and her own surprise to discover upon meeting her first Jew that he was just an ordinary person.) Only 33% of the people surveyed had even heard of the Holocaust. Only 28% were free of any prejudice.

The historical mistreatment of Jews in many parts of the world, and the increasing insecurity they face in Europe primarily as the result of actions of Muslim immigrants (google, for example, what is happening to Malmo, Sweden), does not justify mistreatment of minorities by Israel. And there is no doubt that there has been mistreatment of and discrimination against minorities in Israel. But the misdeeds of Israel pale in the greater context of global events, and the global response to them, when it ignores so much else that is so much worse, can only be seen as a double standard. It is also noteworthy that, what-

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ever the mistreatment of minorities in Israel, it has not reduced the mass influx of refugees from Muslim countries such as Eritrea and the Sudan, who voted with their feet for far-away Israel over a neighbouring Islamic country. Nor has it prevented the mass movement of Arabs from the eastern parts of Jerusalem to areas that would remain under Israeli control in any prospective partition of that city.⁹ By comparison, have you ever heard of a Jew seeking refuge in a Muslim country?

Israel may have many problems that need fixing, but it is orders of magnitude more democratic than its neighbours who want to destroy it. In 2014, Iran, which in all probability is developing a nuclear bomb, created a computer simulation of the complete destruction of Israel. Its former president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has gleefully pointed out that one big nuclear bomb would destroy all of Israel but only a recoverable part of Iran. This is applicable to their relative populations (8 million vs. 78 million) as well as to their territories (20,770 vs. 1,648,195 sq. km). The destruction of Israel is a goal of most Arab and Islamic states and supported by a large proportion of their populations. But the destruction of Israel would not make the world a safer place. Those who would destroy Israel are not the friends of the democratic world. It is time for that democratic world to abandon the “racism of lowered expectations” when it comes to Palestinians in the Palestine-Israeli conflict. •

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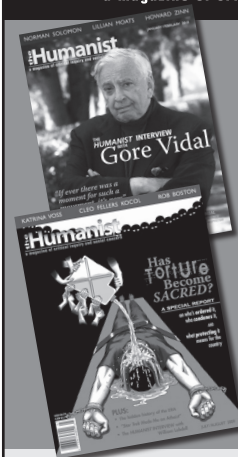
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*Sophie Dulesh was born, educated, and spent her young adulthood in Russia. She is of Jewish background and lost family members to the Holocaust. Sophie worked for 27 years as a medical doctor and researcher in Russia before immigrating to Canada in 1980, where she worked as an MD for another 23 years. Sophie’s interest in secular humanism, philosophy and the history of religion led her to write *The Trouble With Religion and My Red Russia*.*

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