

The Long View

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From the Carnage Rises Hope?

Palestine Liberating the World

Jennifer Loewenstein

Gaza Delenda Est: The Palestine Protests, Antisemitism, and the American Jewish Establishment

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Gaza and the Politics of Genocide Recognition

Imam Dawud Walid

The Obligation of Social Justice Activism

Arzu Merali

Telling Tales of the 'British' Nation: The Michaela School Moment and the End of Minority Rights

In the Name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

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The industrial scale slaughter in Gaza has unmasked many things: the hollow claims of a western civilisation that preaches humanism but practices genocide, the continuation of a neo-imperial world order on the Global South seven decades after "Independence", and the tendency to intensified violence that is characteristic of declining empires.

But these last few months have also reminded us of the indomitable spirit of colonised peoples to resist against seemingly insurmountable odds and the willingness of ordinary people around the world to risk reputation, limbs, livelihoods and even lives to rally behind the oppressed. The current phase of the struggle against Zionist settler colonialism has been marked by a remarkable and unprecedented level of civil society activism. It has seen dockers refusing to load ships carrying weapons, activists trashing weapons factories, protestors hounding politicians and disrupting their meetings, students demanding their universities divest from Israel and ever-expanding boycotts against Israel and its supporters.

The pressure being applied by the resistance is impressively unique in its scope and strategic effectiveness. Another feature has been its diversity and inclusiveness, spanning every conceivable political, religious and racial stripe. One of the most potent challenges to Israel's campaign of mass extermination has come from within the Jewish community, from individuals who have had enough of their faith being hijacked in the pursuit of a political project predicated on the replacement and subjugation of a native people by ethno-supremacist invaders in the service of equally racist and violent imperial powers. The presence of dissenting anti-Zionist Jews are a welcome antidote to the hasbara tactic of conflating anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism to smear anyone who dares to speak out.

It is in the vein that the author of our first essay tackles the internal dilemma posed by being Jewish and the associated cultural expectation of supporting the Zionist entity. **Jennifer Loewenstein** cannot reconcile her Judaic identity with allegiance to a state or ideology that demands this level of suffering simply in order to exist. She protests against the domination of US Jewry by Zionist federations that attempt to silence internal opposition with the same iron fist that puts down external critics. And she warns against the obvious dangers of conflating Judaism with Zionism, an ideology in whose name the most bestial acts are routinely carried out.

Searching for a historical precedent for the sheer magnitude of the carnage in Gaza, Loewenstein finds a precedent with the Roman destruction of Carthage in 146 BC during the Third Punic War where in an act of sheer vengeance and after a three-year siege, Roman warriors burned, looted, and razed the ancient city of Carthage to the ground. Some historians like Ben Kiernan have cited this as early support for genocide.

While the term genocide dominates popular and civil society discourse around Gaza it remains noticeably absent from the political discourse of western powers. Our second essay by **Afroze Fatima Zaidi** locates this omission in an international order that exists in the first instance to protect the gains and prevailing system of white supremacy. Colonial genocide is a formative component of European identity, hence Europe's willingness to act as an accomplice. Moreover, "white supremacist colonial ideology goes beyond racism as discrimination - it holds the coloniser as superior and therefore more entitled to space, land, freedom, cultural identity and heritage, and the right to live. Colonising

forces have therefore joined hands to endorse the settler-colonial Zionist project, offering Israel impunity as well as political, material, and ideological support."

Zaidi sees the United Nations as more of a hindrance than a help with the legal rules around prosecuting a genocide both ambiguous and selectively applied. This renders the term almost meaningless in international law. Where it does hold weight, however, is in the court of public opinion, where it is instinctively recognised as a grave injustice against a specific group of people that should be opposed and prevented. Like Loewenstein, she sees hope in the snowballing global movement that is challenging governments everywhere and demanding they intervene to end the genocide.

Our third piece, an extract from the upcoming second edition of **Imam Dawud Walid's** book "Towards Sacred Activism", takes up this theme of political activism. Addressed to Muslims, it sets out an Islamic underpinning for social and political activism. In an indirect way it is also a rebuke to the political quietists who shun engagement for reasons of dogma, pusillanimity or indifference. The struggle for justice in Palestine is a religious duty for every Muslim. It is a religious obligation just like prayer and fasting. One cannot claim to be following Allah's will if one abandons the battlefield and ignores the requirement to "speak the truth in the face of a tyrant" and "to enjoin good and forbid evil". Activism is a religious imperative rooted in divine injunctions, not a lifestyle choice or activity that can be switched on when time or mood allows. Due to be published later this year, the book is essential reading for all Muslims involved in social/political activism.

Our final essay in this issue by **Arzu Merali** leaves Gaza for the political battlefield that is education in England to examine how it is being used to advance new notions of normative Britishness. For several decades schools have been the object of an ideology driven tussle for control between local authorities and central government. At first, Westminster was concerned with breaking the left's stranglehold on policy through its influence over local councils. In recent years that has given way to an attack on "wokery" or the purported influence that minorities, particularly Muslims, exert on school settings. Merali unpacks the ideological agenda driving the targeting of Muslims in manufactured moral panics epitomised by the Trojan Horse Affair and the more recent Michaela School affair.

Buffeted by the winds of globalisation and the loss of power and prestige on the international stage, much of the English political class has made a reflexive dash for the sanctuary of a nostalgic nativism that seeks to recreate an idealised, monochrome past in which Muslims are either airbrushed out or seen and not heard or scapegoated to erode civil liberties or justify military intervention in Muslim lands. At the hands of unreconstructed Islamophobes like Michael Gove and Suella Braverman, education is also an anvil on which a recalcitrant religious community can be hammered to be made to fit inside a top down, secularised, one size fits all notion of citizenship.

Whilst the powers that be in the 'West' are set on controlling their citizenry, the grass roots have different ideas. From lone students challenging prayer bans, to student encampments at university demanding divestment from genocide, injustice is no longer silently met. Let's make the conversation on these pages part of that movement for justice.

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Gaza Delenda Est: The Palestine Protests, Antisemitism, and the American Jewish Establishment

Jennifer Loewenstein discusses her experiences of life as a US based anti-Zionist Jewish activist in the context of the current genocide in Gaza. While things are dire, not least the state of civil society, she looks for and finds glimmers of hope in the mobilisations world-wide.

As Israel's war on Gaza continues day after day, I have begun to wonder if it will ever end. Like many activists, I follow the news closely, even obsessively. I cannot escape it; I *will* not escape it. I know my taxes are paying for the death and destruction being visited upon an entire people, for the grotesque weaponry of mass murder, the arms of a psychotic military. I won't turn on American news channels, the ones telling me that this is a justifiable price for the terrible [events of October 7th](#); the ones insisting that 2.4 million people deserve to suffer unspeakable horror until [130 hostages](#) are released. I will not believe the lies, the equivocation, the craven 'objections' of diplomats and politicians claiming they want a lower death toll. I will not be complicit in this human travesty. I will not go about my daily life as if it is acceptable to ignore a catastrophe my country is underwriting.

Instead, I put on [Al Jazeera English](#) or [Democracy Now!](#) read the alternative press, read reports from international aid and human rights organizations, read what the pundits would rather ignore. I demonstrate, speak, protest, boycott, write, and talk about what's happening to everyone I can. A solidarity movement is growing, and this alone gives me hope, but it is still a tiny flame in an abyss of darkness.

Hudia, a friend in Rafah, writes to me regularly about the situation in her hometown:

People sleep in tents and in the streets or in the shadows of shuttered businesses. The sounds of drones, artillery, air and sea bombardments, and tank shells echo across the Gaza Strip from Rafah to Beit Hanoun. It's a constant rush in your ears. There is no escape. No sermon about steadfastness from leaders and media are going to help us right now. We are ghosts and we should go and haunt the world revealing what has happened to us.

Exhausted refugees are wearing filthy clothing (where can we wash dirty laundry?) Wood burning stoves fill the main streets. Everything is cooked on wood fires now and they fill the air with smoke. The ground

around them is blackened and people's faces are blackened. This is a preview of the apocalypse: yes, right here in Gaza you can witness what the end of the world will look like.

As you walk, you pass faces of those who used to be proud and generous but are now humiliated and betrayed. They half-whisper, brokenly, in your ear: "I swear, I am not a beggar. But I was displaced from my home here and here. My family and children have nothing to eat. If you give me five shekels..."

This is only part of the picture, which is getting darker, more unbearable, and more painful every day with the siege and death. I do not know if death is worse than what people are experiencing now. What new, unthinkable circumstance will be thrown our way tomorrow? It's too horrible to contemplate. I want to run away...

Is it any wonder that, after 7 months of this carnage, student protests are springing up across the country and around the world? I only wish they had begun earlier. Yet, as pro-Palestinian Gaza encampments proliferate, much of the mainstream media is focused on rising antisemitism. An [Al-Jazeera article](#) reports, for example, that "...a prominent rabbi linked to Columbia University and its affiliated Barnard College, Elie Buechler, urged Jewish students at the institution to stay home due to 'extreme anti-Semitism' on campus." In an [Axios](#) article noting that all in-person classes have been cancelled we read, "Members of Congress flocked to the Columbia University campus on Monday amidst raucous protests over the Israel-Hamas war and concerns about the safety of Jewish students and faculty," and a [Vanity Fair](#) article notes that "President Joe Biden marked the Passover holiday by condemning antisemitism on college campuses amid the pro-Palestinian protests at Columbia University that have reverberated across the nation."

Then, there is Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu](#) carping all the way from Tel Aviv about the 'horrific' and 1930s-style 'antisemitic mobs' taking over college campuses

across the country and demanding that it be stopped. Reading the news, one would think we are embarking on a dark age in which the rise of neo-Nazi antisemitism was threatening the foundations of enlightenment thought at our institutions of higher learning.

Meanwhile, our political and media elites are attempting to impose an increasingly shrill and intolerant right wing pro-Israel agenda upon the institutions and people who oppose it. A key element of this agenda is unconditional support for Israel, which is synonymous with US hegemonic interests in the Middle East. One of the tools used to advance this agenda and silence its critics is the charge of 'antisemitism' each time one calls into question Israel's actions especially regarding the Palestinians. In many cases, these charges and - to some extent - the focus on the student uprisings on university and college campuses across the country, have taken the spotlight off the butchery and massive destruction taking place in the Gaza Strip.

This is unacceptable especially as pictures and [reports of mass graves](#) come in: Nearly 400 bodies have been discovered in Khan Younis at the Nasser hospital complex alone and the number is growing; bodies of people whose hands were zip-tied behind their backs and who were shot in the head in summary executions; bodies of people whose organs are missing; bodies of up to 20 people buried alive. Why isn't this news in bold headlines across our major national newspapers? The silence is as suspicious as it is disquieting. What are you hiding, you sorry excuse for a "[Fourth Estate](#)"?

