

# The Case for Israel

From Postmodern historiography to Anti-Israel Bias in the Media

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By

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As promised today's post is a section from a book I have been writing with the working title: "The Woke West." The excerpt makes up a substantial chunk of a chapter in that book dedicated to the history of the Israel-Palestine conflict. I've given it the title "The Case for Israel," in a subtle homage to Bruce Gilley's fantastic "The Case for Colonialism."

For those who may have read my 4-part Israel-Palestine essay series on [Woke Watch Canada](#), this larger work today (the Israel chapter in The Woke West), is an expansion of that series. Today's excerpt, "The Case for Israel," belongs right after the section in Part 1 of the WWC series that provides an overview of the ancient history of Israel that begins in Canaan.

I will publish more excerpts, in essay form, as they are completed. There will be at least three more. One, expanding on the WWC essay mentioned, will cover Israel's ancient history, delving deeply into the biblical and archaeological record. Another will deal extensively with the modern era beginning with the 1948 Declaration of the state of Israel, and another deals more deeply with the history of the conflict from the founding of Hamas to present day. I would also like to write some deep dive analysis of the global and timeless phenomenon of antisemitism, the history of radical Islam, and on the general state of the Middle East.

However, this will take some time, and a lot of work. To be honest, this stuff is massive amounts of work. The essay you are about to read is over 11,000 words and has just under 100 end notes. It was made from many 16, 18, and 20 hour days (and at least one 21 hour day). Yes, I take lots of little breaks during these research & writing sessions - my eyes would fall out otherwise - but when I start a project, I go at it like an obsession. In this case, my usual obsessiveness was augmented by the torment I have felt since hearing the awful details

of the horrendous attack of innocent Israelis on October 7th of this year.

Because of the serious and existential nature of the threat to Israel, and the even more alarming global threat to the Jewish diaspora, this work could not be more important. And the message it contains, “the case for Israel,” could not be more pressing.

I extend my gratitude to my friends Barbara Kay and Jim Heller who offered up some great sources during the research for this essay. If you like what you read today, and think the message is a worthy one, please consider supporting my efforts with a paid subscription or a donation of any amount you see fit:

## **The Case for Israel**

### **From Postmodern historiography to Anti-Israel Bias in the Media**

The total area of the state of Israel is 22,145 square kilometers, while the total area of the entire Arab peninsula is roughly 1,930,000 square kilometers. In other words, Israel takes up a total land area of less than 0.2% of the region. <sup>1</sup> A mere sliver when one considers the vast expanse of this desert climate.

There are many reasons why, as I will argue in the following, the Israel-Palestine conflict is not primarily about land. For now, I humbly request the reader, while perusing the following paragraphs, to carefully consider the implications, with regards to the contentious politics of the region, of the State of Israel being so exorbitantly tiny.

[The Innocents Abroad](#) is a travel book written by Mark Twain after he visited parts of Europe and the Holy Land in 1867. Faced with a vast barren expanse, it is fair to say Twain was less than impressed with what he encountered in Palestine. He described it as a sparsely populated desert wasteland ‘...[a] desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds—a silent mournful expanse....A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action....We never saw a human being on the whole route....There

was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of the worthless soil, had almost deserted the country’.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Miracle of Jewish Agriculture, “that made the desert bloom”**

The pre-state period, before Israel’s 1948 founding, is highlighted by Jewish agricultural settlements, predominantly of the *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* variety. The goal of earlier pre-Zionist farmers and settlers was to develop a bond with the land through agricultural works, and to change “the national and international ethos from a people that had engaged in commerce, with individuals seeking their own benefit, to a people working its land.”<sup>3</sup>

When Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, visited a Jewish settlement in the Negev desert, he later sent instructions that the region’s agricultural expert be fired. The expert was under the short-sighted belief that fruit and vegetable orchards in the Negev were impossible. Ben-Gurion reasoned, “I need an expert who can do it.”<sup>4</sup>

Precipitation in the desert is extremely low, however beneath the Negev is an enormous lake of salt-water. Through the Jewish innovation of drip irrigation, the subterranean brack can be used in agricultural works without burning and damaging the plants (as happens to plant leaves when sprayed with salinized water). Furthermore, dates and melons turnout sweeter due to a stress reaction in the plant caused by salt, which triggers the production of more glucose.

An adaptive combination of greenhouses and innovative irrigation and hydroponic techniques transformed barren areas of Israeli desert, into the sites of vastly productive agricultural industries. The early Jewish pioneers, and the farmers and settlers at the nation’s founding, performed nothing short of a miracle by converting many of the most barren and lifeless tracts of land into a virtual “desert bloom.”

### **Context: The Back Story**

In the following subsections, and subsequent essays in this series, I have chosen to cover a little over two centuries of the history of Israel-Palestine. Because events in the Middle East do not occur in a vacuum, it is necessary at some points to comment generally on the entire region, even though the bulk of the specifics are focused on Palestine and Israel. To begin, the first section illustrates the pervading geo-political climate which dominated affairs in the region in the first of the two centuries covered.

### **The Great Powers and Spheres of Influence**

The Concert of Europe, known as the Congress System or the Vienna System after the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), “was a general agreement among the Great Powers of 19th-century Europe to maintain the European balance of power, political boundaries, and spheres of influence. Never a perfect unity and subject to disputes and jockeying for position and

influence, the Concert was an extended period of relative peace and stability in Europe following the Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars which had consumed the continent since the 1790s.” [5](#)

While scholars debate over the length of time that the Great Powers of Austria, France, Prussia, Russia, and the United Kingdom held together a functioning Concert of Europe, the formal Congress System (which in theory would have held regular Congresses), was seen as a failure by the 1820s. However, peace was maintained as the Great Powers would meet separately and co-operate on an ad hoc basis at critical points in time.

Called the “sick man of Europe,” the failing Ottoman Empire triggered the Eastern Question [6](#) in which the Great Powers sought to address the problem of political and economic instability in the Ottoman region (from the late 18th to early 20th centuries), and to analyze the threat this posed on the delicate balance of power previously established by the Concert of Europe.

Involvement of European powers in the Middle East, not entirely without reason, has always contributed to an environment of mistrust among Arab nations (between themselves, between foreign powers, and between themselves and foreign powers). The modern politics of the region has long been tainted by intrigue. Editor of the Middle East Forum, Daniel Pipes, has written of the “conspiracy mentality” in the Middle East, which harms “Middle Eastern political life, spurring both plots and the fear of plots.” Considering the political consequences and the abysmal record of clandestine activities not gone as planned, “the significance of conspiracies lies more often not in their success but in the repercussions of their failure. They have a real impact not by changing the course of history but by poisoning people's minds; they affect psychology more than politics.” [7](#)

For example, in the following excerpt from an essay on Middle East politics, Pipes explains the tangled web of collusion around Lebanon’s Shi`i leader Musa as-Sadr in the 1970s:

“No one knew Sadr's ultimate purpose or the identity of his patron. Pro-shah Iranians painted him as a long-term agent of Ayatollah Khomeini. Anti-shah Iranians claimed that the shah paid as much as \$1 million to ensure Sadr's rise to the top of Lebanon's Shi`i hierarchy, or even that he was sent to Lebanon to bring that country under Iranian control. The PLO called him an agent of the CIA or the Lebanese government. The Libyans accused him of building up Shi`a power on Israel's behalf. The Muslim Brethren emphasized Sadr's ‘deep connections’ to Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad. Others tied him to the Iraqi regime. Italian police suspected him of training members of the extreme left-wing organization Prima Linea.” [8](#)

In the same essay, after explaining the uniqueness of the Middle East which has not been subject to the control of a single state since 1798, Pipes details the way in which the Great Powers “all took part in the nineteenth-century tug-of-war over the Ottoman Empire. Both the

French and British colonized Egypt. German ambitions in Morocco provoked crises in 1905-06 and 1911. British and Russians faced off in Iran (over control of the country), as did British and Americans (over control of the oil resources). The Italians had aspirations to large stretches of territory, including parts of Anatolia, though they ended up only with Libya. At the same time, proximity to Europe meant that some regions--Ceuta, Melilla, Algeria, the Caucasus, Central Asia--were not just colonized but actually incorporated into the mother country."

