

The Long View

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From Bosnia to the US: Fighting religious and political particularism



SAEED A. KHAN

**Remember,
Remember the Third
of November: The
2020 US Election**

**DAWUD
WALID**

**Muslims' Engagement
in 2020 with BLM:
Promise and Problems**

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**Peace
is still
holding**

**JENNIFER
LOEWENSTEIN**

**Samson's Rage:
A Critique of
Modern Zionism**

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

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People get the leaders they deserve, the saying goes. This saying does at least hold true for democracies in which people have the power to choose who governs them. That the citizens of the UK and US decided in recent years to elect boorish, unextraordinary imbeciles to the highest office speaks volumes about the dumbing down of politics and the social and economic changes that have given the polarising policies of Boris Johnson and Donald Trump mass appeal.

In our lead article in this issue, **Saeed A. Khan** explores the reasons for rising populism in the US. He locates the breakdown of centrist politics in the US in the Reagan era when a former Hollywood heart throb ignited a smouldering Christian conservatism by framing the Cold War as a fight between God and the devil. Viewed through this lens, the collapse of communism was seen as a vindication of Christianity and conservatism. More importantly it held out the promise of a new paradigm of social engineering that has fuelled the efforts and ambitions of some Christian movements ever since. The movement has accelerated in response to a moral panic over changing demographics which point to the white majority becoming a minority by 2050 and also the challenge posed by China to the US' global economic dominance.

Looking ahead, the incoming President Biden will start his stewardship of a nation that has deeply embedded structural flaws and vulnerabilities. His immediate priority will be to repair the damage wrought by his predecessor, which will require a huge amount of healing and reconciliation. Khan is pessimistic:

"The past four years have been marked by a normalisation and even an endorsement, explicitly or implicitly, of bigotry, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, among a list of attitudes that are antithetical to social cohesion. While the new president can certainly reset the official government tone of what will and won't be tolerated, a recalibration of civil society may prove far more elusive, given the depth of discord and distrust among various factions in the country."

The extent of the fissures in US society have nowhere been more exposed than over the lingering issue of racism. Last summer's murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis by a white policeman once again brought anti-racism protestors flooding onto the streets only to be met by a counter movement comprising white supremacists reacting to what they saw as a near and present threat to White Anglo Saxon hegemony. The Black Lives Matter network (BLM) soon assumed the leadership of the movement, also receiving backing from US Muslim groups after years of scepticism and wariness.

In our second article, **Imam Dawud Walid** argues that this standoffishness is still justified. There is a big difference between standing up for the dignity of Black life and BLM. Specifically, elements of the BLM network, particularly those championing LGBTQ+ aims, espouse values that are diametrically opposed to Islam. Moreover, the aggressive, even if non-violent, protest tactics of certain BLM activists are far detached from the Prophetic method. While welcoming the belated take-up of racial justice causes

by US Muslims, Walid is concerned that the faithful remain guided by sacred principles: "It should not be the case that Muslims are completely copying BLM including using their language which seeks to normalise and promote the forbidden, nor should they be actively given platforms within our community which could further confuse our community, especially the youth."

Moving away from the US, our third piece analyses the dangers posed by irredentism to the integrity of Bosnia Herzegovina.

The Dayton Agreement of 1995 marked the end of the regional wars that broke out following the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia between 1990-1992. As some of the autonomous regions and republics exercised their peoples' desire to gain independence from the Serb dominated state, they were attacked and invaded by Yugoslav armed forces. The complicating factor in Bosnia was that it was also invaded by a secessionist Croatia which laid claim to territory there. By the time the Balkan wars had run their course, an estimated 140,000 people had lost their lives, some in the worst massacres to afflict mainland Europe since the Second World War.

Demir Mahmutćehajić argues that centrifugal forces based on religio-politics continue to undermine the survival of a federal Bosnia. He describes the current state of affairs as something less than peace, a ceasefire that cannot last indefinitely, especially given that the protagonists are expending great efforts to establish a legal basis for their objectives. Sooner or later, according to Mahmutćehajić, the openly expressed desire of Serbs and Croats to secede will be translated into action.

