

# Anti-Semitism Is Not the Issue; Palestine Is

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*Anti-Semitism should not be used as an issue in discussions and debates over the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Ever since the establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine and all throughout the unfolding of Zionist policy, Jews like Chaim Weizmann have expressed the idea that Zionist crimes in Palestine are to be deplored, not so much because of their nature as acts of butchery against a largely unarmed Palestinian Arab population, 80% of whom were agrarian, but because of the negative impact such crimes, once broadcast, would have on the well-being of Jews worldwide. In his autobiography Trial and Error, he writes:*

I have said that the terrorist groups in Palestine represented a grave danger to the whole future of the Jewish state. Actually their behavior has been next door to anarchy. The analogy which is usually drawn between these groups and what happened in Ireland or South Africa presents only a half truth. It leaves out of account that one fundamental fact with which the Jews have to reckon primarily; namely that they have many hostages all over the world. And although Palestine is the primary consideration, it must not, it has no right to, endanger the situation of Jews outside of Palestine. Apart from which it must be remembered that after all the building of Palestine will depend to a large extent on the good will of the Jews outside.

As is well known by now, the building of Palestine in the form of Israel did, in fact, depend, and continues to depend in large part, on the good will of the Jews “outside,” many as Norman H. Finkelstein writes in American Jewish History, deriving renewed pride in their religion and their connections to Israel with each Israeli military victory.

The irony/tragedy is that Israeli governments throughout history, including now with the Trump/[Bannon](#) merger, work with anti-Semites to promote Jewish immigration to Israel. Zionist [collaboration](#) with Nazis is also documented. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism should not be taking center stage either in arguments against Palestinians or in pro-Palestine arguments.

Anti-Semitism is a fake issue when it is used by Israel in its PR arsenal against Palestinian Arabs. Tony Greenstein, for example, has [published](#) statistics on his blog with the headline: “More Fake News – Zionist Claims that Anti-Semitism has increased by 30% in one year: Despite the headlines – Anti-Semitism in Britain is DECLINING not increasing; a decline in anti-Semitism doesn’t serve Zionist interests”. This is his attempt to counter Israel’s fierce campaigns in the UK and elsewhere to conflate anti-Semitism with criticism of anti-Zionist policy.

And we are still seeing approaches that use the same argument against Israel's oppression as that used by Weizmann. In Haaretz, Tony Klug has an opinion [piece](#) titled: If Israel's Occupation Doesn't End, anti-Semitism Worldwide Will Rise to Sinister Heights. By "occupation", he means, not the totality of the Zionist project in Palestine, but the following, as expressed in the sub-heading: "50 years of occupation have reawakened latent prejudices and old stereotypes not only against Jews, but also against Arabs and Muslims. But many still deny Israel's increasingly oppressive control is a crucial factor".

Tony Klug, through Haaretz and Mondoweiss, is addressing other Jews. He blames Israel, correctly in my view, not only for a potential rise in anti-Semitism worldwide, but also for the rising Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism which [Jewish organizations](#) foster in Israel's name. Arab and Muslim violence, he implies, is connected to denial of the cause of the violence. In a way, he wants to scare Jews into awareness and action against the occupation of 50 years, though not necessarily against the occupation of 70 years.

Appealing to people's rational self-interest in making an argument is effective. But there is a problem for Palestinians in this approach, because not appealing to someone's altruism obfuscates people's sense of justice and fairness. And it is ultimately the interest of Palestinians rather than Jews that is at stake here.

But the heart of Klug's argument is this: he is worried that, "the moral appeal of Israel's case will consequently [as a result of the denial of the oppression of the occupation] suffer and this will further erode her level of international support, although probably not among organized opinion within the Jewish diaspora."

Contrary to what Klug says above, this is an argument that might work only with "organized opinion [by which I understand organized by Zionists] within the Jewish diaspora". Such opinion is organized to safeguard the existence of the Jewish state at any cost – even the cost of a smaller Israel. In his autobiography commenting on Great Britain's [White Paper](#) regarding the partitioning of Palestine, Weizmann remarks

"that God promised Palestine to the children of Israel, but I do not know what boundaries He set."

In other words, boundaries may be vague, but the "moral" claim (here expressed in religious terms) to Palestine is unquestionable.

Klug speaks for Palestinians as "yearning for independence" without truly understanding himself what Palestinian fundamental human rights are and how these rights are trampled, not only by the occupation, but also by the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.

In making an appeal to Jews or anybody, Palestinians must certainly not frame their appeal the way Klug, a consultant to the Palestine Strategy Group and the Israel Strategic Forum, does. Rather, they must frame their appeal on the [litmus test](#) of principles of justice, human rights and equality – i.e., principles that the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions ([BDS](#)) movement embodies.

Yes, what we need in Jewish communities and public opinion generally are "transformations", but not ones, as Nada Elis [says](#), based on exclusivity.

I am grateful both for the activism of [Jewish Voice for Peace] JVP, and for [Jewish liberation theologian Marc] Ellis' prodding of his religious community to acknowledge Israel's violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people beginning in 1948. Yes, there is an urgent need for accountability and transformation. But maintaining claims to exclusivity is a hindrance, not a contribution to a solution that hinges on co-resistance to racism. As Israel openly embraces Jewish supremacy and the ongoing ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, a hushed denunciation of "the occupation" falls short of the necessary "transformation," and cannot be considered progressive. And as we seek to co-exist, after successfully co-resisting apartheid and genocide, we cannot attribute a deeply-engrained commitment to justice to one community over another.

Klug writes about "denial" when he himself is in denial of the [Nakba](#) of 1948, if not the 1967 occupation. Palestinians badly need Jews to advocate for them. But I envision such activism along the lines that K Sheshu Babu does in a comment on my [article](#) Jews Worldwide Must Support the Palestinian Cause:

"Jews round the world must unite to pressurise Israeli government to liberate Palestinians and free their lands. But more than that, Jews in Israel must rebel against their own government and fight for justice to Palestinians. They must organise mass movements in solidarity with Palestinians."

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