### **The "Lawrence of Arabia" Mythology, Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Great Arab Revolt**

"Earlier than most, Lawrence seemed to embrace the modern concept that history was malleable, that truth was what people were willing to believe." - Scott Anderson

As will be shown several times in the following pages, creative writing, drama, music, editing, and romanticizing through artistic cinematography, are no friend to historiography. In fact, it is ideology that is far more commensurate with the less-disciplined forms of historical story-telling found today throughout the online entertainment complex. As Marshall McLuhan understood, "the medium is the message," that is, the message (content) is altered by the medium in which it is delivered. Unfortunately however, this presents a great obstacle to finding and preserving the truth. The legend of Lawrence of Arabia is a prime example.

T. E. Lawrence, was the British archaeologist, army officer, diplomat, and writer, celebrated in the critically acclaimed 1962 biopic Lawrence of Arabia. "Filmed against a canvas of awesome magnificence...Lawrence of Arabia, a man torn between two civilizations," the baritone narrator of the film's theatrical trailer tells us, as a montage of action accompanies further splashes of voice-over proclaiming T. E. Lawrence was "an extraordinary man," a "poet," a "scholar," a "mighty warrior," and "the most shameless exhibitionist since Barnum and Bailey." A character, it would seem, made for the silver screen. Or made that way, from a restless and prolific imagination.

The film's cinematographer, multiple Academy Award winner, Freddie Young, shot the epic in Super Panavision 70, one of the rarest film formats ever used.<sup>9</sup> The 70 mm large-format cinematography virtually incites the romantic desert myth, infusing the picture with a breathtaking seemingly endless and barrenly arid tract, capturing the drama in the brobdingnagian scale. The film's score, by French composer Maurice Jarre, was performed by the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It employed "eleven percussionists to create the exotic and ethnic colors required by the setting," and "utilized tritone intervals both harmonically and melodically" to help "create feelings of expansiveness, thus reinforcing the vast...desert vistas."<sup>10</sup>

The film was based on Lawrence's book, Seven Pillars of Wisdom (also known as Revolt in the Desert). It is an autobiographical account of Lawrence's experience in the Ottoman

provinces of Hejaz and Greater Syria during the Arab Revolt (1916–1918) and the Sinai and Palestine Campaign (1915–1918) against the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.

On the first page of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence admits, “My proper share was a minor one, but because of a fluent pen, a free speech, and a certain adroitness of brain, I took upon myself, as I describe it, a mock primacy. In reality I never had any office among the Arabs: was never in charge of the British mission with them.” In the 2013 book, “Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, Imperial Folly, and the Making of the Modern Middle East,” veteran war correspondent, Scott Anderson writes, “Lawrence was able to become ‘Lawrence of Arabia’ because no one was paying much attention.”

Indeed, upon closer examination, the “Lawrence of Arabia” phenomenon seems to reveal that T.E. Lawrence was struck by a form of intoxicating cultural relativism rooted in the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The writings of Lawrence, and the film that dramatizes his military stint in the desert, has played a role in fostering the romantic naivety found within the Western conception of the Middle East. Comparable to explorers from the Age of Discovery, who dreamed of encounters with Rousseau’s New World “noble savage,” the mythology around Lawrence of Arabia similarly imbues Middle East history with an idyllic but haltingly incomplete picture of the complexities of the region. Lawrence, and the film about him, were responsible for an “extraordinary feat of historical deception.” <sup>11</sup>

A letter from 1918 demonstrates Lawrence’s relativistic tendency to romanticize, when he mused, “the Arab appealed to my imagination. It is the old, old civilisation, which has refined itself clear of the household gods, and half the trappings which ours hastens to assume. The gospel of bareness in materials is a good one, and it involves apparently a sort of moral bareness too...They think for the moment, and endeavour to slip through life without turning corners or climbing hills. In part it is a mental and moral fatigue, a race trained out, and to avoid difficulties they have to jettison so much that we think honourable and grave.” <sup>12</sup>

Lawrence was stationed at the Arab Bureau of intelligence in Cairo on the 15th of December 1914. During this period, Sharif Hussein, the Emir of Mecca, offered to lead an Arab uprising against the Ottomans. As this was in the interests of Britain (the Ottomans had entered the war in October on the side of the Central Powers), they engaged in negotiations with Hussein, who hoped to secure support for an independent Arab state, which would include the Hejaz, Syria, and Mesopotamia. <sup>13</sup>

According to the popularly accepted mythology of Lawrence of Arabia, today’s Middle East is a result of the meddling of European powers who exploited the Arabs by misleading them to help overthrow the Ottoman Empire during the Great War. They accomplished this, with Lawrence caught somewhere in the middle, by promising Sharif Hussein and his Hashemite subjects their own state. However, it was Hussein who propositioned the British to support an Arab revolt, not the other way around. And, far from being misled, in October of 1915, Hussein demanded a commitment from Britain threatening to otherwise join the Ottomans. <sup>14</sup>

In a series of letters called *The McMahon–Hussein Correspondence*, the British agreed to recognize Arab independence in a large area of the Syrian region after the war in exchange for Hussein to lead the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire. <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> However, Sharif Hussein and the Hashemites performed so poorly it was considered that they did not satisfy their commitment made to the British.

“Hussein never came close to fulfilling his end of the bargain. Most of the Arabic-speaking population remained loyal to the Turks until the bitter end, viewing the Hashemite insurrection with disdain. Even in his hometown of Mecca the sharif didn't command absolute loyalty. Had he not been armed and fed by Britain (and, to a lesser extent, France) and provided with troops, military guidance and lavish shipments of gold to buy Bedouin loyalty, Hussein would have never been able to launch his uprising, let alone sustain it.” <sup>17</sup>

According to the mythology, Lawrence played a pivotal role in the Arab Revolt which drove the Ottoman Turks out of the Levant. However, in reality, his involvement in the secondary war theater of the Ottoman region was not as consequential as was dramatized in *Lawrence of Arabia*, and although he was a gifted writer and a visionary in many ways, Lawrence was not quite the hero to the Arab cause, as was exaggerated in the film and in his writings. In the case of the Arab Revolt, it was a British expeditionary force, not a Sharifan army championed by T.E. Lawrence, that was the decisive factor in driving the Turks from the Levant.

From a 2013 essay in the *Wall Street Journal*, by professor of Middle East and Mediterranean studies at King's College London, Efraim Karsh:

“Lawrence did indeed have a considerable impact on the creation of the modern Middle East, but this had nothing to do with his real war record. The revolt had been a complete fiasco. For all the British and French efforts, the Bedouins remained hopelessly immune to any concept of orderly warfare. They would break for coffee in the middle of the fighting and drop off occasionally to see their families; often a whole clan would tire of fighting and take a rest. They would attack small and lightly armed Turkish garrisons but would disperse in panic when confronted with a significant force, or even upon hearing artillery.” <sup>18</sup>

A prime example of the ineffective chaos intersecting with Lawrence's role in the desert struggles occurred in 1916. During the revolt he was sent on a mission to Mesopotamia, which failed to have an impact on the brutal situation in Kut-al-Amara, a town located 160 KM south of Baghdad with a garrison of 8,000 British troops. <sup>19</sup> The Siege of Kut by the Ottoman army was one of the worst defeats suffered by the allies in World War I. A total of 13,000 British and allied soldiers were taken into captivity where at least one third of them died. <sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front, the Sykes–Picot Agreement was signed in London. This was a secret agreement between the United Kingdom, France, the Russian Empire, and the Kingdom of Italy, which sealed the fate of the Ottoman region.