No, instead we are regaled with stories of rising 'antisemitism' and the need for Jewish students to feel 'safe'. We are reminded that " Hamas started this war" (Did it? Really??) Instead, students and teachers are arrested in the hundreds for protesting a '[plausible genocide](#)'. (Wait - What? When do the weapons' manufacturers go to prison? When do the officials and lobbyists and masters of war get their day in court?)

Antisemitism and 'Antisemitism'

Real [antisemitism](#) - the hatred of Jews *because they are Jews* - has acquired a well-de-

served stigma. The Nazi holocaust and European fascism have been forever and correctly tainted by the virulent, murderous brand of antisemitism that led millions to their death. Like all forms of prejudice, antisemitism has been rightfully excoriated and pushed to the margins of our society as an unacceptable expression of irrational hatred. But evidence of genuine antisemitism still exists and must be combated.

In the wake of Israel's rise as a regional superpower and client of the United States, however, 'antisemitism' has taken on entirely new meanings. For many, the status of Israel and its close relationship to the United States tempered the kind of residual antisemitism that I and others experienced both as children and adults. Israel is now seen as an important ally and friend. Being genuinely antisemitic seemed to some almost unpatriotic. Those who have called into question Israel's role both as an arm of US power and as an independent, expansionist state built and consolidated at the expense of another people have had to fend off different charges of 'antisemitism' as a matter of course, however.

This is a political tactic; a political (and arguably social) way of shaming anyone who fails to support Israel unconditionally. Unsurprisingly, it has become routine for people championing the self-determination of the Palestinians to be labeled 'antisemitic' whether their views are anti-Jewish or not. As a result, we are today faced with a newfangled 'antisemitism' that not only threatens to undo basic civil liberties but that also jeopardizes a whole constellation of political and ethical values at the heart of any democracy.

Searching for a Precedent

As Israel's obliteration of Gaza enters its seventh month, I have watched in horror as the scale and scope of destruction takes on greater and more terrible dimensions. At least 35,000 people, approximately 25,000 of them women and children, have been slaughtered under 'precision' guided- and 'dumb' bombs, tank shells, and gunfire. More have died and are dying because of the draconian siege imposed by the Netanyahu war cabinet. Disease and malnutrition are rampant; famine is spreading as humanitarian aid trucks are unable to deliver desperately needed goods, including food, clean water, medicines and medical supplies.

Domicide, the destruction of dwelling places and the rendering of whole areas of land uninhabitable, and *ecocide*, the destruction of the environment by humans, together with mass murder, starvation, torture, detention, imprisonment, targeted assassinations, the erasure of Gaza's universities, the bombing of schools, businesses, and mosques, and the systematic violation and ruination of the healthcare system across the Strip defy accepted wartime boundaries and challenge many of us to seek historical precedents.

One that caught my eye was the Roman destruction of Carthage in 146 BC during the **Third Punic War**. In an act of sheer

vengeance and after a three-year siege, Roman warriors burned, looted, and razed the ancient city of Carthage to the ground. **Cato the Elder** of Rome, known for his slogan "Carthage must be destroyed!" [**Carthago delenda est!**], attempted to convince members of the Roman Senate that Carthage was a threat to the supremacy of Rome and must be annihilated. Some historians have cited this as **early support for genocide**.

In his report, "**The First Genocide: Carthage, 146 BC**," Yale historian **Ben Kiernan** writes,

[W]hat ideology demanded the disappearance of a disarmed mercantile city? Whatever the military reasons for pursuing the siege after 149, the socio-political motivation of the destruction's leading proponent is significant. Cato ultimately won a Senate majority, but the depth of his personal preoccupation was unusual. ... Cato's broader thinking ... shared more modern features with recent tragedies such as the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, and the Cambodian and Rwandan catastrophes. The perpetrators of these 20th century crimes, like Cato, were preoccupied with militaristic expansionism, the idealization of cultivation, notions of gender and social hierarchy, and racial or cultural prejudices.

The farmlands and fields of Carthage were plowed up and sown with salt; its homes destroyed one by one; its buildings set on fire; its roads destroyed, and its inhabitants massacred or sold into slavery. Some reports say only **50,000 Carthaginians, or one fifth of the population of 250,000 survived**. Otherwise, the city simply ceased to exist.

This, I believe, may be the closest we have to what Israel hopes to do to Gaza, displacing its population outside the borders of Gaza permanently rather than enslaving it. While the genocidal policies taking place in Gaza are neither a replica of what happened in Carthage nor an excuse to indict an entire people, the similarities in genocidal thinking should not be dismissed lightly. This is especially true when examining a society in which the supremacy of one people over another has been incorporated into both the secular and religious education of the general population.

A Nation State of the Jewish People

How exactly is exposing the desolation of Gaza 'antisemitic'? How are **the words of its own leaders, politicians, and officials – used by the International Court of Justice to rule that a plausible genocide is underway – antisemitic?**

For many, anything critical of Israel is antisemitic because Israel is considered *the*

state of the Jewish people. The **2018 Nation State Law** codified this in a number of ways, but primarily by asserting that "the right to exercise national self-determination" in Israel is "unique to the Jewish people." It designates Hebrew as the only official language, downgrading Arabic to a "special status," and it makes the settlement or 'redemption' of all the land of historic Palestine by Jews a national value. In other words, this law established what many have considered fact for generations, and what **Israeli laws have legislated for decades**. Arabs and other gentiles cannot belong to such a polity as equal citizens.

For me, this law also codifies apartheid. Palestinian Arabs, who make up one-fifth of the population of Israel 'proper,' are excluded *by definition* from such a state. They are outsiders and are treated as such. Meanwhile, Palestinian Arabs living in the occupied Palestinian territories are governed by **military law and suffer discrimination** of every imaginable kind. Again and again, however, I have come across people insisting that because the Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel can vote, they live in an egalitarian democracy. Such claims bewilder those who have spent any length of time in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, or the Gaza Strip. On every street and in every alleyway; in cities, towns, and refugee camps; in fields and orchards; at checkpoints and borders; and in the graffiti on the separation wall, the burden of an ever-encroaching, immiserating, and sadistic military occupation stifles the very breath of the land.

Under the circumstances, we must ask ourselves if it is so far-fetched that so many people demanding Palestinian liberation in Europe and the United States regard Jews with a certain amount of suspicion and hostility. It is a false equivalency, one that must be vocally opposed, but it is also one that has been encouraged by the very people and organizations screaming "antisemitism!" the loudest.

A Jewish Education

In 2003, after my daughter was born, I fought with my husband to prevent her from getting a Jewish education – not out of any dislike for mainstream Judaism, but because it is nearly impossible to give an American Jewish child such an education without Israel being its central feature. In almost every synagogue, at nearly every wedding, at Bar or Bat-Mitzvahs, at funerals, on holidays and regular services, the blue and white flag of Israel flies front and center usually, but not always, accompanied by an American flag. When any major national development, such as the **October 7th Hamas massacre** of approximately 1100 Israelis, occurs American Jews head to their synagogues for solidarity and soul-searching. When *Israeli* national holidays take place, there are celebrations within (and often outside of) the American Jewish communities from coast to coast.

When major Israeli events or political

figures are in the news, one will often hear Jewish congregations in the United States singing the *Hatikvah* and organizing actions and conversations around that news. When Prime Minister *Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1994*, every major synagogue in my hometown of Madison, Wisconsin filled with its congregants to commemorate his life and wring their hands over the circumstances of his death. Similar gatherings, discussions, and shows of solidarity occurred when the *1993 Oslo Accords* were signed; and again and again during the *Second Intifada* and when *Israel launched its wars on Gaza in 2008-9, 2014, and 2023*. What other ethnic group in America expresses this much solidarity with the nation of its heritage? Why should we be surprised that there is a nearly universal identification of Jews with Israel?

What other national, ethnic, or religious group in the United States offers its citizens regular “*birthright*” tours to the homeland? What other national, ethnic, or religious group praises its members for “*making Aliyah*” (returning to Israel and becoming a citizen)? What other national, ethnic, or religious group practically excommunicates its members for refusing to identify with the nation of their heritage?

The Jewish Federations

While in the past decade we have seen the establishment of *anti-Zionist synagogues* and a growing popularity of anti-Zionist organizations such as the *International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN)*, the *American Council for Judaism (ACJ)*, and *Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP)* they are regarded with contempt and animosity by Jewish mainstream organizations. Indeed, *JVP was listed by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL)* as one of the top ten anti-Israel groups in the United States in October 2023 and is *described on its website* as a group of radical fanatics unrepresentative of Jewish society in the United States and elsewhere, partly responsible for the rise of ‘antisemitism’. Indeed, *Jonathan Greenblatt*, head of the ADL *recently condemned JVP (and other pro-Palestinian student*

groups) as ‘*campus proxies of Iran*’. Rather than engage critically with ideas set forth by JVP, the ADL and other Jewish organizations simply list them as warning signs; as part of a ‘woke’ ideology to be regarded with fear and trepidation.

Jewish Voice for Peace is a radical anti-Israel and anti-Zionist activist group that advocates for the boycott of Israel and eradication of Zionism. JVP does not represent the mainstream Jewish community [and its] staunch anti-Zionist positions place it squarely in opposition to mainstream American Jews and Jews worldwide, most of whom view a connection with Israel as an integral part of their social, cultural or religious Jewish identities. JVP promulgates the view that Jews who identify even tangentially with Israel are motivated by white supremacy, Jewish racial chauvinism and religious supremacism. The spread of JVP’s most inflammatory ideas can help give rise to anti-semitism.

Locally, I and other members of JVP-Tucson were met with social isolation from the mainstream Jewish community when we tried to find a venue to host the orthodox Jewish journalist and university professor *Peter Beinart* to come and speak on the current crisis in Gaza. The Assistant Director at the University of Arizona *Hillel*, Kelsey Jannerson, informed me that “Hillel International’s policies include a clause about not working with anti-Zionist organizations,” and when another member secured a venue at the local *Tucson Jewish Community Center* in January 2024, she received a letter in early February informing us that we’d have to find someplace else. “The J does not host anti-Zionist groups, so therefore we won’t be able to accommodate JVP,” Noah Osten, the Special Programs and Events Specialist, wrote on stationery with the big words, “*Everyone Belongs*” emblazoned on it. The irony apparently escaped him.

