



Our History is Our Mandate

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I spend a great deal of time researching and teaching about Palestinians and Israeli Jews who resist Israeli colonialism by refusing its separatism and racial hierarchies. It's always been my understanding that one of the founding structures of Israeli colonialism was the physical and epistemological separation of Arabs and Jews. This state of affairs was manufactured through forced population transfer when the state of Israel was established in 1948. Yet many still believe this separation stems from an immemorial tribal conflict or a civilizational one, in which Arabs are cast as representatives of the Orient and



Jews as citizens of the West. Never mind that nearly half of Israeli Jews hail from the Arab World and North Africa. From the time of their migration, they've been told to eliminate the vestiges of the Arab past from their language and practices so that they can assimilate into a secular Western democracy and differentiate themselves from the figure of the 'Arab enemy.' As children, we were told that the Arabs went to war with us because they hated Jews, but certainly not because they opposed Israel's treatment of Palestinians. And because we were surrounded by the Arab World, we would always be unsafe. In fact, we grew up with the idea that after the Holocaust, in which we had lost nearly all our family, no Jew is ever safe to live amongst non-Jews again. That is why Jews needed our own exclusive state and military to defend us. The collective trauma of the Holocaust needed careful working through and healing, but instead it has become a tool of political propaganda and statecraft.

Israel is the most dangerous place to be a Jew today

Jewish unsafety is one of the main justifications for Palestinian inequality and for the broader regime of Apartheid and settler violence. Now the Jewish sense of unsafety is being weaponised on a global scale to justify the slaughter of thousands of Gazans, the bombing of hospitals, ambulances and refugee camps. We have the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and UK Home secretary Suella Braverman knocking themselves over to protect Jewish people from Palestinians and the British public, by renouncing peaceful protests for Gaza as 'hate marches'. Even a renowned Antisemite like Marine Le Pen is promising to protect Jews in France from Islam. The Israeli state rhetoric which insists that Jews worldwide are made safer by its military violence stands in stark contrast to the reality that Islamophobia and antisemitism are rising hand in hand alongside the attacks of both Hamas and Israel. I don't think it can be said enough: the far right will never make Jews safer, nor will Apartheid, nor West Bank settlements. And slaughtering the adults and children of Gaza will certainly not make Jewish communities safer. There are about 7 million Jews in the United States and 7 million in Israel and the only difference between them is that in Israel Jews have



legal rights and privileges their neighbours do not. This doesn't make them safer. In fact, Israel is the most dangerous place to be a Jew today. Apartheid and colonialism are violent, with negative effects for all sides.

What I'm particularly concerned about today is the political discourse rampant in the UK & Western media that is equating the fate of Israel with the fate of Jews worldwide. In this equation Judaism, a millennia-old religion, has been made continuous with Zionism, a modern-day political ideology, and a critique of Zionism or Israel has become synonymous with antisemitism. Such rhetoric has for years been compounded by state-mandated definitions of antisemitism like the one posed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). A monolithic Jewish community is touted as a symbol of the West, and Palestine and its supporters, (including any progressive Jews) are framed as violent and antisemitic, even terrorists who want to destroy Israel and hurt Jews. This utter distortion, which pits communities against each other worldwide and endangers people's bodies, lives and employment, is shamelessly printed in right wing and mainstream newspapers alike.

What the media rarely reports is that there are many thousands of Jews worldwide, including myself, who reject this story. Contrary to popular belief, Zionism is not the only Jewish political tradition: we also have socialism, we have a progressive left and we have a pro-Palestinian movement. Although they are regularly under attack, thousands of Israeli Jews and Palestinians work together tirelessly for a democratic future. As we speak, hundreds of Jews are taking over the Statue of Liberty in New York's Ellis Island calling for ceasefire, last week they occupied NY's Penn Station and St Pancras Station here in London, and the week before the US congress. In London, every Palestine March has a Jewish Bloc, in addition to scores of protests organised specifically by Jewish organizations like *Na'amod* and *Jewish Voice for Peace*. In Cape Town South Africa, progressive Jews curate a *Shabbat against Genocide* in solidarity with Palestinians every Friday in the city's public promenade. In my own university, Cambridge, a coalition of Jewish, Palestinian, Turkish and other academics have spent the past half-decade working for Justice in Palestine/Israel.



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Like others I know, watching the bombs streak down the skies of Gaza, watching people frantically pulling bodies out of the rubble and watching injured kids crying on the dusty floor of a hospital returns me to the mass graves of Jews and partisans in Lithuania, where my grandmother's entire town was liquidated. A few years after my grandmother fled to Palestine in the 1930's, her Jewish community was transported to Verdigris forest on the outskirts of their town. There they were told to take off their clothing, to lay next to each other in the ditches, and they were all shot. They say that the Holocaust began in Lithuania because the German military had so much help from civilians. Neighbours turned in and shot their own neighbours, an entire society was complicit. Later I realized that this is the world fascism created, the world of terror my grandmother fled, in which people came to be seen as human animals to be eradicated. To make a new world involves something far more radical than becoming one more nation state on stolen land. It means living differently; it means never looking at human beings that way again.

Last weekend, I hosted a *Shabbat Against Genocide* with about two dozen Jewish activists who have spent the last weeks protesting and organizing for a ceasefire in Gaza. Together, we recited the Kaddish, the Jewish mourner's prayer, and we wept, not only because of the horror of this violence, or because these bombings are being carried out in our names, or because we lost a friend or a relative in the slaughter, or because our family or friends were furious with us for supporting Gaza, or because we were being pushed out of our shuls or being targeted at work for criticizing Israel. We wept because like the children and grandchildren of Gaza, many of us have the memory of genocide and exile encoded in our bones. For some this means they think they will only be safe in a state of ethnic separation, but for others, like myself, our history decrees an ethical mandate to do anything we can to end pogroms, massacres and genocides, forever. Because we are only safe in this world when we find a way to live in it, share it and to



thrive in it together.