By appeasing French demands, the Sykes-Picot agreement, effectively reneged on the British pledge to support Hussein's (and Lawrence's) aspirations for an independent Arab state in the region of Syria. <sup>21</sup> Because the British viewed the Sharifian Army as disorderly and ineffective, and gave most credit to the British military's Egyptian Expeditionary Force for successfully driving the Ottomans from much of the Hejaz and surrounding region, the British chose not to fulfill their previous agreement with Sharif Hussein.

Understandably, the Arabs viewed this, and the Balfour Declaration the following year, as acts of betrayal. However, in fairness, Hussein and the Hashemites did end up with territories far greater than what they had before the war: the emirate of Transjordan. Lawrence's take on the "swindle" can be found in Seven Pillars of Wisdom:

"By our swindle they were glorified...The more we condemned and despised ourselves, the more we could cynically take pride in them, our creatures...They were our dupes, wholeheartedly fighting the enemy." <sup>22</sup>

A September 16, 1922 "Note By The Secretary-General Relating To Its Application To The Territory Known As Trans-Jordan" in accordance with Article 25 of the Mandate, created the region of Transjordan. It was then given to the Hashemites in order to appease the Arabs. This separating out of the areas East of the river Jordan meant that the Jews were losing over 70% of the original area promised to them. Because of this, the 1922 note is seen by some Israeli experts as the original two state solution. Everything west of the Jordan River (including Jerusalem) went to the Jews as described in the Note (more on this in the next essay).

The "Great Arab Revolt," as it was later immortalized, did not occur in the grand fashion that war mythology of Lawrence of Arabia would have us believe. After WWI came to an end in 1918, the Middle East was indeed divided between the British and French in the League of Nations Mandates.

Later, I will expand on the subversion into the Middle East by Soviet Communists in the Cold War era. For now, the reader should keep in mind that the Rousseau-like romanticization of the desert and Arab culture, the "well established traditions of disunity, corruption, and organizational incompetence," <sup>23</sup> coupled with the meddling, subversion and intrigue of international actors, have been dominant features in the affairs of the region since well before the first world war. The modern history of the Middle East, not least due to these elements of both local and international intrigue, can be paralyzingly difficult to analyze. The trick, in my view, is to constantly pull back and survey the big picture with the aid of a tightly calibrated moral compass. This, of course, is much easier said than done.



## The Historiography of Israel-Palestine

“The impact of the New Historians who revised and interpreted anew the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict cannot be exaggerated. Their amendment of what they termed the ‘official’ Zionist version of history, mixed with postmodernist assumptions (such as that there is no one version of history), was not confined to intellectual debates in academia.” [24](#)

Unfortunately, in the world today, “postmodernist assumptions” and political ideology permeates most sites of knowledge and cultural production. This taints scholarly cannons and the historical record, and makes the job of getting to the truth so much more difficult. In North America, it is the “decolonization” program of postcolonial theory that distorts the truth, in order to deny the legitimacy of Canada and the United States, whereas in Israel, post-Zionism is used to confute the validity of the Jewish state. Indeed, in Israel, post-Zionists consider Zionism to be a European colonial endeavour, leading to a combination of anti-colonialism and anti-Zionism which forms essentially the same highly politicized anti-West activist mode of modern historiography found in North America, Australia and much of Europe.

In an attempt to cut through the convolution, I have made an effort to understand the perspectives of both Palestinian and traditional Israeli historians, as well as the views of the New Historians, and their even more ideologically extreme successors, the Post-Zionists. Contrasting the scholarship of these disparate corners of Israel-Palestine historiography, is a difficult but enlightening exercise.

In 1999, political scientist Meyrav Wurmser wrote, “Israel is today in the midst of a cultural civil war in which one side would like to see their country continue to exist as a Jewish state and the other believes that Zionism, the founding idea of the state, has reached its end. For the latter group, the time has come for Israel to enter its post-Zionist stage.” [25](#) Since Israeli political scientist, Shlomo Avineri has pointed out that “post-Zionists are simply anti-Zionists,” it’s worth noting that the post-Zionist historical narrative rarely deviates from Palestinian historical narrative, and that Palestinian historiography has no revisionist movement comparable to the Israeli New Historians.

As mentioned, the Post-Zionists were the successors of the less radical school of the Israeli revisionist New Historians. Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Simha Flapan, Tom Segev and Avi Shlaim are among the well known New Historians. They detested the so-called “canonical version of the official Zionist narrative,” so in the 1980s, when the Israeli government released sealed documents from the 1940s, they set out to reexamine the historical record concerning the founding of Israel.

## Traditional Fact & Evidence-Based History vs. Revisionist “New Historian” History

Concerning the “canonical version of the official Zionist narrative,” also known as the fact and evidence-based interpretation of Israel’s history, the following lists the narrative components around the period of the 1948 war most hotly contested by critics in the New Historian / post-Zionist camp.<sup>26</sup> In the next essay on Israel’s modern history, I cover in greater detail the specific timelines, and the facts and evidence used to establish the traditional scholarly historiography of Israel’s founding. For now:

New Historian challenges to Israel’s official historical record:

- First off, New Historians claim that it was the machinations of British diplomats, along with the force of the British military, that conspired with the Jews and prevented the forming of a Palestinian state. However, the abundance of evidence has long ago established that the British, during their mandate in Palestine, lost faith in the Zionist project, and acted to oppose the founding of a Jewish state.
- The New Historians claim that the Arab’s were expelled by the Jews, making the Jews culpable for the subsequent refugee crisis. But the official line established that most Arabs left of their own volition. However, due to strategic military imperatives, in some cases, Arabs were displaced by the Israeli military.
- The official narrative which held that Israel was at a drastic military disadvantage was challenged by the revisionists who claimed the balance of power favoured Israel.
- It was denied by the New Historians that the Arabs intent was to annihilate the Jews, even though there is a copious supply of evidence to the contrary, demonstrating the genocidal attitude toward Jews held by Arabs all over the Middle East. Much of it in the form of public statements made by political, religious, and military Arab leaders.
- Some of the more extreme revisionist historians, like Simha Flapan and Avi Shlaim, have even contended that it was the Arabs who wanted peace, and the Jews who prevented it, ignoring of course, the undeniable fact that Israel was attacked by all of its neighbours within a day of declaring the Jewish state.

### **The Dissension of the New Historians**

Benny Morris, is one of the most prominent of the revisionist historians. It is fair to say he is likely the most objective as well. However, New Historians, like Ilan Pappé, openly and unapologetically favour ideology over evidence. In 2011, Morris wrote an essay called “Liar As Hero,” about the “retroactive poseur,” Ilan Pappé. According to Morris, “Pappe defines Zionism as ‘a racist and quite evil philosophy of morality and life.’ The language is fully as virulent as Hamas’s, or worse.” From the essay mentioned:

“At best, Ilan Pappé must be one of the world’s sloppiest historians; at worst, one of the most dishonest. In truth, he probably merits a place somewhere between the

two.”

Pappé’s work, including his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, has been found by Morris and others to contain many mistranslations, basic errors, omitting of significant context, and blatant lies. Morris suggested that Pappé perverted history ‘for one purpose only: to blacken the image of Israel and its leaders in 1948’.” [28](#) Of the book *Palestinian Dynasty*, Morris wrote, “Pappe’s real interest lies in politics, specifically anti-British-imperial politics and anti-Zionist politics, and not in distant Ottoman-era history.”