The Tucson Jewish Community Center, like many such community centers across the

country is loosely controlled by the *Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC)* which is affiliated with a branch of the over 400 Jewish Federations, themselves represented by the *Jewish Federation of North America (JFNA)*. The JFNA boasts that it is “one of the top 10 charities on the continent” listing lobbying in Washington DC as among its primary activities and noting that it partners “with the government of Israel and a variety of agencies to secure the Jewish State.”

As a charitable organization for the benefit of local and national Jewish communities, the JFNAs activities in North America should be commended. As a partner with the government of Israel and agencies whose job is “to secure the Jewish State” its actions and policies should be closely examined and seriously questioned. What exactly does this mean? How would Americans feel knowing, for example, that a Chinese American organization was partnered with the Chinese government and worked with agencies to “Secure the Chinese State,” or that a Venezuelan American organization was partnered with the Venezuelan government and agencies to “secure the Venezuelan State.” Are Israel’s alleged interests really the same as the United States? Even if they were, would that make it all right for a major American Jewish organization to be working separately with the Israeli government?

It is both wrong and dangerous to assume that Jewish individuals are somehow agents of Israel, approving of its policies and supporting it unconditionally. I wouldn’t want to be the target of anti-Israel protesters simply because I am Jewish any more than I would wish to be the target of anti-Americanism overseas simply because I hold an American passport. I have been a vocal critic of US foreign policy for decades.

I have also been an *anti-Zionist* and vocal critic of Israel and of its illegal occupation and treatment of the Palestinians since the early 1980s. So far, however, while the American government hasn’t blacklisted me or revoked my citizenship for speaking out against its actions, I cannot say the same about the established American Jewish community or the Israeli government, and there are many

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American Jewish critics of Israel who have experienced far worse than anything I have ever undergone. But whose fault is it that many people see non-Israeli Jews as representatives of Israel when organizations such as the JFNA, the Jewish Agency, and the Jewish National Fund do everything possible to reinforce that bond?

We must also not forget the giant lobby group, AIPAC, whose control over Israel policy has been almost sacrosanct for years. Claiming to want to encourage bipartisan support “to strengthen and expand the US-Israel relationship,” AIPAC has begun spending millions of dollars on US domestic elections to unseat any candidate who does not support Israel. In 2021, AIPAC set up a super PAC (political action campaign), the [United Democracy Project](#), that pours money into primaries in order to try to block any candidate it deems insufficiently supportive of Israel from getting into office. It will often promote information critical of a candidate (on any topic) that might be seen as hurting that candidate’s chances of being elected.

Most people have no idea that behind its massive spending campaigns is the singular issue of support for Israel. One wonders how the American public would feel about any PAC, united with a foreign government, spending millions to defeat candidates because they don’t support that foreign government – but keeping that underlying motive hidden.

What does this say about the state of established American Jewry and Israel? If both are guilty of prejudice against me and those who share my anti-Zionist beliefs, are they ‘antisemitic’? Apparently, being an ‘acceptable’ Jew involves sharing a political belief in the centrality of Israel and of the unconditional support it receives from the American political establishment. Are anti-Zionist Jews no longer ‘Jewish’ for objecting to the slaughter of tens of thousands of human beings who wish to live freely on their own land?

At the turn of the 20th century, the Mayor of Vienna, [Karl Lueger](#), was known for having said, “I decide who is a Jew.” This is the polit-

ical atmosphere in which pro-Palestinian anti-Zionist Jews are living today; one in which the Jewish Federation of North America and its allies ‘decide’ who is and is not rightfully ‘Jewish’ and ‘antisemitic’. Their motto ought to be “We decide who is an anti-semitic.” It is a cynical, self-serving and highly opportunistic play for power dictated by narrow – and dangerous – political interests.

“Gaza Must Be Destroyed”

I am setting out for the new encampment at the University of Arizona. I have many reasons for wanting to express my solidarity with it. Pouring over my memories of Gaza, I think back to the many occasions I shared with friends and colleagues there. I remember the first spring I spent there.

On a bright April afternoon in 2002 I left [Gaza City for Beit Hanoun](#), further north, to have dinner at a coworker’s home. Stepping out of a taxi, I had to make the last part of that trip by foot to reach his place. In so doing, I passed through an orchard of orange trees whose white flowers were in full bloom. This memory will never leave me. There were petals falling from the trees, scattering on the ground like snow, and a sweet perfume of orange blossoms filled air like an ethereal liquid. Around me was a beautiful and vivid silence as though one were passing through a patch of paradise. I wanted to capture the moment forever.

Anwar lived in a low, modest pair of rooms with his wife, five children, and elderly mother. They fed me as if I’d never eaten before, offering me dish after dish of warm, freshly cooked chicken and fish surrounded by spiced vegetables in savory sauces. I ate until I thought I would burst, and stayed until dusk, making my way back (accompanied by the oldest son) to the road where a taxi returned me to my home in the [Rimal district](#) of Gaza City.

These memories are especially poignant for me now, for only two years later, in 2004, the orchard had been savaged by Israeli saws, which cut them down to their skinny trunks, claiming the need for better visibility into a ‘nest of terrorists’. Nothing of that

swathe of paradise remains.

Ten years later, in 2014, during Israel’s ‘[Operation Protective Edge](#)’, Anwar led his family to a safer place above the offices where he worked in Gaza City. Beit Hanoun, close to the border with Israel, often felt the brunt of these attacks, so many of its inhabitants fled for the duration of this campaign. During an Israeli-declared temporary ceasefire, however, Anwar returned to check on his home and collect any valuables they had left behind. Inside, he noticed the water had stopped running from the faucet of his kitchen sink, and outside a small group of men gathered around a water pipe to try to restore it. Anwar joined them to see if he could help. But a group of men together is an invitation for the US-supplied Israeli death machines to cut them down, and a helicopter gunship fired a missile into the group fatally wounding Anwar, who died an hour later at the [Kamal Adwan hospital](#), the contents of his abdomen spilling out onto a gurney. Anwar was a simple, apolitical man who had never belonged to any organization or political party.

Ten years passed again, and in 2024 Beit Hanoun is a stronghold of the Israeli military. Farmland, homes, orchards, and shops have been left scorched, bombed, and plundered; devoured by a ravenous beast. Little remains of the place I once visited as a welcomed guest. Further south, Gaza City also lies in ruins. The upscale Rimal district, whose streets I once traversed, has been wiped off the face of the earth. The space it once occupied has turned into a moonscape; a miniature Hiroshima with nothing but the grey wreckage of past life to remind its former inhabitants of their home.

This image is repeated across the Gaza Strip, down to Rafah, which waits in silent agony for a similar fate. Only the sea to the west survives; the sea, where buried history laughs aloud and laps the shores, wondering when it will swallow the carnage whole.

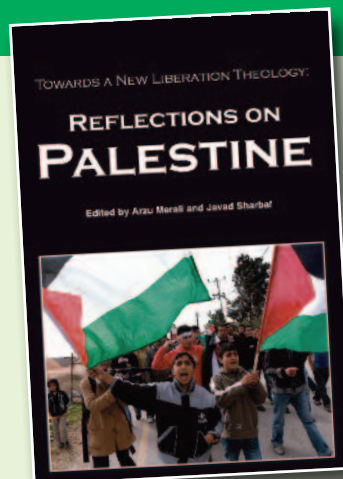
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Gaza and the Politics of Genocide Recognition

Afroze F Zaidi argues that Western countries' refusal to use the term genocide to describe events in Gaza is a nod to their complicity not only in the ongoing slaughter but a reminder of its place in the recent histories of colonialism, recompense for which is outstanding. As activists world-wide revive the idea that genocide exists and must be stopped, Zaidi looks to the grassroots' and dissenters' demands as a locus for future normative discourse.

At the time of writing, it's become widely accepted that Israel has been actively committing genocide in Gaza for several months. Evidence of popular acceptance of this notion abounds. Pro-Palestine marches have taken place in major cities around the world. The call to boycott brands and corporations supporting Israel has had an impact in real terms on their business. University students have transformed their campuses not just into sites of protest but arenas for public accountability. And it is now practically impossible to browse through social media without coming across the word 'genocide'.

In a post-Holocaust world, as we watch the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza unfold before our eyes, now would be the time for the United Nations (UN) Genocide Convention to fulfil its intended function. While other genocides have undoubtedly taken place in recent history, the one in Gaza has certain unique characteristics.

First, the smartphone era has created more documented evidence of Israel's genocide in Gaza than there has been for any other genocide in modern history. Second, internet and communication technology has meant that images, video footage, eye-

witness testimony, and stories not just of innocent civilians but of healthcare workers, journalists, academic scholars, etc who have been murdered by Israeli forces, have spread so rapidly and pervasively around the world that comparing it to wildfire would be an understatement. Third, the genocide in Gaza has particularly pulled back the façade of purported liberal Western values such as democracy, diplomacy, human rights, international law, and freedom of speech.

Now more than ever, it has become painfully apparent that not only does Israel act with impunity, its genocidal actions – and justifications – are enabled by other Western states and the mass media that serves them. So much so that student protests against Israel's actions have been attacked with the full force of the state – particularly at Columbia and the University of Amsterdam – in blatant violation of the students' democratic right to protest. Western colonial states have banned and silenced Palestinian voices such as Dr Ghassan Abu Sittah without a passing thought for freedom of speech. And these same states and academic institutions continue to enable and support the supply of arms to Israel so that it can carry on its flagrant violations

against human rights and international humanitarian law.

It has become clear that the role of Western states is no longer one of passive complicity, but rather they are active enablers of the genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. They have willingly and consistently supplied the hardware with which Israel continues to eviscerate Gaza in its entirety – including critical infrastructure, hospitals, universities, schools, factories, homes, and, of course, people. Moreover, in a display of pro-Israel bias, the US, UK and EU placed fresh sanctions on Iran for its military attack on Israel, despite the fact Iran only responded to Israel's unprovoked act of naked aggression against it, i.e. the attack on the Iranian embassy in Damascus. At the time, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron went on air and **expressed concern** about thousands of hypothetical deaths that 'could have' happened in Israel, without breathing a word about the 32,000 or so actual deaths that had already taken place up to that point at the hands of Israel in Gaza.

Following this, in an even more blatant show of pro-Israel bias from the US, on 26 April twelve Republican senators **signed a letter** effectively threatening the chief pros-



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ecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Karim Khan in order to deter him from issuing arrest warrants against PM Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli officials. The letter read:

“Target Israel and we will target you. If you move forward with the measures indicated in the report, we will move to end all American support for the ICC, sanction your employees and associates, and bar you and your families from the United States. You have been warned.”

