

Introduction

Oxfam America is a charitable organization supported by “global citizens” that aims to end poverty, hunger and social injustice. It claims to be “one of the most effective international relief and development organizations in the world.”

But Oxfam is more than a charity; it is also a propaganda vehicle for the demonization of Israel. Recently Oxfam criticized global good-will ambassador Scarlett Johansson, for representing SodaStream, an Israeli company in the West Bank. Oxfam, arrogated to itself, the role of moral arbiter by suggesting it was wrong to promote trade with a company in “occupied territory.” Never mind that the territory is “disputed” and one might ignore as well the employment of approximately 500 Palestinians; Oxfam knows what is best for the region. To Ms. Johanson’s credit, she ended her relationship with the charity citing “a fundamental difference of opinion in regards to the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.” (BDS)

BDS spokesman, Omar Barghouti, states the objective of this movement with utter clarity, “The right of Palestinian refugees to return to the homes and lands from which they were displaced and dispossessed in 1948.” While “Nakba” or the Arab catastrophe is now ensconced in the BDS narrative, most of the reliable histories of the period indicate the Palestinian Arabs joined surrounding Arab states in a war of extermination against the fledging State of Israel. These Palestinians left their homes with the understanding they would return at war’s end. But at the end of this vicious war in which thousands were killed and maimed, the Arab side lost and security measures were introduced to protect Israel from attacks in the so-called territories.

Should the absurd plan of BDS be realized – absurd in the sense even a great grandchild of a Palestinian who my live in the West is considered a refugee (the only such condition in the world) – the state of Israel would cease to exist. Nonetheless, BDS has gained traction since Israel is increasingly considered a colonial oppressor.

Overlooked in this narrative is the fact that Jewish communities in Iraq, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Yemen, have all been forced out of existence creating Jewish refugees of more than 600,000. These people are not recognized by the United Nations or even acknowledged by the world media corps.

While the Middle East is aflame with civil wars, terrorism and anti-humanistic sentiment, Israel has become the political preoccupation in many Western centers of opinion. Yet it is the only

democratic, open and truly multi-ethnic society in the region – the only nation where Jews and Arab sit side by side in the parliament.

It is instructive that Omar Barghouti, the aforementioned BDS activist, is a graduate of Tel Aviv University and, in fact, the university resisted a worldwide petition to have him expelled for his radical views, upholding the principle of free thought and speech and awarding him a Masters degree in philosophy. Where in the Muslim world could a story of this kind be told?

In 2014 the Valedictorian at Technion University Medical School was a Ms. Mais Ali-Saleh. She is a Muslim raised in a small Arab village outside of Nazareth. Most significantly, she is a living example that contradicts BDS claims that Israel is an “apartheid state.” Ms. Ali-Saleh noted, “An academic boycott of Israel is a passive move and it doesn’t achieve any of its purported objectives.” She went on to point out that BDS “perpetrates falsehoods” since Arab women in Israel have more freedom, liberty and academic opportunities than any Arab country. In fact, she added, Arab countries should be pressured into emulating Israel’s academic freedom and democracy.

This viewpoint, however, is submerged before the starry eyed preaching of Roger Waters, the lead singer of Pink Floyd. In a recent interview Waters argued that Israel promotes “ethnic cleansing” as part of its “racist apartheid regime,” drawing parallels to Vichy governments and Nazi Germany. He even described the systematic murder of Jews in the Holocaust as no different from the “murder of Palestinian people.” This blood libel, this rancid hatred, goes on without public outrage. Waters claims many artists share his views, but are fearful of speaking out because of “the powerful Jewish lobby.” The Waters statements actually prove the opposite. Instead of public censure, he goes about his hateful rhetoric without the slightest care, making tens of millions in concerts across the country.

Waters has his allies in the swamp of anti-Semitism; yet well meaning, often misguided Jews have also accepted the BDS narrative. For many, this is the manifestation of ignorant or unsophisticated opinion; for others, it is the expression of leftist rhetoric – the latest cause of the professional *soi disant* “do gooders”; for still others, it is a way to put pressure on the Netanyahu government for greater flexibility in territorial negotiation. Whatever the motivation BDS has gained ground on American campuses.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article Lucette Lagnado explains her consternation over a piece by the Vassar Jewish Union president who supports the American Studies Association boycott of Israeli academic exchanges. According to Ms. Lagnado the piece had all the now familiar

buzzwords: “atrocities,” “oppression,” “abuse,” “colonial” and the always present “apartheid.” The head of the Jewish Studies program also expressed support for the boycott.

The essence of BDS program is to make Israel and its supporters toxic in the groves of academe. Even some Hillels have engaged in a concession to the onslaught of campus opinion by encouraging debate on the very existence of Israel, a position in direct violation of the Hillel charter. Under the banner of “a diverse range of opinion” anti-Israel opinion is now legitimate. It is curious that what is good for the goose isn’t good for the gander. Where is the academic debate and openness on the atrocities occurring daily against Christians in Muslim dominated countries? And where is the comparison between the dictates of Sharia and the liberty exercised in Israel?

The bearers of anti-Zionism present their bigotry not as prejudice, but as a worthy ideal of social justice. Yet the question remains; “whose justice?” If Zionist thought is the original sin, only dismantling the Jewish state can redress the past. So many of the anti-Zionists claim that they do not oppose Judaism, only the state of Israel. But the main guarantor of Jewish security since the end of World War II is the sovereign state of Israel. It wasn’t born on the ashes of the Holocaust, but it is the last fortress against reenactment. The Chinese wall between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism is growing porous and the distance between polite discourse and sheer vile bigotry is narrowing.

My guess is that BDS will ultimately fade. It is laughably different from the boycott movement that unseated South African apartheid, even though this analogy is casually made. BDS cannot stand the bright light of day. Then again, as Chairman Mao maintained, a lie repeated a thousand times becomes the truth. For a generation uneducated about the past BDS propaganda is like catnip. Its appeal may be irresistible for some, creating a lot of damage in its path. In fact, we are living with some of that damage at the moment.

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