Our final piece by **Jennifer Loewenstein** describes how modern Zionism, informed as it is by racial exceptionalism, land theft and necessary violence, continues to blight the lives of Palestinians in their own homeland. Interspersed with accounts of their harrowing everyday ordeals which she herself has witnessed at first hand, Loewenstein highlights how the foundational principles of the country that purports to be the only democracy in the Middle East fly in the face of the most basic democratic principles and human rights.

She writes: "Try as one might to argue that Israel can be Jewish and democratic simultaneously, the history of Israel and the facts of daily life belie this claim. The mechanisms of exclusion reach far beyond empirical data. An ingrained system of belief and more than 70 years of indoctrination sponsored by state legal, educational, and military institutions will remain no matter how eloquently Israel's apologists might hope to wish them away."

These bleak pictures of the arguably inherent inequalities of nation states are a necessary reminder for those interested in a just future, that only a fundamental change in how we politically organise is required. The way we work as movements and networks needs to understand that, if we are to move towards a world free of the violent harms of 'nation' and 'state' that we live through today. Let's organise.

Faisal Bodi and Arzu Merali
Editors

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Remember, Remember the Third of November: The 2020 US Election, Its Outcome and Implications

Can a new US emerge from the bitter polarisation of recent decades, or is the future more of the tempestuous same? **Saeed Khan** looks at the past, its possibilities and missed opportunities, and the ever-degrading position of Muslims in the US present and future.

To paraphrase Voltaire, if Donald Trump did not exist, he would have to be invented. The fact is that Trump does exist, yet, ironically, one would not be incorrect to infer that he was the product of self and media creation. Centuries from now, people will question how a boorish, self-promoting failed businessman and reality television show star ascended to become 45th President of the United States. Such bewilderment, already underway, requires a lens of analysis that transcends a purely political focus. It involves a deep exploration of America's cultural tides and storms as well as a 50-year extrapolation into the nation's recent history to seek context of the origins of the phenomena that produced both Trump and the climate that reinforces him. Above all, to understand Trump warrants delving into that critical component of economics – the law of supply and demand. While Trump certainly provides the former, it is essential to understand the latter as well.

One would be hard pressed to find an American who responds with ambivalence when the name Trump is invoked. In Newtonian terms, for every strong aversion, there is an equal and opposite adoration for the occupier of the Oval Office. Yet, it is fitting that such deeply held, polar opposite sentiments exist as they are merely a reflection of the severe polarisation that defines American society today. Yeats warned that the centre cannot hold, and the American discursive landscape has proven him right. Polls affirm that most issues of political and/or social concern are perceived with strong opinions on either side, with no meaningful inclination toward nuance, even acknowledgment of an alternate possibility. The very idea of bipartisanship appears to be an absurdity or, at best, an anachronism from some bygone era when misguided politicians sought to achieve consensus through mutual compromise.

Evangelicals and the Reagan Revolution

The inauguration in 1981 of Ronald Reagan as America's 40th President was a paradigm shift in the nation's political his-

tory. The new decade portended the promise of new possibilities and a reset from what had been seen as the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s. The United States had experienced a significant amount of change, some of it positive, as with the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but it was also a victory won at tremendous cost. The death spasms of Jim Crow America confirmed that the country's racism was not going to be terminated by the stroke of President Lyndon Johnson's pen. The subsequent protests and riots that ensued in the remaining years of the 1960s clarified that racism was but one facet of broader, deeper societal inequalities that were delineated by way of the opposition to America's military intervention in Vietnam. Reagan, an openly devout and self-professed Christian, awakened a dormant yet ambitious movement of Christian conservatives who now had someone in the White House unafraid to speak the language of their faith, weaving it seamlessly and unapologetically into political and social rhetoric. Reagan framed the Cold War as a battle between good and evil: the godly Americans vs the godless, communist Soviets. The end of the Soviet Union was seen as a victory of Reagan's and a vanquishment by (Capitalist) Christianity over Communism, in both religious and socio-economic terms. The prospect of exerting further influence in the political arena and the promise of a new paradigm of social engineering has fueled the efforts and ambitions of such Christians, especially Evangelicals, ever since.