Therefore, amidst widespread public upheaval, Israel is buoyed and emboldened by support from Western superpowers. State actors that could actually take tangible action to bring this genocide to a halt are, instead, most actively enabling it. Worse still, the UN, the supposedly neutral, self-appointed arbiter of genocides, has proven entirely impotent against Israel’s brazen perpetration of crimes against humanity.

For some people, this may come as no surprise. But for many others, it has still been a shock to witness firsthand, in the midst of an ongoing, livestreamed genocide, the inaction of the body from which the Genocide Convention originated.

The UN’s role in genocide prevention

Few events in modern history seem to have demonstrated the redundancy of the UN as a peace-making body more than the genocide in Gaza. With crimes against Palestinians in Gaza being livestreamed and verified not just by citizens and eyewitnesses but by health workers, journalists, aid workers and so on, one would think that this would give unprecedented urgency to the imperative to take action and stop these atrocities in their tracks.

Yet there is no action. Ironically, in this situation, the legal definition of a genocide and the process and burden of proof required simply to establish its existence, even in the presence of overwhelming, undeniable evidence, serve more as a hindrance to justice rather than a vehicle for it.

For reference, the Convention [places the following obligations](#) on states:

1. “Obligation not to commit genocide”
2. “Obligation to prevent genocide”
3. “Obligation to punish genocide”
4. “Obligation to enact the necessary legislation to give effect to the provisions of the Convention”
5. “Obligation to ensure that effective penalties are provided for persons found guilty of criminal conduct according to the Convention”
6. “Obligation to try persons charged with genocide in a competent tribunal of the State in the territory of which the act was committed, or by an international penal tribunal with accepted jurisdiction”

7. “Obligation to grant extradition when genocide charges are involved, in accordance with laws and treaties in force (Article VII), particularly related to protection granted by international human rights law prohibiting refoulement where there is a real risk of flagrant human rights violations in the receiving State.

Just from the brief examples cited earlier, it’s clear that not just Israel but the states enabling its genocide are failing on at least six of the Convention’s obligations.

Importantly, the fourth point also includes the following clarification:

“The political organs of the United Nations play an important role in supporting the implementation of the Convention, but not in making a legal determination as to whether a situation constitutes genocide under the Genocide Convention or under international criminal law.”

This is significant because it shows a lack of clarity regarding whom the responsibility actually falls upon to make “a legal determination as to whether a situation constitutes genocide”.

A [factsheet](#) on the Convention which has been drafted by the UN provides no further clarity in this regard either. Its entire focus appears to be on defining what genocide is and is not, with a cautionary tone regarding mis-attributing the term ‘genocide’ where it doesn’t technically apply (based on the Convention). To date, out of a list of dozens of possible genocides since the Convention, the UN has only [taken legal action against three](#). And yet it hasn’t occurred to anyone with influence that the process of establishing a genocide might be prohibitively burdensome. The three against which legal action has been taken are the respective genocides in Rwanda (1994), Bosnia (1995) and Cambodia (1975-79) – incidentally, none of the alleged perpetrators of these genocides happen to be allies of Western superpowers.

Furthermore, the factsheet demonstrates that the Convention and its associated terminology have been designed with the goal of ‘genocide prevention’, with no information on the process to stop the perpetration of an ongoing genocide or seek accountability from its perpetrators. The factsheet also refers to the ‘UN’ as a body separate to its ‘departments’, ultimately making the process entirely opaque, with no clarity as to who is responsible for initiating action, and moreover what specifically, if anything, is the responsibility of the UN proper during an ongoing genocide.

Article V of the Convention [states that](#) “The Contracting Parties undertake... to provide effective penalties for persons guilty of genocide”. Meanwhile, article VIII is as follows:

“Any Contracting Party may call upon the competent organs of the United Nations to take such action under the Charter of the United Na-

tions as they consider appropriate for the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide or any of the other acts enumerated in article III.”

In other words, it falls on the ‘Contracting Parties’, i.e. member states, either to “provide effective penalties” or call on the UN to take action for “the prevention and suppression of acts of genocide”. However, where these member states are demonstrably committed to pursuing their own geopolitical interests over compliance with international law, the Convention becomes effectively useless.

Where the Convention and the UN’s factsheet give little clarity on the actual process of seeking accountability for a genocide, Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, clarified the following [in her report](#) published in March 2024 (p. 4):

“The [UN’s International Court of Justice] ICJ and the International Criminal Court (“ICC”) have jurisdiction over the crime of genocide, and so do State domestic courts. Prior to the establishment of the ICC, ad hoc international criminal tribunals advanced their interpretation of what constitutes genocide, its intent and required evidence.”

To elaborate further, while the ICJ is the judicial arm of the UN, it holds no prosecutorial or enforcement powers. This means that although the [ICJ has ruled](#) on the ‘plausibility’ of people in Gaza deserving protection from genocide, it cannot enforce this protection, nor take any punitive action against Israeli officials. In order for the UN to pursue legal accountability for genocides that it has officially recognised, its Security Council (UNSC) must make a referral to the ICC. Although the UNSC has done this for genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Cambodia, in the case of Israel, this referral does not appear forthcoming.

Contrary to what some might assume, this inaction is not due to the fact that genocide must be established as per the criteria and burden of proof laid out in the Convention. Rather, Albanese’s report offers a thorough justification of how Israel’s actions and rhetoric constitute genocide as per the Convention, [stating](#) in no uncertain terms:

“By analysing the patterns of violence and Israel’s policies in its onslaught on Gaza, this report concludes that there are reasonable grounds to believe that the threshold indicating Israel’s commission of genocide is met.”

Not only has Albanese documented evidence of genocidal acts, but also a comprehensive proof of genocidal intent (p. 12):

“In the latest Gaza assault, direct

evidence of genocidal intent is uniquely present. Vitriolic genocidal rhetoric has painted the whole population as the enemy to be eliminated and forcibly displaced. High-ranking Israeli officials with command authority have issued harrowing public statements evincing genocidal intent, including as follows:

(a) President Isaac Herzog stated that “an entire nation out there...is responsible” for the 7 October attack, and that Israel would “break their backbone”

(b) Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to Palestinians as “Amalek” and “monsters”. The Amalek reference is to a biblical passage in which God commands Saul “Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass”.

(c) Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant referred to Palestinians as “human animals”, and announced “full offense” on Gaza, having “released all the restraints”, and that “Gaza will never return to what it was”;

Albanese added that (p. 13):

“There is cogent evidence that these statements have been internalized and acted upon by troops on the ground. Israeli soldiers have, including on social media channels run by the Israeli military, referred to Palestinians as “terrorists”, “roaches”, “rats”, and have repeated terms articulated by political leaders, chanting that “there are no ‘uninvolved civilians’”, while also calling for the building of settlements in Gaza, “occupy[ing] Gaza... wip[ing] off the

seed of Amalek”, boasting about killing “families, mothers, and children”, humiliating detained Palestinians, detonating dozens of homes, destroying entire residential neighbourhoods, and desecrating cemeteries and places of worship.”

As Albanese elaborates:

“Such calls for annihilatory violence directed at troops on duty, constitute strong evidence of direct and public incitement to commit genocide. Decades of discourse dehumanizing Palestinians have prepared the groundwork for such incitements.”

This report, establishing both genocidal actions and intent on the part of Israel, was submitted to the UN at the end of March 2024. But as anyone bearing witness to events in Gaza will know, the barrier to justice for Palestinians, or at least accountability under international law, is not a lack of evidence – it is political will.

What will it take?

The reality is that Albanese’s report, whether due to the timing of its publication or the limits of its scope, does not even include some of the most horrendous of Israel’s crimes, such as the Flour Massacre in early March or the siege of Al Shifa Hospital and subsequent discovery of mass graves, with zip ties small enough to fit around the wrists of babies.

One might ask why it is, then, that global superpowers hold such little regard for Palestinian lives that they can maintain their unshakeable commitment to the Zionist cause even in the face of overwhelming evidence of Israel’s crimes. In order to answer this question, we need to acknowledge that the Zionist project is indeed the most overt manifestation of modern-day settler colonialism, which, in turn, is inextricably linked with white supremacy. When French

authorities denied entry to Dr Ghissan Abu Sittah on 4 May, [he tweeted](#):

“Colonial genocide is a formative component of European identity. Hence their eagerness to become complicit in silencing the witnesses and arming the war criminals”

Albanese also references the characteristics of settler-colonialism [in her report](#), stating (p. 3):

“Genocidal intent and practices are integral to the ideology and processes of settler-colonialism”

Crucially, she adds:

“Settler-colonialism is a dynamic, structural process and a confluence of acts aimed at displacing and eliminating Indigenous groups, of which *genocidal extermination/annihilation* represents the peak.” [original emphasis]

However, the link Dr Abu Sittah makes which Albanese does not is that between colonialism and (white supremacist) European identity. White supremacist colonial ideology goes beyond racism as discrimination – it holds the coloniser as superior and therefore more entitled to space, land, freedom, cultural identity and heritage, and the right to live. Colonising forces have therefore joined hands to endorse the settler-colonial Zionist project, offering Israel impunity as well as political, material, and ideological support.

As identified by Edward Said, another aspect of white supremacist colonialism is Islamophobia, and this is again a trait shared by the Zionist project. Israel has capitalised on global Islamophobia by using its portrayal of Hamas as an ‘Islamist’ terrorist group to justify any and all genocidal behaviour. Arguably, Israel has managed to get away with the extent of damage it has caused in Gaza in part because of its depic-



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tion of Hamas as an Islamist terrorist entity that is, by definition, senselessly violent, barbaric, and beyond reasoning with. The international community, and global superpowers in particular, have accepted this categorisation of Hamas as a terror group without giving any consideration to the military strength and apartheid inflicted upon Palestinians by Israel as an occupying force. The UN, meanwhile, despite its global membership, has proven itself to be an institution that is equally complicit in protecting white supremacist colonialism.

So does this mean that ‘genocide’ is a meaningless term? When it comes to accountability under international law, it would appear so. However, the term undoubtedly holds weight in the meaning it has taken on in the popular imagination. It represents the perpetration of crimes against humanity that are deliberate and targeted at a specific group of people. It represents a pinnacle of injustice, as a powerless group of people is exterminated by a powerful one. Perhaps more than anything, it represents a failing of humankind that should never be allowed to happen. That should be prevented. That should be opposed. This is, after all, the essence of ‘Never Again’.

One thing the genocide in Gaza has served to demonstrate is what the politics of genocide is not. It is not genocide prevention. It is not an equal application of justice for all human beings. It is not concerned with state actors facing accountability and having checks and balances for their power. Rather, it is simply about [white guilt over the Holocaust](#), and Zionist, colonial interests capitalising on this in service of their own ends. The fact that Germany, the most vocal proponent of ‘Never Again’, seems to also be the most vehemently anti-justice for Palestinians goes to show firstly the political nature of genocide recognition and secondly the commitment of white supremacist states to upholding colonialism. It’s almost as though ‘Never Again’ only means ‘Never Again – except when it comes to genocide

being perpetrated against a group other than the Jews’.