But perhaps most damning, is the following:

“To cover the history of Palestine—a geographically small backwater in the giant Ottoman domain—and the activities of its aristocracy and their interaction with the authorities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one would have to spend many months in the Ottoman archives in Istanbul. There one would need to locate and pore over reports and correspondence from and about the relevant vilayets (provinces), Syria/Damascus and Beirut, and the relevant sanjaks and mutasarafliks (districts), Jerusalem, Nablus, and Acre, in addition to the central government’s deliberations and decision-making about Jerusalem and its environs. Pappé, who lacks Turkish, has not consulted any Ottoman archives. There is not a single reference to any Ottoman archive, or any Turkish source, in his endnotes.” [29](#)

In 1999, Pappé told a French newspaper, “...the struggle is about ideology, not about facts, Who knows what facts are? We try to convince as many people as we can that our interpretation of the facts is the correct one, and we do it because of ideological reasons, not because we are truthseekers.” [30](#) Pappé’s later involvement in the “Katz Affair,” namely his defense of a controversial masters thesis at Haifa University in 2000, would demonstrate his commitment to ideology over truth-seeking.

On October 10, 2023, three days after Hamas terrorists committed the worst atrocities in Israel’s history, killing over 1200 innocent people and kidnapping hundreds more, Pappé reaffirmed his opposition to Zionism, writing that “this violence is not a new phenomenon,” and called for a “de-zionised, liberated and democratic Palestine from the river to the sea.” [31](#)

### **Teddy Katz and Tantura**

“The battle over Israel’s legitimacy, of which this story of the great ‘massacre of Tantura’ is but a chapter, is part of the overall war being waged in the West by the progressive camp to impugn the moral foundations of the West as a civilization advancing freedom...It is the intentional obfuscation of fact in an attempt to use the device of the ‘approximate truth’—something factually wrong but nonetheless representing a desired truth—to actually undermine truth and rewrite the historical narrative of Israel.”- Meyrav Wurmser [32](#)

One of the most bizarre dramas in modern Israeli academia involves the “approximate truth” of a 1998 master's thesis written by Teddy Katz, a student at Haifa University. Katz claimed that a Nazi-style slaughter had taken place at the village of Tantura on the Mediterranean coast of southern Haifa (during Israel's War of Independence). He went further and asserted the massacre was perpetrated by the Israeli military. A massacre I might add, “until recently the Palestinians were unaware of is now a core element of their national narrative.” [33](#)

According to Katz's master's thesis, in May of 1948, the Haganah (a precursor to the Israel Defense Forces) murdered more than 200 villagers, many after they had surrendered.

It should be noted that no Jewish massacre of the scale claimed by Katz had ever been part of the historical record. The emphasis on discrediting the founding of Israel by New Historian and Post-Zionist academics, is “a revisionist attempt to define Israel's resurrection not as the return of an ancient nation, but as a deliberate European colonial effort to disempower Arabs to establish a European bridgehead in the Middle East.” [34](#)

On January 1, 2000, a story was published in the Israeli newspaper, Maariv, summarizing Katz's “findings” about Tantura. Upon hearing of the sensational claims, veterans of the 33rd Battalion of the Alexandroni Brigade, the unit that had captured, not massacred the village of Tantura, sued Katz for libel, claiming he had lied about atrocities.

The veterans “maintained that the battle for Tantura was a strategic one, an attempt to stop the maritime smuggling of arms and food and to prevent the Haifa-Tel Aviv road from being cut off; and that throughout the fight for survival in a bloody war launched by the Arabs, they had maintained the strictest ethical standards. While the battle for Tantura was difficult – 14 members of the IDF battalion and about 40 Arabs were killed in street fighting.” [35](#)

There was a trial that December in Tel Aviv where, after two days of cross-examination, Katz admitted his thesis was a fabrication, and agreed to sign the following statement:

“After checking and rechecking the evidence it is clear to me now, beyond any doubt, that there is no basis whatsoever for the allegation that the Alexandroni Brigade, or any other fighting unit of the Jewish forces, committed killing of people in Tantura after the village surrendered.” [36](#)

As if that weren't enough, during the cross-examination Katz told the court, “I did not mean to say that there had been a massacre in Tantura...Today I say there was no massacre at Tantura.” [37](#) However, shockingly, he retracted the written statement twelve hours after signing it and requested to restart the trial. When the judge refused, Katz submitted an appeal to a higher court, which was dismissed without a hearing. Haifa university, set up a committee to investigate his thesis. The findings were that Katz had “grossly distorted” [38](#) ...and “gravely and severely” fabricated testimony in fourteen sections of his thesis. [39](#)

The master's thesis was subsequently disqualified. In 2002, Katz submitted a revised version which corrected the “gross distortions.” However, he did not receive passing grades and

therefore was only awarded a non-research degree. [40](#)

His thesis work had been based primarily on the subjective interviews of refugees from Tantura who lived in the West Bank and Israel, as well as military veterans who had been involved in the so-called “massacre.” However, many of the things claimed to have been said by eye-witnesses, in which Katz used to construct his argument, in fact, were never said. After looking into the controversy, Benny Morris felt the “massacre” was a “fraudulent myth.” Notably, Morris found that Katz “had not worked in the Haganah or IDF archives, and his massacre story was based on no documentation, Israeli, British, or Arab.” [41](#)

During the trial Katz was forced by court order to hand over his interview tapes, which led to his imminent discrediting. An example of the gratuitous historical invention uncovered upon examination of Katz’s witness tapes, was an interview he conducted with a man named Abu Fahmi. Katz wrote in his master's thesis that Fahmi had told him the IDF rounded up villagers, lined them up against the walls and executed them. But there was no quote to be found from Fahmi where he claimed anything of the sort. In fact, Fahmi can be heard repeatedly on the recordings asserting that the IDF did not murder the Tantura villagers after they surrendered. [42](#)

In a December 2001 article for the Guardian, New Historian Tom Segev, who argues that there is some merit to Katz’s work, is quoted saying, “The question of whether the Alexandroni Brigade troopers did indeed murder residents of Tantura and the place of the entire episode in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians still remains.” [43](#)

Ilan Pappé, Katz’s mentor, unofficial advisor and ardent defender, wrote an article about Katz for the Journal of Palestine Studies which expanded on Katz’s claims, and denounced Haifa university for not accepting “a solid and convincing piece of work whose essential validity is in no way marred by its shortcomings.” Here is Pappé’s introduction to that article:

“Though the researcher, Teddy Katz, is himself a Zionist, the case sheds light on the extent to which mainstream Zionism is prepared to go in discouraging research that brings to the fore such aspects of the 1948 war as ‘ethnic cleansing’.”

Pappé then wrote letters to American and British historical and Middle Eastern societies, requesting the boycott of Israeli universities because, “Israeli academics cannot find in themselves the courage to remain loyal to the basic rules of academic research and freedom.” This, along with Pappé’s public criticism of his academic colleagues and Haifa University, led the 40,000-member British Association of University Teachers (AUT), to hastily pass a motion in April of 2005 to boycott Haifa university. However, due to international outrage over what was widely viewed as Kangaroo court proceedings, the AUT reconvened and rescinded its resolution one month later. [44](#)

Because of remarks made in Pappé’s letters, articles, and public comments, Haifa’s dean of

humanities, Yossi Ben-Artzi, brought a formal complaint against Pappé, seeking his dismissal for “non-collegial, unethical and immoral conduct, lies, badmouthing, and impudence.” Pappé often used, and still uses, the “Katz Affair” as an opportunity to play the victim, claiming “I was boycotted in my university and there had been attempts to expel me from my job. I am getting threatening calls from people every day.” However, in spite of Pappé’s feigned academic persecution, the university did not pursue Ben-Artzi’s complaint. [45](#)

According to an official statement by the University of Haifa, despite Pappé’s “transgression of all common ethical standards of academic life ...Pappe was never summoned by the disciplinary committee as the committee’s chairperson decided not to pursue the complaint. Moreover, and contrary to Dr. Pappé’s claim, the university made no attempt to expel him.” In 2007, Pappé left Israel of his own volition to take an appointment at the university of Exeter.

