

Refugees, Intersectionalists, and Jews

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- To begin with, there actually *are* no Palestinian people, as used in the current sense of the term. The Oslo Accords accurately refer to Arabs, which is what they are — Arabs who left Israel in the war of 1947-8 in order not to be involved in a conflict in which other Arabs fought with Jews and Christians and who currently make up more than a million of the Arabs now living in Israel as citizens with equal rights.

Refugees are back in the news. This summer, the number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean from North Africa is likely to rise significantly. According to the *Daily Telegraph*:

“Europe could face a new wave of migrant arrivals this summer, a leaked German government report has warned. Up to 6.6m people are waiting in countries around the Mediterranean to cross into Europe, according to details of the classified report leaked to Bild newspaper.”

With the closing of the route through the Balkans and entry via Greece, most refugees, economic migrants and asylum seekers are crossing the Mediterranean into Spain or Italy, putting those countries under enormous strain. Since 2016, Austria has strengthened border police to prevent thousands more entering from Italy, and increased the number of troops and armored vehicles on the border in 2017.

On World Refugee Day 2016, the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees announced that there are now more displaced persons than there were after World War Two: "The total at the end of 2015 reached 65.3 million - or one out of every 113 people on Earth... The number represents a 5.8 million increase on the year before." During the past three years, Gatestone Fellow Soeren Kern has published a strong series of well-researched articles examining the impact of the refugee crisis on Europe overall and on individual countries such as Germany and Sweden. The rise in criminality in general, rape, Islamic radicalization, and even terror attacks as a result of a barely controlled influx of migrants from mainly Muslim countries has created alarm in country after country.



Migrants arrive at a beach on the Greek island of Kos after crossing part of the Aegean sea from Turkey in a rubber dinghy, on August 15, 2015. (Photo by Milos Bicanski/Getty Images)

This alarm has led to serious divisions. It has divided people politically, with the left and centrists welcoming increasing numbers and the right — in particular the far-right in Europe — calling for more rigid controls and even the expulsion of many incomers. Even this division conceals two important issues.

First, it is easy to forget that many countries are legally bound to accept refugees from wherever they originate. These are the 142 countries who are signatories to

the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol extending it. They include European countries into which refugees have been coming, such as Germany, Spain, Italy, France and the UK. (The United States is signatory only to the 1967 Protocol.) The Convention guarantees that refugees shall not be sent back into harm's way, and that, according to the UNHCR, "refugees deserve, as a minimum, the same standards of treatment enjoyed by other foreign nationals in a given country and, in many cases, the same treatment as nationals". Among the few non-signatories are the Gulf states of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

Second, there is a moral dimension that transcends simple party politics. Many religious people, such as Christians, may give greater priority to compassion for their fellow man than national concerns about the ability to cope with overwhelming numbers of new arrivals or ways of integrating them into their own societies. Many Jewish people, conscious of the world's failure to take in hundreds of thousands of Jews in the years leading up to, and even during, the Holocaust, also feel a moral obligation to show a level of concern for today's refugees far above what was shown to their grandparents. This view also extended to the way a barely-established state, Israel, took in around a million Jews expelled from Arab states after 1948.

Generosity and moral actions, however, may unintentionally make matters worse. In a recent Gatestone article on migrants, Douglas Murray quotes a statement by Bill Gates, a philanthropist who has started to rethink the results of such generosity:

"On the one hand you want to demonstrate generosity and take in refugees. But the more generous you are, the more word gets around about this — which in turn motivates more people to leave Africa. Germany cannot possibly take in the huge number of people who are wanting to make their way to Europe."

Balancing legal requirements, stemming from the 1951 Convention, with the needs of national security, finance, and social cohesion, still proves a major dilemma for signatory states. Non-signatories such as the Gulf States, vastly wealthier than European countries such as Greece or Italy, have no such a dilemma, even though many Syrian and North African refugees speak much the same language, have the same religion, and practice similar customs in daily life.

That is an anomaly that has yet to be addressed seriously by the United Nations, UNHCR, and many national parliaments.