Right-Wing Populism and the Perfect Candidate

The 2008 Recession served as a turning point in American politics. During the closing overs of the George W. Bush administration, the credit crash and ensuing economic misery was the final repudiation of a Republican administration and system that had plunged the nation into costly and crippling conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and had addressed the financial crisis by bailing out banks and the wealthy at the expense and neglect of the working class.

The ensuing discontent among a large segment of the electorate decided to punish the Republicans by staying home on Election Day, and helping to catalyse the rise of the first Black American president. But while Barack Obama's election brought a sense of hope and guarded optimism for meaningful change and renewal, the reality was that America was still structurally flawed, and the systems that had created the malaise continued unchecked, yet seemingly embraced by both Democrats and Republicans. The counter-establishment on the Left constituted itself as the Occupy movement, while the equivalent on the Right emerged as the Tea Party.

The Occupy movement focused upon the institutions that had created substantial levels of social inequality, while somehow immunising themselves from both accountability and adverse impact of the 2008 recession. The movement lost its momentum midway through the first Obama administration, and many who had been Occupy participants shifted their attention away from institutions to the identity politics of various demographics seeking to assert their respective rights and grievances. Politically, the landing spot was progressivism, especially as personified by the consistent track record of a democratic socialist and political independent Senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders. The progressive agenda was refracted through a populist fervor. Unfortunately, for the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, the establishment proved too strong and motivated to allow its institutions to be usurped by the upstart element that was growing in numbers and potency. Hillary Clinton represented everything that was conventional, seemingly safe, and ultimately, unsuccessful about the Democratic efforts to retain control of the White House in 2016.

By contrast, the Tea Party, similarly disgruntled by the intransigence of the status quo, underwent its own ideological re-configuration. Unable to articulate its frustrations well, the right wing anti-establishment sector proceeded to undertake its own form of identity politics, coalescing not out of sense of demographic diversity,

but instead, militant sameness. Right wing populism emerged as a preservationist imperative that sought to anchor American identity and the nation's future in the past. It required a societal reset to an era and ethos that was familiar and definable by conventional, traditional lines of demarcation in society. For the vast majority of its proponents, right wing populism was code for white supremacy, Christian nationalism and legitimised nativism. Early on, the movement found a charismatic, though inchoate champion in former 2008 Vice-Presidential candidate and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin. Unable to repel the phenomenon that was Obama, the movement bided its time through the 2012 elections, that showcased the hyper establishment, and eventually unsuccessful candidacy of Mitt Romney. The yearning still existed in 2016, and the one individual that personified the antithesis of establishment and convention amidst a crowded field was a bombastic businessman of questionable veracity or credibility named Donald J. Trump. His shock victory was the ultimate validation for the very group Clinton had branded "the deplorables" in the election; their response was to wear the moniker as a badge of honour and view it as a validation of their agenda and ideology.

Moral Panics and Anxieties About a Changing America

Cultural racism highlights the ability to classify a people not based necessarily or primarily on their color or even ethnicity. Rather, it is based on examining and then delegitimising certain cultural values and practices shared by all members of that group. This form of racism appears more subtle and strangely, more acceptable because it does not involve conventional markers of racism which have by and large become discredited in society. In the United States, given the sordid nature of the country's racial history, the opportunity to target yet another group with the same scope of treatment as that experienced by African Americans is limited and ultimately, unacceptable. Similarly, the professed secular nature of American civil discourse and constitutional mechanisms intended to remove the privileging or promotion of religion in the public sphere militates against the ability to single out a specific religious tradition for mistreatment. Cultural racism allows the focus to shift from a person's physical attributes or religious "belief" to the more insidious attention being on *how* the person may express religious belief.