But the spell of “approximate truth” is not so easily broken. And the desire for a real “Tantura Massacre,” is far too strong for an abundance of refutational facts to make much difference. After everything that occurred since the public debunking of the master’s thesis, it is shocking that in 2022, documentary filmmaker, Alon Schwarz, received high praise from critics at the Sundance Film Festival and beyond, for a documentary film that rehashes Teddy Katz’s phony “Tantura Massacre” theory.

The film, “Tantura,” was both defended and celebrated by leftwing media. The Intercept claimed that it exposed the lie of Israel’s founding. [46](#) The Los Angeles Times called the film a “compelling” and “blistering and defiant documentary,” and opened their review with a quote from Pappé who, with no context provided regarding his disgraceful scholarly track record, is simply introduced as “a professor at the University of Haifa.” [47](#) The New York Times columnist, Ben Kenigsberg said the film is “not simply a persuasive augmentation of Katz’s argument, but also a disturbing portrait of how very human impulses — passivity, rationalization, social pressures — can shape the writing of history.”

Commenting on the “Katz Affair,” the inspiration for his film, Swartz proclaimed, “they were able to create the bluff, the fake news, because no one listened to Teddy’s tapes. If they had, there would be no doubt in anyone’s mind that something horrible happened at Tantura.” [48](#) It should be mentioned that Katz’s tapes were over 140 hours of interview footage. Virtually all of it is story-telling without substantiation. To imply that the public, academia, or those in the judiciary were somehow under the obligation to listen to all 140 hours makes little sense. During the trial, the onus was for Katz’s recordings to vet against the claims in his thesis, which they did not. In more ways than one, the Katz research “findings” were of things people didn’t say, about other things that didn’t happen.

“Tantura,” to its directors discredit, features an interview with Ilan Pappé, along with new interviews of former Israelis soldiers, audio clips of Katz’s interviews, and also features recently uncovered Israeli military documents that vaguely mention “acts of destruction,” and

refer to a mass grave dug by soldiers (something that would not be uncommon during a war, considering the number of soldiers killed in combat), as well, historical aerial photographs are shown that contain the appearance of a large trench in the area that witnesses claim is the site of a mass grave of murdered Arabs from Tantura village. All of it makes for compelling cinema. However, as Israeli historian Yoav Gelber sees it, “the goal is to say that Israel was born in sin...It’s not history, and I doubt if it’s filmmaking.” [49](#)

### **Benny Morris and the Revisionists, Revised**

“The rumour that I have undergone a brain transplant is (as far as I can remember) unfounded – or at least premature. But my thinking about the current Middle East crisis and its protagonists has in fact radically changed during the past two years.” - Benny Morris, 2002 [50](#)

Even though the New Historian movement is associated with the opening of the Israelis state archives in the late 1980s, according to critics, like Efraim Karsh, “an examination of their works easily reveals a highly eclectic and superficial use of these archives. Thus, for example, while claiming to have overturned the ‘myth of the few [Jews] against the many [Arabs]’ during the 1948 war, Avi Shlaim, at Oxford University, had not even attempted to tap the archives of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and its pre-state precursor, the Hagana, both of which contain millions of declassified documents relating to the issue.” [51](#)

Karsh, a staunch detractor of the New Historians, in the year 2000 authored a book called *Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians."* In an assessment of Benny Morris’s influential book, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Karsh points out that although Morris makes the bold claim that it was the Haganah and the Israel Defense Forces who are to blame for the Palestinian exodus, his book makes no reference to the military archives of either organization. In response to his critics, Morris admitted the following:

"When writing *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* in the mid-1980s, I had no access to the materials in the IDFA (Israel Defense Forces Archive) or Hagana archive and precious little to first-hand military materials deposited elsewhere...None the less, the new materials I have seen over the past few years tend to confirm and reinforce the major lines of description and analysis, and the conclusions, in *The Birth*." [52](#)

Karsh shocked by the implications of Morris admission, responded in an editorial:

“In other words, the foremost new historian (Morris) admits both to having written the single most influential revisionist work without the use of the most important archives and to having a preconceived view of what his archival findings would be...Any self-respecting academic discipline would not tolerate such an inversion of the research process.” [53](#)

According to Israeli political scientist Avi Beker, “New documents may provide some previously unavailable details, but in most cases they cannot change the direction of historical research. Worst of all, a selective use of archives that ignores the historical context, ends up in distortions and misleading accounts. It can only serve those like Ilan Pappé, who does not attempt to disguise his anti-Zionist agenda and defines the ‘new history’ as a revolutionary movement whose goal is to ‘reconsider the validity of the quest for a Jewish nation-state in what used to be geographic Palestine’.”

Benny Morris returned to the fold of mainstream historians in 2000, disenfranchised after the Camp David Summit failed to produce a peace agreement. Since then, his critique of the founding of Israel and its history thereafter has become more balanced and rooted in the facts. Morris finally realized that the Palestinians “want it all, Lod and Acre and Jaffa.” And further, that there is a “deep problem in Islam,” where “life doesn’t have the same value it does in the West,” and that because of a lack of “moral inhibition” and lust for “revenge,” if Islam “obtains chemical or biological or atomic weapons, it will use them.” [54](#)

In Beker’s views, “the sharp reversal of his positions by Benny Morris, regarded by many as the dean of the New Historians, must be viewed as a full exposure of the fictitious structure and distorted facts of what was an orchestrated, anti-historical, anti-Zionist endeavor.” And that, “Morris in his new incarnation provides the best ammunition in the intellectual struggle against the anti-Zionist historians disguised as revisionist historians, who claim to possess ‘new’ documents that show the ‘true’ history.” [55](#)

The about face of Benny Morris was a welcome development in the ongoing drama of Israeli historiography. Although Morris, unapologetic for his past historiographical missteps, claims it was previously unseen documents which made him aware of the unrelenting antisemitic hatred of the Arabs towards the Jews. In response, Beker and other traditional Israeli historians have pointed out that ample evidence of Islamic Jew hatred has been part of the historical record since well before Israel's founding.

### **Good or bad violence?**

An example of an area of interpretive contention between the various historiographical schools is in distinguishing between what constitutes “battle,” and what should be considered “massacre.” It should not be surprising that traditional Israeli historians often classify Jewish actions during a given event (like Tantura) in Israel’s War of Independence as “battle,” when the Palestinian historians and post-Zionists are convinced a “massacre” took place, and other revisionist historians equivocate somewhere between the two. For example, Israeli historian, Avraham Sela, felt that the expulsion of Arabs from the village of Lydda was “an intense battle where the demarcation between civilians, irregular combatants and regular army units hardly existed.” [56](#) The Palestinian historian, Walid Khalidi, called the same event “an orgy of indiscriminate killing,” [57](#) while Benny Morris said it “combine(s) elements of a battle and a



massacre.” [58](#)

### **Purity of Arms**

Another area of controversy is around the Israeli concept of Purity of Arms, a moral policy that the Haganah (later the IDF) incorporated into their doctrine which commits Israeli soldiers to use weapons “only in self-defense and (never) against innocent civilians and defenseless people.” [59](#) While traditional Israeli historians like to emphasize the soldierly honor of the Purity of Arms policy, Palestinian and revisionist historians feel this emphasis is hagiographic. There is no doubt that Jewish forces did not always live up to the moral standard they sought with the Purity of Arms policy, as the fog of war often obscures the best of intentions. However, it says a lot that Israel pursued an ethical and principled commitment to professionalism and human rights in military interventions even before the IDF was founded, and even if that commitment was not always met, the record shows, it most often was. The same cannot be said for the Palestinians, or any Arabs in the Middle East.