There are likely to be further waves of refugees in the next few years, then more from Syria now that Islamic State is all but finished in Raqqa. The civil war in Syria, with the ISIS threat to a large extent removed, is certain to intensify; then more will flee Iraq with the recapture of a battered Mosul and further clashes between Sunni and Shi'i militias; then more from Libya, where ISIS-affiliated groups clash with a multitude of other Islamist fighters; then more from other failed and failing states in North Africa, the Middle East, the rest of Africa and Afghanistan, where the Taliban are again resurgent — more, in fact, from everywhere as social structures break down further, now that so many qualified people such as doctors, teachers, scientists have vanished to Europe. According to a leaked German government report, up to 6.6 million migrants — both refugees and migrants seeking a better life — are currently waiting to cross to Europe from Africa.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), since its establishment in 1950, has resettled some 50 million refugees — an extraordinary achievement by any standards. Today it faces an even higher figure, all at one time. The collapse around the world of so many countries that never became democracies — countries lacking in abundant natural resources and whose dictators, taking international aid for their own pockets, sucked them dry — has led to an exodus that threatens to displace some of the world's leading democracies. Many are now under a barely manageable strain and growing impoverishment, actually enabled by our democratic values, our concern for international conventions, our compassion and, at times, our naïvete. Worst of all, perhaps, our decline will leave future refugees without sanctuaries in which they may thrive and give their children the opportunities for which they came.

Something, however, is missing. The left, who so often lead the campaigns to welcome to our shores an almost unfettered number of newcomers, alongside a great many decent and humanitarian people from churches or secular organizations, have in recent years justified their actions through the concept of intersectionality.

In itself, intersectionality could a useful way of looking at the world by seeing links between people who suffer different forms of oppression, such as racism,

misogyny, homophobia and so on. It argues, for example, that a poor black woman has more issues to solve than, say, a middle-class white woman, even though both may be victims of male oppression. In theory, it is a useful tool; in practice, not so much.

How does intersectionality apply to refugees? Well, in general the “Left” have made the open reception of refugees a major cause, using intersectionality to justify this while condemning any other approach as fascist.

Articles often drip with standard far-left language: “emancipate ourselves from all forms of oppression”, “if we want to fight capitalism with all its forms of oppression”, and “white supremacist behavior harms our political self-organization” and other displays of racism framed in victimhood.[1]

Referring to Linda Sarsour, a prominent Palestinian-American “anti-Zionist,” Benjamin Gladstone argues in *Tablet Magazine* that

“no matter what the Sarsours of the world say, Jewish issues do belong in the intersectional justice movement. ... Despite its enormous value and importance, however, the idea of intersectionality can also be manipulated to exclude Jewish issues from pro-justice movements.”

Why “Jewish issues”? And what does this have to do with refugees? The answer is that the “Left”, including the anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist “Left”, have turned intersectionality into two seemingly unlinked matters: as an argument to call for unlimited entry for refugees and other migrants; and as a weapon to advance their hostility for Israel in demonstrations, in conferences, and in their written work.

The clearest expression of this refusal to include Jewish concerns in any intersectional discussion is the way “Left-wing” and anti-racist demonstrators, and speakers, starting in Ferguson in 2014, have consciously linked the Black Lives Matter movement to the Palestinian cause, blaming the “oppression” of the Palestinians on Jews, Zionists, and Israel, and then appealing to intersectionality as the basis for that link. This pairing of two causes rapidly became a core part of the Black Lives Matter movement. Already by 2015, in a deeply anti-Semitic and anti-Israel document, the 2015 Black Solidarity Statement with Palestine, one reads:

“Our support extends to those living under occupation and siege, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and the 7 million Palestinian refugees exiled in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. The refugees’ right to return to their homeland in present-day Israel is the most important aspect of justice for Palestinians.”

There is, of course, no mention of Palestinian repression of free speech, of corrupt Palestinian governance, of Palestinian terrorism, or other abuses that follow in the wake of rotten governance. This overdone concern for generations of the descendants of Palestinian refugees — people forced to live in camps, not by Israel but by the Arab states referred to — is then artificially made to meld with the intersectional concern for refugees who are fleeing into Europe from wars in Muslim countries.