Meanwhile, the dehumanisation of Palestinians, as Arabs and perceived Muslims, has placed them at an acute disadvantage – in order to hear Palestinians and treat their concerns as valid, the institutions to which they might turn with complaints of human rights violations against them must first recognise them as human beings. These institutions, however, keep exposing their white supremacist leanings, as they accept Israel’s narrative of merely engaging in self-defence against Islamist terrorists.

“Always talk”

“I think a lot of resistance to calling Gaza a genocide comes from people who say Israel is not killing people for sport but rather to eliminate a perceived threat. Problem is every single genocide in history was to eliminate a threat as perceived by the people carrying it out”

Bruno Mações, author

A few weeks ago, it might have been easy to feel disheartened at the seeming futility of collective action in the face of world leaders and their unequivocal support for Zionism. But recent events have shown the power of collective action and consistent public pressure.

Just as new snow on a mountain slope can trigger an avalanche, student protests on university campuses appear to be the straw that have broken the camel’s back. They have exposed an international Palestine solidarity movement that is both unrelenting and effective, grounded not in legal frameworks or definitions but in an inherent sense of justice and liberation for all Palestinian people. Universities have begun committing to divesting from Israel. The boycott of brands and companies supporting Israel has spread far and wide, [giving tangible results](#). Palestine Action activists in the UK [managed to shut down](#) a drone factory owned by Israel’s Elbit Systems, and

the Fire Brigades Union issued guidance saying fire fighters should not assist the police in removing them. And US President Joe Biden has put an arms shipment to Israel on hold following its ground invasion of Rafah.

So no matter how futile or ineffective it might seem, it is essential to recognise the role that protests and direct action can play in Palestinian liberation. In an interview with BreakThrough News published on 26 April, Lebanese [journalist Ali Mortada said](#):

“It’s very important [for] you guys to talk. Always talk, always talk. Especially the Western people, we love you. We are seeing what you are doing. And I swear to God, the demonstrations in London are more effective than the demonstrations in Lebanon. We fight, you demonstrate. Let us fight. Let us make them taste our fire. But you must always talk, and we will do the work... We are very powerful. They couldn’t beat us, but we need you beside us. Always talk, always share, always make us feel like a human because they are always treating us like animals.”

The importance of sharing, amplifying, not looking away, has been emphasised repeatedly by Palestinians. In doing so, we are not just resisting and countering Zionist narratives but also bearing witness to the genocide unfolding in Gaza. Genocide recognition by the UN, prosecution by the ICC, or sanctions against Israel may not be realistic possibilities, but this means even more so that the general public, all people outside of Gaza, must use their privilege to keep demanding not just a ceasefire but freedom for Palestine – from the river to the sea.

Afroze F Zaidi

is a writer, editor and independent researcher. Afroze has an established track record of writing about current affairs in a manner that challenges narratives in the mainstream media. She also regularly offers rigorous, research-based critiques of colonial/ white supremacist structures and institutions. You can find her on Twitter/X @afrozefz.

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The Obligation of Social Justice Activism

In this extract from his book ‘Sacred Activism’ Imam Dawud Walid argues that Muslims must not lose sight either of the injunctions to challenge injustice, or while doing so enjoining the good and forbidding the bad.

Supporting existing expressions of justice in society, restoring individuals’ God-given rights which have been denied, and interrupting factors which cause injustice are all part of the Islamic faith. Though the phrase ‘social justice activism’ is not explicitly used in the Qur’an and Prophetic traditions, it resides within the framework of enjoining good and forbidding evil (*al-amr bi al-ma’rūf wa al-nahī ‘an al-munkar*) which is an essential foundation of Islam. All schools within Islamic theology recognise the necessity of enjoining good and forbidding evil, and scholars have extensively discussed the criteria and manners for doing so. Thus, there is a Prophetically inspired roadmap regarding the mandate for social justice activism which constitutes a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) for every Muslim community, as well as an individual obligation (*farḍ ‘ayn*) upon every sane post-pubescent Muslim.

Obligation of Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil from the Qur’an

Allah (Mighty and Sublime) made enjoining good and forbidding evil mandatory upon the Muslim community through the imperative command: *‘And let there be from among you a group calling towards constructive excellence, enjoining good and forbidding evil. And these will be the successful ones’* (Qur’an, 3:104).

Allah (Mighty and Sublime) also praises Muslims who enjoin good and forbid evil when He says: *‘You are the best nation brought out for humankind; you enjoin good, forbid evil and believe in Allah’* (Qur’an, 3:113). It is noteworthy in this *āyah* (verse) that enjoining good and forbidding evil are mentioned before belief in *tawḥīd*.

Finally, Allah (Mighty and Sublime) identifies enjoining good and forbidding evil as the first adjectives describing those who have sound faith: *‘And the believing men and women are allies of one another; they enjoin good, forbid evil, establish prayer, give charity and obey Allah and His messenger. These will soon receive the*

All schools within Islamic theology recognise the necessity of enjoining good and forbidding evil, and scholars have extensively discussed the criteria and manners for doing so. Thus, there is a Prophetically inspired roadmap regarding the mandate for social justice activism which constitutes a collective obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) for every Muslim community, as well as an individual obligation (*farḍ ‘ayn*) upon every sane post-pubescent Muslim.

mercy of Allah. Surely Allah is Mighty, All-Wise’ (Qur’an, 9:71).

Further Evidence from the Prophetic Tradition

In Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, it is narrated that Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: *‘Whoever sees an evil, let him change it with his hand. And if he is unable to do so, then with his speech. And if he is unable to do so, then with his heart, but that is the weakest of faith.’*¹

Regarding enjoining others to good and forbidding them from evil in general, the Prophet ﷺ said, as narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī: *‘Help your brother, be he a wrongdoer or one who has been wronged.’* The companions said, ‘O Messenger of Allah! In this we know how to help the one who was wronged, but how do we help the wrongdoer?’ He replied, *‘By preventing him from wronging others, for surely that is helping him.’*²

In Sunan Abī Dāwūd and Sunan al-Tirmidhī, a Prophetic saying regarding enjoining governmental authorities to good and forbidding them from evil is recorded: *‘The most virtuous struggle (jihād) is a word of justice (‘adl) to a tyrannical ruler.’*³ A similar sound hadith, narrated by al-Nasā’ī, states that the most virtuous struggle against an unjust leader is *‘a word of truth (ḥaqq).’*⁴

Consequences of Neglecting to Enjoin Good and Forbid Evil

Allah (Mighty and Sublime) speaks of the fate of those who came before us, who neglected their obligation to enjoin good and forbid evil: *‘Cursed are those who disbelieved from the Children of Israel, from the tongues of Dāwūd (David) and ‘Isā (Jesus) the son of Maryam (Mary) for that which they disobeyed and transgressed. And they did not prohibit among themselves evil which they did. Indeed, it was vile which they did’* (Qur’an, 5:78-79).

Ḥabīb Abdullah bin Ḥusayn bin Tahir⁵ (may Allah sanctify his spirit) stated, in his treatise regarding recalcitrance of the tongue, that it is sinful to be ‘silent regarding enjoining good and forbidding evil without a valid excuse.’⁶ Ḥabīb Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Haddar⁷ (may Allah sanctify his spirit) also said:

‘A person who dispenses with the acts of enjoining good and forbidding evil shares with the disobedient in their sins; and, being pleased with disbelief is a form of disbelief. If Allah is disobeyed in the east and you are in the west, you must nonetheless forbid evil. According to one of the recommended methods as much as you are able.’⁸

Allah (Mighty and Sublime) discusses the punishment given to the wife of Lūṭ (Lot, peace be upon him), when she assisted the men of Sodom in open sexual transgression, though she did not partake in their actions:

‘Allah sets forth a parable of those who disbelieved, the wife of Nūḥ (Noah) and wife of Lūṭ; they were under two servants from among our righteous worshippers, but they both betrayed them [their husbands] so they [Nūḥ and Lūṭ] benefitted them not against Allah; thus it was said, “Enter the fire along with those who enter.”’ (Qur’an, 66:10)

Regarding the learned leaders among the Children of Israel who neglected their duties, Allah the Most High says: *‘Why did not their rabbis and doctors of law forbid them from sinful assertions and devouring the forbidden? Indeed, evil are their works’* (Qur’an, 5:63). Regarding

this *āyah*, the Ḥanbalī scholar Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (may Allah sanctify his spirit) said that their scholars, jurists and cantors did not prohibit them from obscene language, eating the forbidden and acting in recalcitrance.⁹

According to Bukhārī and Muslim, the Mother of the Believers Umm al-Ḥakam Zaynab bint Jaḥsh (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated that the Prophet ﷺ came to her while alarmed and said: *‘There is no deity but Allah. Woe unto the Arabs from mischief that has come near. An opening has been made of a day in the wall of Gog and Magog similar to this,’* and he made a circle with his thumb and index finger. She said: ‘O Messenger of Allah! ﷺ Shall we be destroyed even though there are pious people among us?’ He replied: ‘Yes, when the wicked increase.’¹⁰

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (may Allah be pleased with him) said, according to a sound narration in Sunan Abī Dāwūd, Sunan Ibn Mājah and Sunan al-Nasā’ī:

‘O people! Surely you recite this *āyah*: *‘O you who believe! Take care of your own souls. No harm can come to you from one who is astray when you are guided aright’* (Qur’an, 5:44). But surely, I [also] heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say, *‘Surely, when people see a wrong-doer and do not take him by the hand [to attempt to stop his evil], Allah will soon punish all of them.’*¹¹

In a sound narration, Ḥudhayfah bin al-Yamān (may Allah be pleased with him) relayed that the Prophet ﷺ said: *‘By Him in whose hand is my life, you will either enjoin good and forbid evil or Allah will certainly soon send His punishment upon you. Then you will make supplication, but it will not be accepted.’*¹² Imam ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (may Allah ennoble his face) narrated similarly that those who desist from enjoining good and forbidding evil will have the worst of the people placed over them as authorities; then, they will supplicate to Allah without being answered.¹³

It is said that surely Allah the Most High revealed to Yūsha‘ bin Nūn (Joshua,

peace be upon him):

‘Surely, I will send destruction on 40,000 of the best of your people, and 70,000 of the worst of them.’

