

There's more to BLM platform than 'genocide' charge



Mira Sucharov

The Movement for Black Lives recently released its platform for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, resulting in a hardening of divisions across the Jewish community. Most controversial is its reference to Israeli "genocide" against Palestinians. While some groups (Jewish Voice for Peace and the anti-occupation group If Not Now) have embraced the platform, others have criticized it. Boston's Jewish Community Relations Council has been harshest in its condemnation, refusing to work with any BLM-affiliated group. Others, including the Anti-Defamation League, T'ruah and J Street, have also pushed back against the use of the word genocide. In response, the platform's drafters have doubled down, saying, "we will not allow anyone to bully us into sanitizing our words."

The use of the term genocide is indeed problematic, and it obscures what really is happening to Palestinians, which is bad enough. There are plenty of wrongs committed in the name of upholding the occupation that we, as Canadian Jews, should be concerned about, including home demolitions, the use of administrative detention, sleep deprivation and physical abuse in prisons, detaining minors, land appropriation, and the lack of freedom of movement.

There will still be those who bristle at the links made between American injustice and Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. If so, we should take the issuing of the Black Lives Matter platform as a reminder that we need to work to ameliorate racial injustice in our own country.

In Canada, while we don't imprison our population at the high rates the Americans do, we face similar racial issues. Blacks and Aboriginals are overrepresented in our prison systems and are more likely to be stopped by police than white people are, for example.

Rabbi Elizabeth Bolton of Or HaNeshama congregation in Ottawa is a leader

on issues of racial injustice. Having served as a rabbi in Baltimore for 14 years before relocating to Ottawa, she became an "ally" among faith leaders on issues such as pervasive homelessness, food insecurity and lead poisoning, which, sadly, is pervasive among children in poorly maintained American rental housing.

When T'ruah, in which she's a rabbinic *chaver* (member), put out a call for people to include a Black Lives Matter sign alongside their Chanukah candles 18 months ago to raise awareness of police shootings, Rabbi Bolton enthusiastically complied.

"The movement for Black Lives, and the perspective of Black Lives Matter resonate with an experience that I witnessed up close," she says.

And what of the "genocide" term in the Black Lives Matters platform? "Like some elements of language used in highly charged political moments," Rabbi Bolton said, "it's a strong word, and it may or may not be the best term to use. But it does not negate for me the power of the call in this historical moment in the United States."

Most importantly for Rabbi Bolton, "Black Lives Matter makes links between the experience of black and brown people in the United States to black and brown people in Israel/Palestine. We would do well to hearken to that analysis and see where it leads us – to create alliances, awareness and understanding here." And as Canada's "Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called for faith communities to be part of [the reconciliation process]," Rabbi Bolton notes that "learning about First Nations, Métis and Inuit rights is definitely on the horizon within our congregational community."

As Canadians, we don't have any legislative say in America or Israel. But we can take a stand – on social media, in op-eds, at Jewish gatherings and in our shuls. And if we are troubled by the use of one word or another by a set of activists to characterize some set of policies, let's take the opportunity to learn more about what actually is going on, even if it's painful to see.

When it comes to human suffering, Rabbi Bolton says, "There's a Jewish mandate to respond." ■

Peace depends on Palestinian acceptance of a Jewish state



Mordechai Ben-Dat

Many Israelis and supporters of Israel who wish to see a sovereign Jewish state living securely, at peace with its neighbours and fully contributing to the advancement and welfare of the world, of the region and of its own citizens, believe that this can only be achieved if the Palestinians, too, have a sovereign place of their own. Ruling, even in the most benign manner, over millions of Arabs who do not wish to be citizens of Israel will always be a permanent stumbling block to achieving such a shimmering state of peace, security and true national fulfilment.

Getting to that sovereign place for Palestinians, however, has proven to be impossible.

As more evidence continues to accumulate, adding to the mountain of facts that first started to pile up in the

second decade of the last century, honest observers of the conflict must finally admit that the reason for this – for the absence of a sovereign state for Palestinian Arabs in the year 2016 – has been the visceral, atavistic, faith-based refusal among generations of self-appointed Palestinian leaders to accept a sovereign Jewish presence in their midst.

The men who vaulted themselves to the head of the Palestinian political line – Haj Amin El Hussein, Ahmad Shukairy, Yasser Arafat, George Habash, Khaled Mashal and Ismail Haniyeh – have all predicated the rise of a Palestinian state upon the cinder, smoke and ash of a Jewish one.

To this list, it seems, we can now add Mahmoud Abbas.

How else can we explain his senseless but revealing decision to sue Great Britain for having issued the famous Balfour Declaration nearly 100 years ago?

British Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour, issued the declaration on Nov. 2, 1917. It was addressed to Lord Rothschild, the paradigmatic representative of the Jewish People, in the British

government's mind at least. Balfour was motivated by pressing geopolitical and military factors as well as by his strong Christian beliefs. So he arranged for the War Cabinet of Great Britain to authorize him to send the following statement to Lord Rothschild.

"His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Even at the very moment of its public issuance, the declaration was merely a statement of inclination. It was not binding policy. Actually, Britain never implemented policy that even remotely hued true to the declaration. In sad point of fact, Britain effectively reversed the spirit underlying the declaration when it published and implemented its infamous White Paper, limiting and then pre-

venting immigration by Jews to Palestine at the very harshest moments of the Nazis' persecution and slaughter of Jews.

Jonathan Tobin, a political commentator for *Commentary*, astutely points out that "by focusing on the Balfour Declaration and treating it as illegal, what the Palestinians are doing is rejecting the very legitimacy of the Jewish presence anywhere in the country."

This, unfortunately, is not new. It has been the Palestinian leaders' recurring tactic since the Balfour Declaration was proclaimed a long century ago. They seek first to tear down the society built by the Jews before they attempt to raise a society of their own. They have failed. And they will always fail, for, as Lord Balfour knew, the Jews are indigenous to the territory the Romans took from the Jews and named Palestina in 132 BC and the Jews renamed the State of Israel in 1948.

Weep for the Palestinian people because they continue to be victimized and betrayed by their own leaders. And then weep, too, for the possibility of permanent peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. ■

It's time to widen the debate on Israel and Palestine



Mira Sucharov

Does the Canadian Jewish conversation on Israel need broadening, and what would it take to see us broaden our public debate platform to include those voices most critical of Israel?

Recently, American commentator Peter Beinart has urged the Jewish establishment to take seriously the perspective of those who oppose Zionism on intellectual and philosophical grounds. Simone Zimmerman has called on these same Jewish leaders to listen to “millennials’ deep outrage at the grave injustices committed by the Jewish state.” And then there was the founding of Open Hillel (on whose academic council I sit), which calls on Hillel International to relax its standards of partnership to include a broader discussion of human rights and international law in the context of Israel

and Palestine – namely, to include debate around boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). (The BDS movement promotes three main goals: ending the occupation, instilling equality among Israeli citizens, and allowing refugee return.)

It's no surprise that the mainstream Jewish community embraces Zionism as a touchstone of Jewish communal identity and, therefore, militantly opposes BDS. In addition to being uncomfortable with the basic idea of boycotting Israel, most in the Jewish community realize that at least one of BDS's demands – that of full refugee return – would directly challenge one of Zionism's core aims, namely to maintain a Jewish-majority state.

I have gone on record many times opposing the end game of BDS, which I don't think sufficiently accounts for the needs and identities of both sides. But these debates over Israel, Zionism and the future of the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan are happening, and there's every sign that they will intensify. And neither can the violence, fear and suffering simply be wished away. BDS offers one set of tactics accompanied by a particular set of

goals. If these tactics or goals are deemed unsuitable, what are others offering in return to address the wide-scale human rights violations and seemingly endless occupation?

When it comes to BDS, these conversations can continue to happen in quiet corners – like debates and panels on BDS in which I've participated (one, in Ottawa, that my synagogue refused to allow to be advertised and another, in Vancouver, which did gather some press in the *Jewish Independent*) – or on social media, where I am currently hosting a focused, multi-part exchange on my public Facebook page between two individuals in Ottawa: David Roytenberg, an active Jewish community member, and Peter Larson, chair of “Canada Talks Israel-Palestine.”

That debate began with the guiding question of whether BDS is or is not anti-Semitic, but quickly expanded to include incisive exchanges around whether settlements are an obstacle to peace; whether the separation barrier is an act of self-defence or motivated by a desire to hem in Palestinians, what has historically motivated Palestinian violence; whether

the 1967 war was a defensive one; whether Jews have a right to live across the Green Line; and whether the demand for Israel to withdraw is a fair one.

When political discourse occurs in silos, attitudes tend to harden. Talking across the divide – however painful it might be – forces everyone to examine their deeply held assumptions and beliefs. It soon becomes clear which beliefs are worth holding onto and which ones should be updated or discarded. And if the chief debaters may not as easily do this themselves, at least those listening in can.

Wrestling with challenging ideas – including uncomfortable truths about Israel's founding, identifying the most legitimate tactics of dissent, issues around ethnic privilege, nationalism, competing narratives, and the needs and rights of all – is not an easy task. There might be some costs along the way – identities might be shaken, the veneer of community agreement may be eroded, those donors who prefer an echo-chamber model of community discourse might express displeasure or worse – but our community will ultimately be stronger for having let in more light. ■

The facts about Israel that BDSers don't want you to know



Mordechai Ben-Dat

What is so galling about the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement that targets Israel and its supporters is its utterly false and fraudulent foundation.

