

“Ethical Decolonization” and the Restoration of all Palestinian Rights and Reparations

Tell Ahed She Can Make Them Go Away, by Magic, and to Sing

By [Rima Najjar](#)

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I wish Caryl Churchill would write a follow up to her play [Seven Jewish Children](#) and call it [Seven Palestinian Children](#).

Churchill’s play, first produced in February of 2009, was “for Gaza”, and was predictably received along political lines, either as a “heartfelt lamentation” on one side and “wantonly inflammatory” on the other—inflammatory in the same way as the mere broadcasting of Palestinian ongoing oppression at the hands of the Jewish state on Facebook [is regarded](#) as “incitement”.

The play depicts seven small scenes, each set in a significant episode of Jewish history, including the 1947 takeover of Palestine by Jews and the ongoing obscenity of the Palestinian Nakba. No children’s voices are heard in the play—we only hear adult voices struggling with how to explain each historical occurrence to an innocent, vulnerable Jewish child. It begins with the horror of the Holocaust—“Tell her she can make them go away if she keeps still /By magic/But not to sing”—and ends with the violence perpetrated by the Jewish state on innocent Palestinians.

“Tell her, tell her about the army, tell her to be proud of the army. Tell her about the family of dead girls, tell her their names why not, tell her the whole world knows why shouldn’t she know? tell her there’s dead babies, did she see babies? tell her she’s got nothing to be ashamed of. Tell her they did it to themselves. Tell her they want their children killed to make people sorry for them, tell her I’m not sorry for them, tell her not to be sorry for them, tell her we’re the ones to be sorry for, tell her they can’t talk suffering to us.”

Although the Jewish children addressed in the play are never seen on the stage, the audience has a clear picture of their innocence and vulnerability, first as victims themselves, and then as unknowing participants in the Palestinian tragedy, being fed “narratives” meant [to shape](#) their world view about the non-Jewish world.

“.. tell her I wouldn’t care if we wiped them out, the world would hate us is the only thing, tell her I don’t care if the world hates us, tell her we’re better haters, tell her we’re chosen people, tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it’s not her.”

This “us” or “them” narrative is a standard Israeli narrative that no one buys into any more. It’s all too clear now that Palestinians, who lived a predominantly agrarian life style in the 1940s, were helpless, politically and materially, in pushing back the tide of immigrant colonizing Jews descending on Palestine, helpless in the face of imperial deceptions, just as they are helpless today in the face of Israel’s military might and the deceptions of the superpower broker. Rather, the reality is, “it’s us and us.”

The choice is not one between Jews and Palestinians, but one between a Jewish state vs. [international law, justice and human](#) rights for Palestinians and Jews. However, what must come first, as Omar Barghouti has so well expressed it in what he calls “ethical decolonization”, is the restoration of all Palestinian human rights and reparations made to them.

So what would Caryl Churchill have adults tell Palestinian children had she written the play in that way? It’s a question I asked my students at The Arab American University in Jenin (AAUJ) several years ago when they were preparing to put on the play on campus. The consensus was, “Tell them they must resist dispossession and subjugation, as their fathers and grandfathers have done.”

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Rima Najjar is a Palestinian whose father’s side of the family comes from the forcibly depopulated village of Lifta on the western outskirts of Jerusalem. She is an activist, researcher and retired professor of English literature, Al-Quds University, occupied West Bank.

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