### **Palestinian & Arab Historiography - Seeking Justice for Counterfeit Crimes**

“The ‘Palestinian narrative’ insists that a discrete Palestinian Arab people has resided in ‘Palestine’ from time immemorial. It claims this putative past trumps the Jewish peoples’ religious and historical ties to Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel).” [60](#)

Even though a discrete Palestinian people never existed, “deep roots” are asserted in the Palestinian historiography, attempting to place Palestinians as the authentic descendants of the ancient Canaanites. This means that a “Palestinian ethnicity” would have pre-dated the arrival to the Levant of the ancient Israelites. The sons of Joshua were simply the first occupiers. Meaning, the “Palestinians” are indigenous to the region, with the Jews demoted to the low-status of “settler colonists.” When questioned about a Palestinian-Canaanite lineage, Middle East scholar, Professor Raphael of Hebrew University, responded: “absurd. ... The Palestinian don’t really have roots here. They know this very well, so they are trying to invent origins for themselves.” [61](#)

That the Palestinians have no confusion over their historical origins is repeatedly confirmed by the public statements of leaders in their highest offices. An example is Fathi Hamad, an interior minister in the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip in 2012, who made the public statement:

“Praise God, we all have Arab roots and every Palestinian in Gaza and all over Palestine can prove their Arab roots, whether they be in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, or anywhere else. We have blood ties...half of the Palestinians are Egyptian, and the other half are Saudi.” [62](#)

In the preface to Benedict Anderson’s famous work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Azmi Bishara, the Israeli Arab Christian founder of the Balad party, who later fled Israel after

being suspected of spying and assisting the terrorist group Hezbollah, wrote the following:

"Acting out of a need to compete with Zionism, the Palestinian national movement has anchored its origins with those of the Canaanites. In doing so, it achieves its own, unique start-off point in the past that precedes that of the Hebrew tribes, which Zionism claims as its natural descendants."

Walid Shoebat, a former Muslim and Fatah activist who converted to Christianity becoming a passionate advocate for Israel and Christianity, said the following about his Palestinian roots:

"We knew full well that our origin was not Canaanite, despite what they tried to teach us...My grandfather would often remind us that our village, Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem, was empty when his father arrived there with six other families. Today, there are over 30,000 residents in the village." [63](#)

And Professor Rafi Israeli, another Middle Eastern scholar (and expert on Islam) from the Hebrew University, who has authored twenty books on Arabs and Islam, said the following about the "absurdity" of Palestinian indigeneity:

"Instead of saying that they are Arabs who immigrated to Canaan and turned it into a Muslim country, they have rendered themselves indigenous Canaanites." [64](#)

There is no common Arab historiography. Each Arab nation has their own collective memory which does not always agree with other Arab nations. In fact much disagreement exists between them. Khalid al-Hasan of the PLO explained it: "Our Arab history is full of agreements and differences. When we differ and then grow tired of differing, we agree. When we grow tired of agreeing, we differ. . . . This is the Arab nature."

### **The *Nakba***

What is documented as "The War of Independence" in Israeli historiography, is called "*Nakba*," or "catastrophe," in Palestinian historiography. The events of 1948 "are seen through the lens of foundational heroism to the former (Israelis), and through that of the obliteration of an entire world to the latter (Palestinians)." [65](#)

In the below essay excerpt, historian Nadine Picaudou describes the understanding held by Palestinian historians regarding the displacement (exodus) of the Arabs during the *Nakba*:

"The exodus has remained at the core of the issues at stake...Palestinian historians refuse to see it as a mere by-product of war and seek more structural explanations; they tend to consider it as the implementation of an ideological project that was an integral part of Zionism, thanks to the opportunity provided by the war." [66](#)

And in the following excerpt, relevant to the above quote, Picaudou contrasts the historiographical approaches of Palestinian historian Nur Masalha, with Benny Morris, in an

analysis of their disparate views concerning the majority of “transfer” of Arabs (refugees) from their villages in the Jewish state during the *Nakba*:

“By depicting the expulsion of Palestinians as a both logical and inevitable product of the Zionist project, Nur Masalha opposed Benny Morris, who had recognized that a Zionist consensus on the idea of transfer existed as of 1937 and may have opened the door to exodus, but refused to consider any causal link between ideological thought about transfer and action taken in the field during the war. On the one hand, Masalha stood for ideological intentionality, as though history could be conceived simply as the unfolding of an idea, beyond the impact of events and circumstantial dynamics; on the other, Morris privileged circumstantialist explanations and fact-based positivism, regardless of the global intelligibility of events.” [67](#)

### **Rashid Khalidi**

Despite Israel's unique ancestral claim, based on biblical and ancient historical records, and given the extra weight of legitimacy through international law, Palestinian-American scholar, Rashid Khalidi believes that “if a people have established itself as a national movement – as what happened in the case of Israel – this has nothing to do with their ancient claims. That's what every national movement does – it fabricates (concocts) a history going back.” [68](#)

A hypocritical claim, to say the least, coming from an anti-Zionist ideologue, who champions the “ancient claims” that inspire a relentless Islamic holy war, while inventing historical fiction used to justify indiscriminate killing of Jews in the name of Islam, as nothing more than “settler colonial” resistance.

The title of one of Khalidi's most recent works of historical invention summarizes nicely the general Arab sentiment regarding their history with the Jews, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017*.

Khalidi has ties to the Islamic terrorist group the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), that have been well documented. [69](#) After the death of Salah Khalaf, the infamous PLO terrorist, and leader of the “Black September” group responsible for the killing of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, Khalidi's public tribute celebrated the terrorist mastermind for his “diplomatic strategy,” his “eloquent speeches” and his “backroom political skills.” [70](#)

An expose by Middle East historian at Tel Aviv University, Martine Kramer, presents evidence linking Khalidi to the terrorist group. In one case a 1978 New York Times report from Beirut, writes that Rashid Khalidi “works for the P.L.O.” Another is a passage from a 1976 Los Angeles Times report, also from Beirut, describing Khalidi as “a PLO spokesman.” And perhaps most damning, Kramer “unearths a 1979 radio documentary on the PLO featuring Khalidi, in which he is repeatedly identified as an official PLO spokesperson in the

Palestinian news service, Wafa.” [71](#)

### **Anti-Israel Bias in the Media**

“Far from being a disqualifier, targeting and singling out the Jewish state for opprobrium seems to help get one on the pages of The Washington Post or The New York Times or The Associated Press, which once shared office space with Palestinian terrorist group Hamas.” [72](#)

In August of 2022, Canadian columnist Barbara Kay wrote a piece for the Epoch Times on media bias against Israel, in which she introduced her readers to a thoughtful former reporter and editor at the Jerusalem bureau of the Associated Press (AP) - one of the world's two largest news providers [73](#) - who had covered the Israeli-Palestine conflict from 2006-2011. According to Barbara, “Nobody has done more to expose media bias against Israel—with an emphasis on AP...than Canadian-Israeli journalist Matti Friedman.” She began her piece with a modernized old Jewish chestnut:

“In Paris, a man sees a pit bull attacking a little girl. He kills the dog, saving the child’s life. Reporters swarm him. One says, ‘Tell us your name. Your fellow Parisians will rejoice in tomorrow’s headlines: *Hero saves girl from vicious dog.*’ ‘But I’m not from Paris,’ the man replies. ‘No worries,’ says another reporter. ‘All France will smile when they see the headline, *Hero saves girl from vicious dog.*’ ‘But I’m not from France,’ the man says. A third reporter responds. ‘Then all of Europe will ...’ ‘But I’m not from Europe,’ he interrupts. ‘Where are you from?’ asks an Associated Press stringer. ‘Israel,’ he says. The next day’s AP headline reads: ‘Israeli kills little girl’s dog.’” [74](#)

In 2014, Matti Friedman wrote a remarkable analysis for Tablet Magazine and another for the Atlantic, [75](#) on the anti-Israel bias he witnessed, as the usual course of affairs, during his time with the AP in Israel. Friedman feels it is journalists, “the people responsible for explaining the world to the world,” who are most culpable for the false image of Israel presented to the world.