It is patently untrue that Israel is an apartheid state. Yet by brandishing that loaded term, the originators of the BDS movement – among them the clever Omar Barghouti – knew they would attract many idealistic youths to their cause.

Barghouti and his confederates claim Israel is an apartheid state because it occupies Palestine. The fact he has only ever defined this “occupation” in terms of *all* of pre-1948 Mandatory Palestine has never bothered the idealistic young people who shout his hateful, vile slogans at countless college rallies around the western world. Nor do his ardent champions seem to

acknowledge, let alone care, that the BDS founders are opposed to two states – Israel and Palestine – living side by side. Barghouti does not believe the Jews are entitled to their own sovereign existence in the Middle East.

And yet, students and professors in North America and Europe flock to Barghouti's extreme, anti-Israel mission like ravenous cicadas swarming a fruit tree.

This, of course, is the source of great pique and piercing sadness. We know the BDS movement exploits many well-meaning, if not always well-informed, students. Of course, there are true haters of Israel and disparagers of Jews who populate the BDS movement. But they are not our concern.

Our concern is for the gullible and the easily deceived who wish, as caring individuals, to stand for justice, integrity and the sanctity of life. They are rightly opposed to actual “apartheid.” But they know so little about Israel's conflict with the Palestinians that they're unable to resist the social and other pressures that sweep them up in the zealotry of their good intentions.

So, we bring two recent stories that depict a different, more factual image of Israel.

- Earlier this month, Israel announced it's donating a water purification system, the GalMobile, to drought-stricken Papua New Guinea. Approximately 85 per cent of the country's six million people lack access to electricity and tap water. The vehicle is a mobile potable water-treatment, storage and distribution system that connects to any possible water source and produces safe drinking water at World Health Organization standards in less than 30 minutes, yielding approximately 8,000 cups of water per hour.

The Caesarea-based G.A.L. Water Technologies and Israel's Foreign Ministry have been providing water-treatment systems to countries in Africa for more than 20 years.

- Last month, Israel embarked on a bold agricultural aid program in Senegal – a mostly Muslim country – to help change the future of the arid, food-starved nation of some 14 million people. The project was conceived years ago and is known by the acronym TIPA (Technology, Innovation and Poverty Alleviation). Israel is partnering with local universities to provide training in rural agriculture technologies, specifically the drip irrigation system it invented. Drip

irrigation tubes line the landscape, where small farms – each of about 1,000 square metres – are being built under Israeli-Italian-Senegalese auspices. In all, Israel plans to help create and assist 4,000 small family farms to produce their own crops.

Former prime minister Aminata Toure, who advises Senegal's president, praised Israel's approach to aiding her country. “We would like to strengthen the agricultural connection with Israel,” she said, while Agriculture Minister Papa Abdoulaye Seck added: “[Israel] is in a difficult environment, but [it makes] the difference due to knowledge, technology and willingness to transform the environment.” Toure noted that more than 600 Senegalese have been trained in Israel in agriculture and other fields.

This is the news that BDS champions crave to suppress. It tells the deeper truth about the Jewish state. But truth is not in the BDSers' interest. The proponents of BDS avoid the truth, because they know that if discovered, it might inspire a genuine curiosity about Israel among some BDS champions, who might then understand they've been exploited all along. ■

Democracy means individuals can choose



Mira Sucharov

The sublime thing about liberal democracies is that they are based on the rights and responsibilities of individuals rather than groups. Unlike the kind of sectarian societies imploding in civil war in the Middle East, in a liberal democracy, it is the individual who chooses to go to the ballot box (or abdicate) or to attend a protest (or go to the movies), and it is the individual who must abide by the law or face punishment.

In robust multicultural societies like Canada's, individuals are given another opportunity – to identify as an ethnic, religious or cultural group. And those groups are considered a boon to the fabric of society. But ultimately, all rights and responsibilities rest solely with the person.

Which is why the recent call for Mus-

lims in Canada and the United States to publicly denounce acts of terrorism committed by the Islamic State (ISIS) and others inspired by them, is understandable – but ultimately wrong.

Here's where it's understandable. Terrorism – defined as the targeting of civilians for political ends – is morally distasteful. When committed by a fellow citizen, the action is especially corrosive, leading to distrust and paranoia. When an act of terrorism is committed by a person or group claiming to act on behalf of a particular religion, it's tempting to want everyone else from that religion to denounce the action.

But here's where it's wrong. As a Jew, I regularly urge my fellow Jews to stand up for injustice as Jews, to stand up against an array of Israeli policies that I find objectionable. I encouraged my JCC (where I was then a board member) to undertake staff training around LGBTQ awareness, thus enabling it to declare itself an "LGBTQ safe zone," as facilitated by the Jewish LGBTQ organization, Keshet. As a Jew, and as a Jewish columnist in the Jewish press, I stand up for religious freedom

in Israel, for human rights, for an end to the occupation and for racial and ethnic equality.