[Yūsha‘ said]: *‘O my Lord! These are the worst, but what about the best?’*

The issue of social justice activism has spiritual import, and consequences attached to it. When a community includes people devoted to the enjoining good and forbidding evil in society, Divine blessings are extended to that community, as they are for other acts of worship, and they are assisted with Allah’s permission

*The Most High replied: ‘Surely they were not angry with [those who incurred] My anger, and they confided in them and drank with them.’*¹⁴

The issue of social justice activism has spiritual import, and consequences attached to it. When a community includes people devoted to the enjoining good and forbidding evil in society, Divine blessings are extended to that community, as they are for other acts of worship, and they are assisted with Allah’s permission. Likewise, when a community ignores this endeavour and individuals abandon this religious responsibility, then just as in the negligence of other duties, severe consequences will eventually reach that community. Judgments in the Hereafter will be made of individuals according to the limitless wisdom of Allah (Mighty and Sublime) and His knowledge of their capacities.

Imam Dawud Walid

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¹ Muslim, hadith 49.

² Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh: Dar al-Hazm, 2015), hadith 6952.

³ Al-Sijistānī, Abū Dāwūd. *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Damascus: Al-Risalah al-‘Alamiyyah, 2008), hadith 4344; Tirmidhī, hadith 2174.

⁴ Al-Nasā’ī, hadith 4209.

⁵ Ḥabīb Abdullah bin Ḥusayn bin Tahir, was from the Ba’Alawi lineage, and was a chief Shāfi‘ī scholar in Yemen who lived from 1191-1272 AH.

⁶ Ba’Alawi, al-Ḥabīb ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥusayn. *Majmū‘ al-Ḥabīb ‘Abdillāh bin Ḥusayn bin Ṭāhir Bā‘alawī* (Beirut: Dar al-Hawī, 2008), p.282.

⁷ Ḥabīb Muhammad bin Abdullah al-Haddar, a descendant of the Prophet ﷺ from the Ba’Alawi lineage, was a scholar in Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence, hadith, Islamic spirituality and poetry, who lived from 1340-1418 AH.

⁸ Al-Haddar, Muhammad. *The Quest for Virtuous Character* (Western Cape: Dar al-Turath al-Islami, 2016), p.44.

⁹ Al-Jīlānī, ‘Abd al-Qādir. *Al-Ghunyah al-Ṭālib li Tārīq al-Ḥaqq* (Istanbul: Markaz Jiy-lani li al-Buhuth al-‘Ilmiyyah wa al-Ṭaba’ wa al-Nashr, 2022), v.1, p.259. Scholars debate the authenticity of this text given that there exist multiple manuscripts which differ in length and substance, including some objectionable wording that falsely assigns corporeality to the Divine.

¹⁰ Bukhārī, hadith 3346; Muslim, hadith 2880.

¹¹ Abū Dāwūd, hadith 4338; Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad. *Sunan ibn Mājah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2022), hadith 3252; al-Nasā’ī, hadith 3531.


¹² Tirmidhī, hadith 2169.


¹³ Ibn ‘Alī, Zayd. *Musnad al-Imām Zayd* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), p.374.

¹⁴ Al-Jīlānī, *Al-Ghunyah al-Ṭālib li Tārīq al-Ḥaqq*, v.1, pp.259-260.

MUSLIM UNITY

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Telling Tales of the ‘British’ Nation: The Michaela School Moment and the End of Minority Rights

Arzu Merali looks at how the Michaela School judgment fits into new narratives of nation in the UK, and how it heralds the collapse of minority rights norms.

Who gets to explain what Britain is? A country supposedly with some of the highest levels of soft power in the world – there is an idea (fiction?) that the UK is a land of equality. It is internalised and celebrated in many parts of the world. How its institutions work is still perceived elsewhere to follow what Arun Kundnani described to the [Counternarratives to Islamophobia](#) project in 2018 as the ‘very simple equality and multiculturalism story that is in a way the official, liberal, tolerance argument that’s been there in British society for some time as the official way of thinking about race.’ This, notwithstanding the declarations of politicians and the media since 2011, is the myth that persists.

This is the story projected about ‘race’ to the outside world. Britain, the country where people of non-‘white’ heritage (even Muslims) can hold the highest offices of state. Where girls can wear hijab to school, and celebrity chefs adorn the same. This story, told from the inside, is very different. Reading deeper, we find characters and events that have been directing the narrative, creating a dystopia by demonising the minoritized.

Into the character list comes Katherine Birbalsingh, the supposedly strictest headteacher in the world, and the school she heads, Michaela. The school hit the headlines

recently when a High Court judge sided with the headteacher after she decided to ban praying. This was in response to Muslim students performing one of their obligatory prayers in the playground. The school’s leadership and its prominent political and media supporters hailed the decision as protecting the values of the ‘majority’. What is it that the majority needs protecting from? Moral panics abound – Islamification of education and society, terrorism. It matters not what those demonised say. Theirs is not (part) of the accepted story

Students from Michaela, interviewed by the BBC, have stated their feelings about the ban:

“Once I did find out about the prayer ban, I felt like the school had stripped me and other students of my Islamic identity..”

“I felt belittled and that I had to somewhat change who I was in order to fit in because it’s like they made it seem that being overtly Muslim was non-British or toxic. So I could never really be true to myself.”

“School is stressful and prayer was the only time I got to just connect to God and just find peace and connect to myself again, and it helped me

with my learning - the fact that I couldn’t pray any more, it honestly did more bad than good...That absolutely just made me just dread going to school.”

Whilst on record on the BBC website, this part of the Michaela story has not found recognition in law or praxis. How those feelings expressed by students, or their need to pray, can be a threat to majority society is never explained. Instead, it is the tale(s) told by Birbalsingh and her political connections like Michael Gove and Suella Braverman, right leaning think tanks like Policy Exchange et al. that currently hold the public imagination.

When looking for the ten key counternarratives to Islamophobia in the UK, the [CounterNarratives](#) project undertaken by IHRC and partners across Europe, identified the need for a rewriting of the story of the nation. In the UK, academics noted that the UK is more plural today, and that requires a national conversation that includes many voices. Many of those interviewed, whether academics, activists or artists came back to the idea of the story of the nation. Whilst Britishness as a monolithic ethnic, religious and cultural identity has become a narrative of the last decade and a half, the actual

CIVIL RIGHTS

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IHRC has focused on civil rights in various contexts from its outset in 1997. This area of interest in civil rights and liberties, political, social and minority rights has been realised in various countries, but particularly in the UK. Our areas of focus include: anti-terrorism laws; counter-extremism policy; institutional racism (including Islamophobia) and discrimination; immigration and asylum; policing; shrinking civil society space and the concentration of power.

makeup (now or even historically) of the state that is the United Kingdom does not reflect in religious, ethnic, class or cultural terms the narrative being propounded.

The Michaela (School) moment is but one of many education-related scandals across decades. In these 'scandals' toxic narratives about Muslims became part of legal and policy language and praxis. They also become part of a vociferous storifying of Britain as a nation. A story where British values are being valiantly imposed in education, across wider culture and through law even, because there are those bent on either dividing the nation or worse, taking it over. These stories of nation do not have a good heritage: one nation was the cry of Isabella and Ferdinand as they expelled and murdered Muslims and Jews from the Iberian Peninsula 500 years ago. This was the birth of the 'nation' state, and so many iterations subsequently have seen those in power or seeking it, minoritize, marginalise and expel the undesirables. It takes many forms: banning and burning books, ghettoising, enacting second class citizenship openly and by stealth. Concentration camps. All of these measures require a story to justify them, and the narratives currently in play in the UK, involve the denial of plurality that is a feature of this type of 'nation' building.

Narratives of minority rights were developed in the wake of the Second World War with the purpose of preventing another mass genocide. Those measures include protected rights for minority children in education: the ability of minority parents to choose the type of schooling their children have and to be able to offer them schooling that caters to their needs; linguistic, religious, cultural. The language of the UK's own Human Rights Acts 1998 states that parents have the right to ensure their children's education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions. The school's ban and the judgment in support not only highlights structural bias in the legal system, it unravels the reasoning for minority rights.

The demonised focus on Muslims that will be recounted below – from politicians, think tanks, advisers, media and the legal system – has its own purposes. This includes both the targeting of possible dissent but also innovations and transformation based on new / old ideas whether from Muslims (and Islam), Marxists, or others deemed undesirable. They also provide distraction from the wider crises in British society. The stories being told about Muslims are not only often not true, or highly biased, thus justifying punitive measures against Muslim communities, they are camouflage for system change measures. Meanwhile, the marginalised, are both battling the narratives used against them, but also trying to integrate by making the other narratives about equality, choice in education work for them in the way our national myths of equality imply. Yet in trying to do the latter, Muslims have been exposed to even more accusations of the former.

The battle for British education

To understand how this works: we have to start with an explanation of the politics of 'free schools' in the wider context of schooling in the UK and the ideological attacks on the sector from the successive governments. Even without the furore about multiculturalism, Muslims, wokeism etc, this would still be a sector of crisis: draining government coffers; ideological interventions from successive governments across the blue-red divide; power struggles between local authorities and central government.

In 1976, then Prime Minister James Callaghan prompted the 'Great Debate' about the nature and purpose of public education. As educational journalist Fiona Millar argues, this was: "widely seen as a challenge to the 'secret garden' of the education world; a place inhabited by unaccountable teachers, a nebulous curriculum and most definitely off limits for the political classes of the time."

Millar ([writing in 2013](#)) describes the shift since as one where 'the balance of power between schools and Whitehall' has entirely shifted, with central government in the 1970s having a handful of powers over schools. The Secretary of State for Education now has over 2000, covering everything from teacher standards to the national curriculum to the location of new schools. More controversial, she states, is who runs schools now:

"Once upon a time, this was essentially the preserve of councils and the established churches, whose role in state education goes back decades. Today almost anyone but a local authority can open a school."

Extraordinarily this shift from local physical and financial control and oversight to the centre, has also meant a shift of ideological control from educational professionals to government¹. This latter, means non-educational specialists, a network of advisers and think tanks are advising ministers, in what academic [Sonia Exley](#) describes as an:

"extensive and growing national and international sprawl of think tank, research and 'knowledge actor' (Stone, 2000) sites of education policy activity. Such activity takes place in parallel and in the shadow of government reform and it has supplanted a more traditional civil service reliance on academic policy expertise."

In current times this includes right leaning think tanks like Policy Exchange, Reform and the Taxpayers Alliance, some of which also promote anti-Islam narratives and advocate for crackdowns on Muslim civil society. It is worth noting that one of the founders of Policy Exchange was Michael Gove.