“While global mania about Israeli actions has come to be taken for granted, it is actually the result of decisions made by individual human beings in positions of responsibility—in this case, journalists and editors. The world is not responding to events in this country, but rather to the description of these events by news organizations.” [76](#)

Friedman explains that the staffing pattern of a news agency signals the importance of an issue. Why did the AP employ 40 staffers to cover Israel-Palestine, a proportioning of resources which far exceeded that given to other more consequential conflicts in the global theater? Why is the Israel-Palestine conflict seen as so important in the eyes of the Associated

Press (and the majority of news organizations in the world)?

According to Friedman, 40 staffers was “significantly more news staff than the AP had in China, Russia, or India, or in all of the 50 countries of sub-Saharan Africa combined. It was higher than the total number of news-gathering employees in all the countries where the uprisings of the ‘Arab Spring’ eventually erupted.”

One would think that this massive deployment of journalistic sense-makers would result in voluminous contextual analysis of the politics, key strategies, and internal divisions among both sides, however, one would be sorely mistaken. During Friedmans entire AP stint, not once was the jihadist Hamas Charter mentioned. This publicly available official Hamas document which calls for the destruction of Israel and rejects any possibility of peaceful coexistence with the Jews, provides context that any honest reporter or news agency is duty-bound by the principled standards of journalism to provide. Yet they do not provide it. This is no mere oversight, they deliberately leave out the key context that would enlighten readers. They serve a narrative. When events unfold, they are presented to fit that narrative. To achieve this, context is omitted.

In addition, the preponderance of analytical scrutiny is relentlessly directed at Israel and the IDF. Between Nov. 8 to Dec. 16, 2011, Friedman counted 27 stories that featured the moral failings of Israel (an average of one every two days). These stories would dissect the moral turpitude of Israeli society from a comprehensive array of angles: “Proposed legislation meant to suppress the media, the rising influence of Orthodox Jews, unauthorized settlement outposts, gender segregation, and so forth.” <sup>77</sup> After the seven week experiment, Friedman concluded that the 27 negative stories on Israel exceeded “the total number of significantly critical stories about Palestinian government and society, including the totalitarian Islamists of Hamas, that our bureau (AP) had published in the preceding three years.”

Even though the AP publishes a relentless stream of Israeli “hit pieces,” which flagrantly omit several critical aspects of Palestinian leadership and culture, aspects that dictate much of the tone of the IDF’s operations within the Palestinian territories, it’s journalists and editors focus almost exclusively on the suffering of Palestinian citizens, without providing an examination, beyond insinuating the moral failings of Israel, that could help explain why Palestinian citizens endure such constant tribulation.

Images of Palestinians digging through the rubble of destroyed buildings desperately searching for loved ones, or pulling out dead or injured family members (including children), are gut-wrenching. But the missing context of Hamas’ use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, or of the extraordinary lengths taken by the IDF to avoid casualties of non-combatants, seems intentionally to cast blame on the state of Israel, and the Jewish people. Considering this obvious pattern of institutionally derived anti-Israel narrative construction, what other reason could there be?

This is not to say there are no journalists today or in the past few decades who have wished to provide objective analysis of Palestinian leadership and culture. However, when they attempt to, they are told it's "not the story," as Friedman was when he suggested a piece on Palestinian corruption. On the contrary, Israeli corruption was (and is) the story. Something all AP staff eventually learn.

Barbara Kay's analysis of the one-sided nature of media coverage of Israel, which focuses so heavily on the suffering of innocent Palestinian lives, uses Greek philosopher Aristotle's framework of persuasion: *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. "Ethos is about establishing your authority to speak on a subject, logos is the logical argument and evidence you adduce to make your point, and pathos is a human-interest example of your thesis that is meant to engage the reader's emotions. All three elements will be present in trustworthy reportage." <sup>78</sup> But all three elements are not present in coverage so clearly saturated with *pathos*, and so tragically lacking in the *logos* of evidentiary based rational analysis.

Honest journalists like Matti Friedman and Barbara Kay have pointed out that other conflicts in the Middle East, and around the world, often involve much higher rates of both civilian and military casualties compared to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Indeed between March of 2011 and March of 2023, over 230,000 civilians had been killed in the Syrian civil war - over thirty 30,000 of those killed were children. <sup>79</sup> In 2023, Global Conflict Tracker reported that as a result of the Yemeni civil war "21.6 million people need aid, including 11 million children, and more than 4.5 million are displaced." <sup>80</sup> The UN announced in June of 2022 that over 150,000 people have been killed in Yemen, as well as estimates of more than 227,000 dead as a result of an ongoing famine and lack of healthcare facilities, "Most of those killed by the war's indirect effects were 'young children who are especially vulnerable to under- and malnutrition.'" <sup>81</sup>

During the years that Friedman worked for AP, he was routinely struck by the sheer abundance of reportage on Israel-Palestine, compared to the relative paucity of virtually all other conflicts. For example in 2013, 1600 Pakistani women were murdered (271 after being raped, with 193 burned alive). <sup>82</sup> In 2012, more than 5 million people were killed in a bloody conflict in the Congo. <sup>83</sup> The drug wars in Mexico cost the lives of 60,000 people between 2006 and 2012. <sup>84</sup> There was also China's continued erasure of Tibet, <sup>85</sup> and the Central African Republic was nothing short of a hell on earth, <sup>86</sup> but none of these conflicts garnered even a fraction of the attention given to the Israel-Palestine conflict. A conflict I might add, from 1949 to 2017, has killed a total of 17,403 Israelis and Palestinians. <sup>87</sup> All loss of lives are tragic, but the numbers killed in Israel-Palestine pales in comparison to the plethora of awful scenarios occurring all over the planet.

Considering the hundreds of thousands killed in the American invasion of Iraq, or the civil wars in Syria and Yemen, or the tens of thousands killed by Mexican drug cartels or by criminals throughout American cities, why is it that the world cares so much for the plight of Palestinians? Where is the outrage concerning the multitude of far more serious and bloody

conflicts and atrocities happening elsewhere? What is it, besides the presence of Jews, that makes the Israel-Palestinian conflict worthy of such a disproportionate elevation of global media scrutiny?

Since October 7th, it has become crystal clear. It is the resentment of the Jews, the scapegoating of the Jews for all of the world's moral failings, the casting of the Jews as string-pulling global villains, and the deeply pathological ancient hatred of the Jews. This is what drives the blatant media persecution of the world's only Jewish state.

For years this anti-Zionist narrative has superseded media objectivity in every conflict involving Israel. Oftentimes, as we have seen, manifesting in what is not said or shown in a given issue. Disdain for Jewish people, or the state of Israel, is not always an overt display, like when veteran CNN global affairs broadcaster, Fareed Zakaria, refers sourly to the Israeli prime minister, as "Bibi Netanyahu," and implies the Jewish state has been the obstacle in the peace process. [88](#)

In November of 2023, a popular Israeli Youtube creator named Oren Cahanovitch posted a video called "The Three Questions the BBC never asks the Palestinians." [89](#) He points out that even though the BBC produces an abundance of coverage on the Israeli war against Hamas, the interviewers never ask Palestinians if they support Hamas, or if a Palestinian state should exist beside an Israeli state, or what Palestinians think about the October 7th Hamas attacks.