It is precisely here that the pretence of intersectionality on the left is most fully exposed. It is not just that supporters of intersectionality refuse to accept Jews as recipients of their outpourings of love and generosity, or that they focus in a racist and fascist manner on the supposed evils of the only Jewish state. They show themselves to be hypocrites in two ways.

To begin with, there actually *are* no Palestinian people, as used in the current sense of the term. The Oslo Accords accurately refer to Arabs, which is what they are — Arabs who left Israel in the war of 1947-8 in order not to be involved in a conflict in which other Arabs fought with Jews and Christians and who currently make up more than a million of the Arabs now living in Israel as citizens with equal rights. These Arabs who abandoned Israel while it was fighting for its life and who afterwards wanted to return. Israel refused on the grounds that these countrymen had not been loyal. It is those displaced persons, largely in Jordan and Lebanon, who then found themselves on the wrong end of a war that their brother Arabs had started and, to everyone’s astonishment, had lost. It is these Arabs (and their descendants), who fled Israel during the War of 1947-8, and who are therefore considered by Israel a fifth-column, who are what we now call the Palestinians.

Jews have remained in place in the area continuously for more than three thousand years — with Arabs, Christians, Turks, Helenes, Philistines, and whoever else came along — even when, at times, many were forced out.

One might have assumed that this history of abuse of the Jews would excite

intersectionalists into reaching out to Jewish people everywhere and working with them to quell anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish terrorism. Instead, they have chosen to align with a people whose leaders have refused multiple times to accept a Palestinian state each time it was offered to them.

Instead, they apparently prefer to hate Jews and the Jewish state of Israel.

This is important. Jewish refugees from the Russian pogroms and Russia in World War I, long before the Holocaust, and from Arab and Muslim states were among the earliest to head for Palestine, then Israel, in order to build a new Jewish homeland, where Jews would be guaranteed a refuge from violence and hatred. Do not those refugees deserve the same intersectional support as those flowing into Europe today? Do not the many thousands of black Jews who went from Ethiopia and Sudan to Israel deserve backing from Black Lives Matter? Do not the thousands of Indian Jews now in Israel deserve friendship from people of color?

Instead, left-wing intersectionalists work towards an increasingly unachievable Palestinian “right of return”. In June 2017, the radical publishing house Verso, hosted an event at which Omar Barghouti, co-founder of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, spoke. In 2009, Barghouti accurately said:

“I do not buy into the two-state solution. It is not just pragmatically impossible, it was never a moral solution. The first issue would be the right of return, but if the refugees were to return you cannot have a two-state solution like one Palestinian commentator remarked, you will have a Palestinian state next to a Palestinian state rather than a Palestinian state next to Israel.”

Speaking after Barghouti was Nyle Fort, a prominent organizer of the Black Lives Matter in Ferguson. Fort’s own anti-Semitism, under the US State Department and internationally-recognized IHRA definitions, and his support for Palestinian terrorists place Barghouti’s earlier remarks in a clear context.

There is no room here for a discussion of the spurious nature of “Palestinian Refugees” or the fact that they are kept in refugee camps — not by Israel but by Arab states. But such a discussion within groups who use intersectionality as a tool for hatred against Jews and Israelis is long overdue.

If intersectionality means anything as a system for bringing diverse peoples together, for helping refugees settle, for expressing solidarity with people who have suffered, it is meaningless if certain people are excluded. The “mistake” the Israelis made seems to have been that, although driven out as refugees, they exercised their right to self-determination, returned to their homeland, and turned it into one of the most successful countries in the world. The Palestinians, who had an equal opportunity to attain the same success, remain in poverty and disarray, with terrorism for 80 years as their only notable achievement. If they had agreed to work with the Jews instead of fighting them, who knows where they might be today? That would have been positive intersectionality, bringing two suffering people together for the common good. But to some, being “politically correct” evidently matters more than making the world a better place. The Jews preach *tikkun olam*, “repairing the world”. What are radical intersectionalists doing to achieve that?

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[1] Nadiye Ünsal, an activist at the Refugee Protestcamp at Oranienplatz in Berlin, writing on “Challenging ‘Refugees’ and ‘Supporters’: Intersectional Power Structures in the Refugee Movement in Berlin”

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