The Muslim community of America is arguably the most diverse in the world. An amalgam of every race, sect, ethnicity and linguistic family, no single subcategory can lay claim to being the quintessential Muslim American. But cultural racism allows the labeller to transcend otherwise unacceptable markers of big-

otry, i.e. color vis-à-vis African American Muslims, and focus on matters of culture as refracted through liturgy or religious obligation being inimical to the "sensitivities" of majority society. While the rhetoric levelled at Muslims may appear to be couched in terms of ideology or theology - in the case of Islam, the hackneyed accusation that its imperious nature will oblige its adherents to conquer America through the spread of its law (and tenets) the impetus is a familiar xenophobia based on both nativism and Orientalism. While the public debate becomes obfuscated with alarmist concerns about "sharia law," "stealth jihadists" and an existential threat to "American values," the underlying antipathy appears less a function of Muslims for *what* they are; instead, it is based on the fact *that* they are.

The phenomenon of anti-Muslim sentiment that appears to pervade so much of the public discourse of late is not occurring within a vacuum. While there are certainly cases such as Oklahoma's attempts to ban the consideration of Sharia law from its courts system, as in over a dozen other states, efforts to block the construction of mosques and Islamic community centres across the country and a general antipathy toward Muslims in some quarters, there are several social currents surrounding highly contestable and controversial issues. Arizona and Alabama have passed measures aimed at limiting illegal immigration; while this is understandable for the former as a border state, it is puzzling for the latter which lacks a foreign land neighbour. These are seen as being less than veiled measures to racially profile people of colour and the scope of the laws will doubtless impact upon people who are legal residents and/or citizens, though deficient in "American appearance." Some politicians and advocates for these measures have been claiming that in addition to protecting the country's borders from the infiltration of 'job stealing foreigners', the legislation also helps prevent easy access for terrorists through porous boundaries.

Another key area of contestation among cultural warriors is over the definition of marriage. The 2015 US Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v Hodges* affirmed the fundamental right to same-sex marriage as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution. Yet, despite the definitive court determination, the issue of homosexual rights, especially related issues of transgender rights and access to public spaces, remain a contentious and highly politicised aspect of public debate. Often, efforts to discriminate against members of the LGBTQ community are framed as legitimate exercises of religious freedom, as with claims to withhold service to LGBTQ individuals. Such justification could arguably be deployed to deny service and to validate discrimination to members, for example, of other religious communities, because of

one's contention that First Amendment religious freedom protections allow it.

While immigration and efforts to define traditional family conventions is nothing new, there has been a coalescence of various demographic shifts in the United States, culminating in the emergence of a new moral panic, where deep rooted fears of a significant, irreversible change in the social order is imminent. Spasms of such an anxiety have been present for some time - some may argue for at least the last several decades since the turbulence of the 1960s - but the intensification of these concerns appears to be related to the impending paradigm change in American demographics estimated for the year 2050. Midway through this century, the United States is scheduled to become a majority minority nation. For some, this is a source for considerable consternation as it brings with it the end of an era perceived to be a permanent part of the American experience and also the sense of uncertainty and possible foreboding of an America which may not readily be recognisable.

While a sense of ensuing anxiety related to inevitable and irreversible demographic shifts may permeate some segments of the public discourse, it is by no means isolated to it. In his final book before his death, Harvard scholar Samuel Huntington assesses the changing America.¹ He suggests that the country is moving toward a more entropic, dystopic future as it abandons its purportedly essential core identity- White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant- for an increasingly Brown, Latin-American, Catholic countenance. For Huntington and those who subscribe to his pessimism, several social currents have started to move in concert, causing moral panic and yet, simultaneously creating a sense of impotence to either change or prevent those seen as the visible agents of change. While the objects of anxiety and even anger may have been readily apparent, political and cultural realities would militate against the natural impulse for a backlash directed at them. The Arizona and Alabama immigration measures may have represented an expression of frustration over the influx of Hispanics into each respective state and the eventual cultural shifts that would occur. And yet, in neither case have the public debates explicitly framed the issue as a Hispanic "problem," instead labelling it as a matter of illegal "aliens." Similarly, the recent legalisation of same-sex marriage in a few states has led its opponents to respond with an affirmative espousal of what marriage is rather than what it is not. In both cases, those affected by moral panic are politically pragmatic enough to engage the issue that vexes them head-on. The Hispanic community is the fastest growing demographic in America and well established in many states that happen to be rich in electoral votes including California, Arizona, Texas, Florida and New York.