This is partially because, as Friedman explains, "the West has decided that Palestinians should want a state alongside Israel, so that opinion is attributed to them as fact, though anyone who has spent time with actual Palestinians understands that things are (understandably, in my opinion) more complicated." [90](#)

Cahanovitch tells us "if the BBC were to ask the Palestinians these questions, the whole narrative would collapse." In light of the brazenly embraced trend of consistent omission of these three crucial questions, and its pervasiveness over most, if not all of the BBC's coverage, Cahanovitch concludes that anti-Israel bias is part of an agenda.

He goes on to explain that most Palestinians do support Hamas, do not support the existence of an Israeli state beside a Palestinian state, and further, deny the Hamas attacks of October 7th. It is commonly claimed by Palestinians, including the president of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, that the Israeli military was responsible for the October 7th atrocities against Israeli citizens. Shockingly, Mahmoud Abbas is often portrayed as moderate in Western media. However, before becoming a political leader, Abbas completed his PhD at a Soviet university where his doctoral thesis blamed the Jews for the Holocaust.

Cahanovitch then explains that the question the BBC is always sure to ask Palestinians is "can you please tell us how bad your situation is because of the Israelis?" All of this is to portray the Palestinians as innocent victims and Israel as the perpetrator. If they show that

Palestinians actually support Hamas, and wish to see the annihilation of the Jewish people and the state of Israel, they will not be effective in their aims to present oppressed Palestinians.

Out of the world's news broadcasters, the BBC's anti-Israel bias is perhaps the most overt. Cahanovitz next shows viewers a juxtaposition of headlines from two stories published on the same day. The first, "Palestinians killed as Israeli settlers attack town," is consistent with the anti-Israel BBC narrative. Notice how Israelis are referred to as "settlers" and accused of "killing." The second headline reads, "Four Israelis shot dead near West Bank settlement," makes no mention of who shot the Israelis dead. And though it may be a subtle difference, "being killed," is more accusatory and implies serious injustice, while "shot dead" by unnamed perpetrators leaves more questions than answers. Were the shooters criminals or terrorists? Were the Israelis "shot dead" in the act of an attempted carjacking or playing checkers in the park? These omissions say more than what is written.

Other areas where anti-Israel bias manifests is in the rush to report on events that reflect badly on Israel, even if the information comes from unreliable sources, like Hamas. An example of this occurred on October 17, 2023, when Hamas claimed that an Israeli missile strike hit the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital complex in Gaza City, and was reported by world media to have killed 500 people. It turned out that 500 people did not die, and the hospital was not hit by an Israeli missile. The hospital's parking lot had been hit by a misfired terrorist rocket intended for Israel.

"Hundreds killed in Israeli strike on Gaza hospital — Palestinian officials," was the BBC headline, while the British Financial Times went with: "Gaza Health Ministry says hundreds killed in Israeli air strike on hospital." How many people reading these headlines wondered where the line was to be drawn between Hamas, and the "Palestinian officials" or "Gazan Health Ministry"? - seeing as how Hamas has been the elected government in Gaza for almost two decades. More often than not, this important context is absent.

While the BBC has no problem labelling the 9-11 attackers, London suicide bombers in 2005, or the 2017 Manchester arena bombers, as "terrorists," they routinely refer to Hamas as "militants."<sup>21</sup> According to these types of not-so-subtle linguistic conventions which by design omit context, Jews can only be made dead by militants, while non-Jews can be killed by terrorists.

The implications of all of this are far reaching and severe. As Friedman put it, "because a gap has opened here (Israel) between the way things are and the way they are described, opinions are wrong and policies are wrong, and observers are regularly blindsided by events." Without a fair examination of the facts and evidence on the ground, the truth will continue to be obscured. The Jews will continue to be demonized despite their best efforts to deal morally with an existential threat, and the media consuming public will continue to be propagandized with an unending deluge of manipulative suggestion culminating and pointing decisively always in the direction of gross Jewish moral failing.



## *Farha*

The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA) filed a report on media coverage concerning the 2022 Netflix film *Farha*, a work of dramatic fiction that takes place during the Palestinian *Nakba*. CAMERA noted that “the film makes an equivalency between IDF soldiers and Nazis.” <sup>92</sup> Rife with ahistoricism and antisemitic tropes, one film reviewer wrote, “The film presents the IDF soldiers as bloodthirsty monsters who amuse themselves with the death of helpless innocents.” <sup>93</sup>

In September of 2022 at a Palestinian film festival in Toronto, *Farha*'s Jordanian director of Palestinian descent, Darin Sallam, told audience members that the film was fictional:

“Why in fiction format, because this is what I prefer to make as a director, as a film director .... fiction usually is more emotional, and I wanted to ... deliver emotion and to communicate in an emotional way with people.”

However, *Time* published a story about the film on December 7th, claiming it was “Set in an unnamed Palestinian village, *Farha* tells the true story of a 14-year-old girl during the creation of Israel in 1948.” Interviewed in the article, Sallam tells the reporter that in researching for the film, “I read many books like Ilan Pappé’s work on the ethnic cleansing of Palestine that I really recommend everyone to read.”

In a lengthy review of the film, the Washington Post quotes Columbia University professor, Hamid Dabashi who thinks *Farha* is making the “Palestinian narrative” part of “the American mainstream.” Dabashi’s previous public comments have included calling Israel a “key actor” in “every dirty, treacherous, ugly and pernicious act in the world,” <sup>94</sup> and that Israeli Jews have a “vulgarity of character that is bone-deep and structural to the skeletal vertebrae of (their) culture.” <sup>95</sup>

The last comment inspired Sarah Stern of the Endowment for Middle East Truth (EMET) to submit Dabashi’s article to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in her testimony about antisemitism on campus. <sup>96</sup> Ilan Pappé is cited extensively throughout the Washington Post piece, as is former PLO spokesman, “historian” Rashid Khalidi.

However, the anti-Israel bias of opinion writers, in the media, on university campuses, and brought to life in films on Netflix and beyond, is not a new problem. Barbara Kay spoke about the “tediously reflexive hostility to America and Israel” in a speech she gave concerning “Anti-Israel Bias on Global Campuses.” She writes:

“For anything approaching the virulence of anti-Israel bias on campus today, you have to look back to the universities in Germany of the thirties. Despite their long tradition of rigorous scholarship and intellectual vitality, academics in the arts and in science faculties lent themselves to the manufacture of propaganda under the

guise of scholarship. The words ‘academic freedom’ became a shibboleth for the falsification and distortion of knowledge in the service of a wicked ideology.”

Modern readers may be surprised to know that Barbara gave the above speech in 2009, not during the aftermath of the Hamas terror attacks against Israeli civilians on October 7, 2023, when a wave global campus antisemitism reached an unimaginable pitch and spilled out into the streets in the form of mass “Free Palestine” protests where activists called to “liberate the occupied in Gaza” from the “oppression of the evil Zionist entity” the “illegitimate settler colonial state of Israel,” and of course always being clear to delineate the area of concern, “from the river to the sea.”

The phenomenon of antisemitism, which manifests in anti-Israel bias, is a very real and ancient pathology. For those who are not Jewish, and do not hate Jews, it can be hard to accept the validity and existence of such an existential evil and cultural cancer, still present in modern times. The Free Palestine protests of 2023 in support of Hamas, and the sharp rise in incidents of antisemitism, have opened the eyes of many formerly passive observers. It is becoming clearer by the day that the hatred of Jews and Israel is not contained to the Middle East or to Western University Campuses. Where this goes next is anyone's guess.

The next essay is coming soon. Stay tuned for **The Modern History of Israel: Prior to the Birth of Zionism, to the End of the Great War.**

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