But let's recall an incident last summer with Jewish pop singer Matisyahu. Organizers attempted to ban Matisyahu from performing at a music festival in Spain unless he denounced the Israeli occupation. Matisyahu is an American, not an Israeli. His only association with the Jewish state is that he himself is Jewish. It was a distasteful act of political theatre on the part of the organizers precisely because they drew a faulty line of logic: Israeli occupation is morally objectionable – all Jews (or at least famous ones) must take a public stand *because they are Jews*. (After a public outcry, the festival organizers backtracked.)

In a liberal democracy, whatever collective identities we hold – sexual, religious, ethnic and so on – are the domain of the private sphere unless we choose, as individuals, to act otherwise. So while I hope my fellow Jews will take a stand against an array of social ills, and am aware that some don't, I would be disgusted and disturbed if, say, a work

colleague or a politician or a journalist in a local or national daily were to demand that I, because I happen to be Jewish, denounce one thing or another.

The upshot? Community conversations about dynamics relating to that community are crucial to have. But they are just that: community conversations. We must leave members of synagogues, mosques, churches, JCCs and other organizations to debate amongst themselves whether and how to publicly denounce actions committed in their name. The pages of the *Canadian Jewish News* may indeed be one useful forum among many for these tough conversations.

And perhaps the Jewish community, being more integrated, prosperous and secure than the Muslim community in North America, may even serve as a model. But demanding that sort of stand-taking by others in a civic forum violates the delicate multicultural balance that is intrinsic to a liberal democracy where the individual is the only meaningful object and subject of political action. ■

Ensuring a Jewish future through education



Mordechai Ben-Dat

Some 18 months after the end of the war in Europe in May 1945, the full extent of the ghoulis slaughter of European Jewry was already known. The full extent of the shock, however, had not yet been absorbed. Nor has it been, truly, even today.

In finding their place in the postwar world that blew clear from the cinder and ash of the battlefields – and, it must be said, from the crematoria – Jews around the world had little time then for memorials and monuments. The needs of the hour were too pressing.

Foremost among them was rallying in defence of the Yishuv, the Jews in Mandatory Palestine striving to bring forth a sovereign Jewish state in the face of murderous hostility from surrounding Arab nations.

But other urgent causes wrought by the war also stirred the hearts of Jews around the world. A.M. Klein, the brilliant Montreal-based writer, poet, scholar and advocate for the Jewish People wrote of one such cause in an editorial in the *Canadian Jewish Chronicle* on Jan. 17, 1947.

"With the destruction of [European] Jewry a great, an important, a vital link in the chain [of our cultural tradition] was broken," he lamented. "The paramount question of Jewish culture today is: shall North American Jewry, free, vigorous and conscious of its responsibilities both to the past and the future, step in and fill up the breach? Shall North American Jewry now play the role which both position and duty impose upon it?"

But having posed these fundamental questions, Klein dismissed them as merely rhetorical. He could not imagine that the Jews whom the Nazis did not reach – some two-thirds of the 17 to 18 million who comprised world Jewry in 1939 – "could possibly contemplate the spiritual suicide that must follow from indifference" to the preservation of

Jewish life, or as Klein called it, Jewish cultural tradition.

For Klein the answer was obvious. He had no doubt Jews worldwide would immediately tend to the survival of a Jewish future even as they would tend to the healing of the survivors and the protection and defence of a sovereign Jewish home. The way to achieve the survival of a Jewish future was equally obvious to Klein. He tells us in typically elegant prose.

"Whether we are a People of the Book is not merely a matter of destiny but of will, and that will is best manifested, both in our own personal respect for the treasures of our heritage and in the support which we give to our cultural institutions. Such a key institution is the Talmud Torah [Jewish education]... It is here that [the students and the graduates] first catch hold of those strands which must forever knit them to their past and here that they forge those minds and those wills of which their people today so grievously stand in need."

The situation and issues that confront

the Jewish People in January 2016 are not those that confronted us in January 1947. But nor are they so different, either.

The State of Israel, now in its 68th year, though imperfect, thrives in so many respects that were unimaginable in 1947. But not even for one day since its birth has its existence been accepted by the Arab world. Moreover, as the historian Joshua Muravchik recently noted, "hatred of Israel is the most deadly thing facing the Jewish People since Hitler."

And what would Klein say of the way in which we have tended to the survival of the Jewish future? The cultural institution that for him was the chief guarantor of that survival – Jewish education, in all its manifest forms – has become shamefully beyond the financial reach throughout North America for most of the grandchildren of his 1947 readers.

Klein would feel sad, concerned, angry and then, like many individuals across the grassroots of Diaspora Jewry today, determined to solve the crisis of the unaffordability of Jewish education. ■