Any aspersions against Hispanics collectively would be met with tremendous backlash beyond just the political arena. Similarly, the LGBTQ community has gained a reputation of being politically well informed and organised, whereby polemical attacks in the context of the marriage debates would face retribution.

If the cultural sands of America are shifting more than is acceptable for some people by virtue of the transformations of ethnic and social mores, the election of the first African American president in 2008 was seen as a significant change for the nation. While some were inspired by Barack Obama's ascendancy to the country's highest elected office and believed it was evidence that America had moved beyond its troubled racial history, it was not a universally held sentiment. Racism, which may have been latent in many quarters, manifested itself in subtle or tangential ways. The President was questioned about his faith, whether he was a Muslim, and about his eligibility to be president by questioning whether he was in fact a natural born citizen, or a Kenyan. In both instances, there was a concerted campaign to portray the President as being alien, a foreigner, someone ineligible to serve as Commander in Chief. Of course, his biography is a matter of public record and scrutiny, incontrovertibly stating that he was born in Honolulu, Hawaii (the year after it was admitted into the Union) and is a Christian (despite having an atheist father of Muslim heritage and belonging to a congregation in Chicago whose pastor has been surrounded by controversy and notoriety).

Populism on the Left: Progressives and Identity Politics of a Different Priority

As the morphology of America changes with ethnic shifts toward a larger Hispanic presence and culture, the redefinition of marriage and the dismantling of racial homogeneity in the country's leadership, Americans have also been saddled with uncertainties regarding the economy as well as the nation's previously presumed dominance on the international stage. With emerging economic powers such as China, India, Russia and Brazil, the prospect of the United States declining so rapidly from being the world's sole superpower to one nation among many is a frightening, demoralising prospect. Clearly, anger cannot be levelled against other countries, especially those that are asserting new conventions of strength. Similarly, on the domestic front, many of the suspect groups seen as driving the most dramatic social and cultural shifts are beyond direct and open reproach given their perceived strength politically, financially and historically. The only community remaining in America that is the object of derision and

lacks social and political capital is the Muslim American population. As a result, the anger and hostility directed against it may appear to be disproportionate to its size unless one assesses such attitudes as being vicariously channelled towards it in lieu of their actual intended targets.

Rise of Conservative Media and Toxic Talk Radio

Ideological and political shifts rarely occur organically and incipiently from a void. Often, facilitators steer public debate, public consciousness and public activism toward a new, vocal and sometimes virulent counterpoint. Perhaps the most transformational phenomenon over the past 30 years, thus causing generational change, has been the rise of so-called conservative media, especially the advent of the Fox News Network and right-wing talk radio. These complementary, mutually validating outlets have influenced millions of Americans into a parallel discourse and, arguably, parallel reality.

Beginning in the late 1980s, conservative conglomerates embarked on an ambitious project of buying small to medium scale radio stations in media markets across the nation. They found an untapped and receptive audience that felt marginalised by the perceived left-leaning bias of conventional media outlets. These stations built up brand names and audiences and eventually, came to dominate large segments of the public, especially in geographic areas that are, unsurprisingly, Republican strongholds. The platform made superstars out of previously marginal voices like Rush Limbaugh, and also became the sounding board for a generation of disgruntled Americans who wished to express their frustration about their lack of agency in a country that was changing away from what they had hoped to preserve and control.