Demonising narratives about the leftists imposing inappropriate politics and ideolo-

gies on unsuspecting British youth pre-exist the current panic about Muslims 'Islamifying' schools. These narratives have been used to justify seismic changes in how education is delivered, its content and the institutions that provide and oversee it. At the same time, a supposedly empowering narrative about 'parental choice' has been deployed. It was levied by Ministers and their advisers as a tool of social empowerment, and as a corrective to the corrupting power of the 'loony left'² in education. Both narratives mask the existence and role of educational ideology channelled between think tanks and ministers (personnel of which are often interchangeable).

When New Labour took office in 1997, a key election mantra was 'Education, Education, Education', based on the concern that the UK's school standards were falling behind its competitors, and that schools in areas of disadvantage were out of control.

Enter academy schools, academisation and free schools. Academy schools were introduced by New Labour, and have been [described](#) as the 'most radical and encompassing programmes of school reform seen in a developed country'. Whilst still considered state schools and publicly funded, they are managed by a private team of independent co-sponsors. Those sponsors delegate management of the school to a largely self-appointed board of governors. They in turn have responsibility for employing all staff, setting pay and conditions of service, discipline codes, performance management etc.

Today some 80% of secondary schools (age 11+) and 40% of primary schools (ages 4 – 11) are [academies](#)³. Whilst many schools volunteered to become academies, the government accrued powers to itself along the way to force academisation onto schools deemed to be underperforming. Many of these are part of Multi Academy Trusts – chains in effect – run by non-profit organisations.

Allowing not-for-profit organisations to get involved in the educational sector was supposed to help deliver innovation by bringing in business and other sector competencies to secure better, nay, transformed futures for the nation's children. It is worth noting that the schools caught up in the Trojan Horse (hereafter referred to as the Trojan Hoax) affair, were schools whose leadership teams (including parent governors and teachers) had brought 'turned around' failing schools into the academy system, and who were [lauded by government](#) at one point and encouraged to take over other schools as part of the academisation model.

The [profiles](#) of the board of Ark Schools, which oversees 34 academy schools, provides some insight into the new regime. Five out of eight members are hedge fund managers. None has any background in education. One of the original board of managers for Ark Schools is Amanda Spielmann. In 2016 she was appointed Chief Inspector of Schools in the UK. She too has no background in education.

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Free for whom? The Free Schools movement and Muslims

The media and policy narratives around 'free schools' also had a faintly familiar ring. No longer talking about the 'loony left', the word woke has now entered the discourse. Not solely related to Muslims, it nevertheless provides cover for those who would argue that minority rights – especially those of Muslims – are egregious demands made to the detriment of the majority, as opposed to basic requirements for a cohesive and equal society. Kemi Badenoch, the minister for business and trade invoked this in her post-Michaela comments: "This ruling is a victory against activists trying to subvert our public institutions. No pupil has the right to impose their views on an entire school community in this way."

'Free schools' are the Conservative party – or more specifically Michael Gove's contribution to system changes in education. All free schools are academies. They are set up from scratch, and unlike other academies, do not need to follow the national curriculum. Further, and more radically still, [any of the following](#) can set up a 'free school':

- charities
- universities
- independent schools
- community and faith groups
- teachers
- parents
- businesses

It is important to understand that other critiques ran alongside those of educational and professional. Racialised communities (including those racialised by faith), were amongst the most aggrieved. Now living several generations in the UK, they found themselves at the lower end of educational achievement not because lack of aspiration, but of where they found themselves living and the state of the schools in those areas. Add to this structural discrimination that set minoritized children at a disadvantage across the schooling system: profiling by teachers, lack of awareness or hostility to cultural and faith practices; gendered and racialised stereotyping in the curriculum etc. Then add peer pressure, hatred and often violence. For many, school was not a happy place, nor a route to social mobility. Their parents wanted change, and this manifested in different demands: from adapted school uniforms and space to pray in mainstream schools, to state funding for Muslim schools (as was [already provided to many Christian and Jewish schools](#)).

Michael Gove has held various ministerial positions since 2010, including the position of Minister for Education from 2010 – 14. He was deeply unpopular with the teaching profession not least because of his ideological zeal when it came to education. US watching readers of this piece will have noticed similarities between the free school and charter school movement. These are not coincidental

with the former seen to be inspired by the latter. Likewise, the attack on 'woke' and the culture wars run parallel in both countries. However, the genesis of 'anti-wokeism' in the US can be largely traced to the Christian right. In the UK, it is figures like Gove who have championed it. Gove – though firmly of the right – does not hail from a 'religious' tradition. He did [however wax lyrical](#) about 'Marxist teachers hell-bent on destroying our schools', and has set his ideological stall as 'traditionalist' education. This type of education is something that Michaela School is supposed to excel at; a focus on love of country, the teaching of English writers and English history before all else. Professor of Education, David Buckingham, in his [review](#) of one of Birbalsingh's books about Michaela describes her as an:

"outspoken crusader[s] against this 'progressive' educational orthodoxy... she described herself as leading a 'revolution in education'... Birbalsingh claims to be non-political... but to judge from the interactions on Twitter; and from the comments on YouTube, her following is heavily dominated by the far right, and the so-called 'anti-woke' movement."

Citing the book he continues his description:

"However, there is also a clear *political* agenda... based on a particular reading of recent (British) history, which sees it as a narrative of moral and cultural decline. In this account, discipline, tradition, morality, national culture and social cohesion have allegedly been undermined by a form of ideological perversion. Apparently, modern Britain has lost its sense of patriotism and national pride: 'our songs, stories and history have been sidelined'. There are too many people in modern Britain 'who appear to believe that rights are not always mirrored by responsibilities'. There is too much emphasis on 'diversity' – on the things that divide us, rather than those which unite us; and this has resulted in a form of 'debilitating collective ignorance'.

"By contrast, at Michaela pupils are required to sing patriotic songs ('God Save the Queen', 'I Vow to Thee, My Country'), to wear poppies and celebrate the Queen's birthday, and to support the England team at football. This form of patriotism, we are told, is a source of 'uplifting unity'. Likewise, according to the Michaela Way, 'powerful knowledge' means a particular selection of *British* knowledge. The role of the curriculum is to prepare pupils for life in 'our' country, and to cultivate a sense of national pride...

"This is clearly not a multicultural, diverse notion of Britishness (or indeed Englishness); nor is it simply a

matter of 'knowledge-based' teaching. On the contrary, it is about inculcating a particular national political ideology – and doing so at a time when this is being asserted in the wider world in ever more vicious and racist terms."

This ideological project controls political narrative about the domestic but also the international. Birbalsingh's friendships and alliances include Gove, but also other doyennes of the right like Suella Braverman (a recent Home Secretary and like Gove a notorious Zionist). Gove – whose anti-Islam philosophy was set out in his book *Celsius 7/7* – was the initiator of the Trojan Hoax witch-hunt against Muslim teachers and governors in Birmingham. Braverman is [a co-founder](#) of the Michaela school and was from its inception until 2018 the chair of the Board of Governors. There are ever-decreasing circles of figures involved in telling this story: depicting themselves as the brave warriors against 'wokeness' and 'Muslimness'. Simon Vessey explains this network of think tankers, ministers and Birbalsingh in detail for [Media Diversified](#), in his piece, 'The Real Trojan Horse Affair'.

Muslim parents, students and groups found themselves on the wrong side of the free school argument. Ironically, many Muslim and other faith community groups found some sympathy with the idea of 'traditionalism' in teaching. From issues as diverse as mathematics teaching methods to the teaching of queer sexualities in social education classes, they were a natural fit for the free schools agenda.

Any expectation that the methods, funding and educational space afforded by free schools could be applied to Muslims however were misplaced. Practically, attempts often failed and were denigrated using [Islamophobic terms](#). Claims about gender segregation were often levelled against Muslim free schools in the media and by Ofsted, with claims coming that this had no place in the UK. This was particularly galling given that gender segregated education exists outside faith settings, and that Michael Gove's [daughter](#) was sent to one [such school](#). Further, despite the supposed opt out from the national curriculum, free schools are in many ways less free than local council schools when it comes to their ideology. They are under the direct supervision and control of the Department of Education, and are inspected by the same inspectorate as all other schools, an inspectorate charged with being institutionally Islamophobic by teaching unions and reported to have been recruiting staff on the basis that their number one priority is to [challenge 'woke nonsense'](#).

Narratives supplant evidence: Where the tropes go

[Tweeting on the Michaela judgment](#), solicitor Zillur Rahman noted that much trust was put in Birbalsingh's accounts without

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corroborating evidence. Narratives supplant evidence. The judge did not question her story. Thus, two of the most prevalent Islamophobic tropes were further institutionalised: Islam and Muslims opposing 'British values'; and Muslims attempting to foist their beliefs through intimidation and violence onto others.

It is a rerun of the tropes used in Trojan Hoax: school takeovers by 'extremist Muslims'; Islamification of schools; diminishing of British culture and values as a result of the promotion of Muslim rights (prayer, hijab, recognition of Eid etc). Just read Birbalsingh's [post-judgment statement](#), all of the tropes are unashamedly there. Various ministers and politicians released similar statements. Mainstream media commentary took their cues accordingly.

A non-exhaustive look at the 2010's reveals more examples. There was the proclamation by the [head of Ofsted](#), Amanda Spielman (remember her?) that Muslim girls wearing hijab were being sexualised and thus a school banning the hijab was correct to do so. Also the claims of erstwhile Prime Minister David Cameron, that Muslim women [lacked basic English skills](#) leading to their exclusion from the labour market (not discrimination) and their children being radicalised by Daesh. This idea of Muslim (women's) lack of education runs against endless research, but still exists as a narrative, providing grist to the mill of misrepresentation. Even [Sajid Javid MP](#), whilst a minister (the Communities Secretary no less) reiterated the 'finding' of the [Casey Review](#) in 2016, that it was Muslim women in particular and the Muslim community more generally who were responsible for the lack of integration into the workplace (read lower employment numbers) of Muslim women.

Set this last announcement and everything stemming from it in the context of reports, that the institutionalising of such tropes in careers advice has resulted in school staff and careers officers [steering girls away](#) from certain professions or failing to give proper advice, to refusing to give references for university courses. In one particularly brutal case received by IHRC, a sixth former was denied a reference to study medicine despite being predicted 4 A* at A-Level, and despite both her parents being doctors. The reason given by the school when challenged was that she would probably just leave the profession and get married and have children in a few years anyway.

Let's go back even further and the comments of the (then infamous,) Bradford headteacher Ray Honeyford whose diatribes against the incompatibility of 'Asian' and 'West Indian' cultures with British schools and society, cost him his job in the 1980s. His incendiary writings included the idea of a conspiracy by Asians to 'produce Asian ghettos' and their 'value system' (as opposed to a perceived British system) and that [there was a](#) "an influential group of black intellectuals of aggressive disposition, who know little of the British traditions of understatement, civilised discourse and re-

spect for reason".

The ghost of Honeyford can be found in Trojan Hoax and in the Michaela case. Whilst contemporary politics eventually saw Honeyford discredited, he is posthumously being celebrated. The Salisbury Review, which printed Honeyford's piece cited above, wrote in 2006, that it "salutes Mr Honeyford's courage and intellectual integrity, which has been so clearly vindicated by recent events". [The Daily Telegraph](#) reprinted the full piece. Once a villain in popular understanding, Honeyford is now a hero of the anti-woke crusade.

What does the majority offer that needs protecting?

As with the Michaela case, narratives become 'truth'. Actual evidence is either never sought or is disregarded. The 'recent events' averred to by The Salisbury Review of 2006 include virulent political and media campaigns against Muslims as failing to integrate. Schools with large populations of Muslim students were targeted as fostering this 'segregation' physical and ideological, and of promoting values alien to 'British society'. To prove the point, the government commissioned a study from the University of Lancaster. [The study](#) involved three schools: one which was almost entirely white; one predominantly Asian Muslim and one mixed. The authors found that:

"The all-White school is unable by itself to overcome the entrenched White extremism that is mediated through the family, the peer group and the enclave. This strongly suggests that in towns with sizeable ethnic minorities, unless White young people are exposed during their school careers to fellow pupils of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, attitudes of White superiority and hostility towards those of other cultures are unlikely to be ameliorated and smouldering resentments will continue into adult life. Enclavisation, however, assists the development of liberal and integrative attitudes among young Asian/Muslim people by providing an oasis of liberality in a strong and cohesive sub-community." (Billings and Holden, 2008: 4)

As one of the report authors noted: 'We have discovered a lot of findings that challenge those assumptions that Muslims are a problem.' Needless to say, there was little media coverage. Instead of being vindicated, Muslims continued to be stigmatised.

The Trojan Hoax affair, coming seven years later, saw these unchecked tropes weaponised by various actors, starting with Michael Gove. Using the pretext of a fake letter claiming an Islamic takeover of schools in Birmingham, several schools and key members of their leadership teams, teachers and parent governors were labelled

extremists, several enquiries were launched and disciplinary procedures and punitive measures brought against those targeted. Yet again, the idea that these schools were incubators for 'extremist' 'anti-British' 'Islamic' ideas was peddled. Their 'evidence' was the changes brought in by teachers and governors: school assemblies that reflected the faith of the majority of students, prayer spaces, sympathetic uniforms. The evidence actually showed these measures to be uncontroversial, with assemblies in particular being entirely consistent with [government guidance](#). Instead, a narrative using those facts was deployed as evidence of an 'Islamic conspiracy'. As the late former London Schools Commissioner and chief education officer for Oxfordshire and Birmingham, Sir Tim Brighouse wrote about the affair:

"...the arrival of academies and free schools has created an open season for lay people and professionals keen to pursue their own eccentric ideas about schooling; and when trust or governor vacancies occur, some perpetuate the very English tradition of inviting friends to join them. When the community is white it doesn't cause much comment. In mono-ethnic east Birmingham, however, it is seen as a Muslim plot to expose pupils to an undefined "extremism"."

Thus Muslims undertaking what other (read white, English) parents undertake in order to better their children's educational circumstances, is pathologized. There is neither equality of opportunity here, or indeed any logic to the criticisms levelled at those involved. But then racism has no logic.

Shrinking spaces: No more expectations

Trojan Hoax showed what happens when Muslims try to make real the opportunities on offer to them as supposedly equal citizens of the UK. Professor John Holmwood and Dr. Therese O'Toole [describe the affair](#) in their book *Countering Extremism in British Schools? The Truth about the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair*, as one of the greatest miscarriages of justice in recent British history. Teachers not only lost their jobs, many were banned from teaching. Likewise, parent governors. The schools themselves, with new leadership teams, all sank in standards. The case of teachers that went to tribunal collapsed as a result of malpractice by lawyers acting for the government who had failed to disclose evidence relevant to the defence, persistent misleading of the panel as to the true state of affairs, and the final refusal by the senior solicitor responsible to attend and explain her actions. In short, they couldn't back up their story.

Yet this found little media coverage that may have gone towards rehabilitating shat-

tered reputations. Holmwood and O’Toole forensically dismantle the claims made during the affair, much of which took its cue from the enquiry headed by former anti-terrorism police chief, Peter Clarke. Clarke’s report was shoddily put together: [statements taken](#) were repeatedly edited and misused. Clarke’s presence reinforced the existing tropes that terrorism was being incubated. Holmwood, in [‘Trojan Horse: A Professional’s View’](#) delves deep into all the ways the story was written with perverse and even malign intent. The central claim, that the school was ‘too religious’, was corroborated only by opinions (not evidence) expressed by those unhappy with the schools. The accusation in itself was meaningless given that – despite the claims of Gove, Clarke (and currently Birbalsingh et al) – schools in the UK are not secular spaces. In fact [collective worship is a requirement](#), and the option of that reflecting the majority faith of pupils, uncontroversial.

The Trojan Hoax erupted in 2014. This was the year that the Michaela school was launched and the comparisons were readily made between these two versions of education in the UK – the one where Islam was being surreptitiously imported as pedagogy and Muslims were overtaking the system versus the brave new/ old world of Birbalsingh, Gove and the Michaela School.

Expectations: who is allowed to have them?

The generation that has undertaken the effort to access options such as free schooling, or simply to effect paper equalities are primarily aged in their late forties, fifties and perhaps older. Back in 2004, while I was part of the IHRC [Muslim Expectations](#) of the Government project, our [third volume](#) dealt with Education, and was published during the intense debate on schooling, Muslims and education in 2006. Over 1200 Muslims in the UK were surveyed. Regarding schooling they were asked whether they prefer: a Muslim school; a state school; or the best school. What were the findings and what do they mean?

The choice of Muslim school was the highest, with 47.5% of those surveyed preferring that. However, the option of the ‘best school’ (meaning the best school in an area regardless of its constitution (faith, state, etc) came second with 38.5%. Only 8.5% chose ‘state school’ as their preference. Looking at the responses for those who chose ‘Muslim school’ it seems that parents wanted a school where their children could grow up with confidence. The age group which chose this option in higher proportion was the one at that time aged 30 – 45, the group which had predominantly been born in the UK. The recounting of not so happy experiences at school was the basis of the expectations.

The recommendations from this research included that the state should fund Muslim faith schools in a manner equal to the provision for other faith communities. This however, was a recommendation of equality for

Muslim communities, and reciprocity and acknowledgement from the state. In terms of actually delivering educational outcomes for Muslim children, the research proposed mainstream schooling integrate ‘dual spaces’ for students into the system: spaces which are shared, and spaces where faith traditions can also have expression. This was happening already in ad hoc manners for decades with schools offering ‘different’ assemblies for Jewish and Muslim students, school uniform adaptations, prayer rooms etc., even before the Human Rights Act of 1998 normalised (in theory) these rights in law. With this type of approach, students could feel safe in their identities, and be able to excel: school becomes a safe place for minoritized identities, education is not a trade-off between faith / culture and opportunity; plurality becomes normalised and functional at an early age. This is basic minority rights.

The end of Minority Rights?

Along with these attacks comes the ever loudening cry of majoritarian rhetoric. In the name of the wider group / larger group, the school / government can impose its values on the whole, and crucially impose restrictions on those minoritized in the discourse. Not even actual minorities but the minoritized: school intake in the Trojan Hoax schools was mainly Muslim. At Michaela, Muslims make up half the school’s intake. Even when they are the largest group, Muslims are not allowed expression of their ‘majority’ status.

Michaela was in many ways a laboratory experiment of how to set up the vision of a free school, now turned laboratory to experiment on how to manage diverse student populations at a time when monolithic nationalism has become the driving ideology in schooling. The framing of the court judgment in the school’s favour will be a touchstone for other school leaderships with less than egalitarian views. It also propels a societal culture that increasingly demands curtailment of expressions of Muslimness – real or perceived.

(Re)Writing the story of the nation

Myriam François, on [these pages](#), describes the need to write the diversity of the national as a counter to: “the truncated history British schoolchildren are raised on and which – alongside a doggedly resistant whiteness of our public sphere”. For the government not to engage in such practices is self-defeating (if the aim is to secure social cohesion and not to foster hatred as a distraction) when, as François elaborates, any of us, child or not sees that:

“the country which birthed you denies your full existence, forces you into narrow strictures which negate your reality and expect you to toe a line which betrays your humanity, the fireworks are surely inevitable.”

Fireworks or not, there is only so much that affected communities themselves can do to write those stories, tell the tales of their existence, and indeed the tales of what being ‘British’ in all its plurality might and in an everyday sense, be. Online Muslim media – of many varieties – abound. Art and poetry from the next generations, celebrate and critique unashamedly the multiple experiences and identities of our communities. Mosque open days, council – community festivals, Muslim led social projects (soup kitchens, neighbourhood services), present our own version(s) of events, history, society. What is missing is the reciprocity of those who hold the power to make those words writ large. Government, their advisers, friendly media and the legal establishment simultaneously exclude those voices, and undergird each others’ efforts at exclusion. That exclusion – a literal silencing – is only a few steps away from physical silencing. The road has been paved with bans of dress, of teaching, and now praying. How long before books too? I don’t mean Muslim books. Plenty bans of those exist (actual or self-imposed) as a result of the anti-terrorism laws. I mean the other books that will fall foul of the anti-woke crusade, the markers of which will shift as easily as they have for the signifiers of errant Muslimness.

In allowing all sorts of tales to be told about Muslims, the British establishment has created a story of the British nation that should be a concern to every observer who cares about minority rights. With no prospect of this or the next government changing the script, the ending does not seem to be a happy one. Nevertheless, if only for the sake of histories to be written after the fact, we need to continue telling the truth and exposing the lies.

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¹ A 2022 Education Bill was eventually withdrawn after even former ministers opposed what was widely seen as a power grab by the Department of Education that would cede even more power to the Minister for Education.

² The term ‘loony left’ was prevalent in the press in the 1970s and 1980s and tended to target Labour councils. An amorphous term it was used to slur individuals and groups (including some councils, the GLA and its then leader, Ken Livingstone) as obsessed with fringe issues, race and anti-racism measures, and support for causes such as Irish republicanism and Palestinian liberation.

³ As an interesting side-note, current statistics suggest that remaining council run schools are outperforming academies, calling into question the very reason for academisation in the first place. See [Banfield-Nwachi \(2023\)](#)



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