Simultaneously, the launch of the Fox News Network, the American incarnation of Rupert Murdoch's toxic mixture of tabloid "sensationalism" under the pretence of professional news production, gained increasing momentum as a complement to conservative radio on television. Despite the ironic "Fair and Balanced" slogan being its initial calling card, Fox News appears to have dispensed with any claim to either adjective as it has lurched into the world of "opinion journalism" for a population that both grew acclimated to it and now has come to expect that tone and perspective. New commentators have gained celebrity status, including Bill O'Reilly, Tucker Carlson, Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham and Jeanine Pirro, and categorical acceptance from their audience as authoritative sources. Such uncritical adulation has allowed these broadcasters to indulge in rhetoric that moves far outside the purview of reportage to blatant political speech, even delving into extremist talking points. They peddle conspiracy theories

and disparage vulnerable demographics, like Muslims, people of colour, and others, with impunity.

Perhaps most egregiously, and relevant to electoral matters, conservative media has effectively framed and fanned the flames of the so-called culture wars. It has persuaded, and affirmed for millions of Americans, that the country is under siege by foreigners, coastal elites and a litany of other individuals, groups and special interests purportedly committed to dismantling America through the erosion of long-held and seemingly uniformly cherished values. This moral framing is almost entirely structured along racial, ethnic and religious lines of demarcation as a decoy for the preservation of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (specifically Evangelical Christian) essentialism and power dominance.

The 2008 election of Barack Obama was certainly a watershed moment in recent American politics and history. Obama's 2012 reelection proved to have even greater repercussions than the mere duplicated success of the incumbent or a referendum of his policies. It became a referendum and affirmation of America's demographic shift. Almost as soon as the results were announced, prominent media voices, many on conservative outlets, acknowledged that the country was changing. For those speaking from the right wing of the political spectrum, the rhetoric intensified to warn of the loss of "traditional" America, a thinly veiled allusion to the dominance of the "white" majority population. The substantial gains made by the Hispanic population, particularly in its overwhelming support for the incumbent, the clear inclination of the women's vote toward Obama and the overall minority support for the Democratic party provided Republicans and conservatives alike with an epiphanic moment that, although developing for some time, has become unavoidable: the gradual move toward a majority minority country.

The various groups that formed an unconnected coalition to bring Obama and the Democrats a victory in 2008 and 2012 constitute the very groups that will, according to most statistics, be the majority demographic segments of American society by 2050. Apart from the November elections, 2012 proved pivotal in furnishing other evidence of how this demographic and cultural shift has begun. For the first time in US history, the non-white birth rate surpassed the white birth rate, with Hispanic births in particular on the increase (US Census, 2011). In addition, and similarly unprecedented in the nation's history, the majority of the country is no longer Protestant. With only 48% identifying as such, the nation is slowly turning toward other religious denominations gaining prominence, e.g. Catholics, no affiliation, etc., at the expense of the dominant religio-cultural faction (Pew US Religious Landscape Survey). For a country that has defined and maintained itself

since its inception as a White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant society, the reduction of each of these identity markers is a dramatic transformation and a matter of great consternation for those invested in or part of the status quo.

While preliminary reports suggest that the Muslim vote in the 2008 and 2012 elections was skewed heavily toward President Obama and Democratic candidates in general, it is difficult to ascertain how critical this vote was to the overall results (Pew Forum: *How the Faithful Voted: 2012 Preliminary Analysis*). Given its relatively small size and its diffuse presence throughout the country, the Muslim American community may be energised, motivated and active but not necessarily critical in the electoral process. Moreover, irrespective of any measurable impact on voting trends on a national, state or local level, Muslim Americans on aggregate lag far behind the demographic groups that clearly did make a difference in the elections, e.g. Hispanics and women, in the amount of social and political capital they wield.

The Establishment vs the Edges: The Battle for Voters

While efforts are currently underway by the Republican party to court potential voters from these segments of society, no such efforts are forecast for Muslims, in part because of their size and relative lack of political influence and also because Republican and conservative attitudes are by and large quite negative, particularly in comparison to Democratic and liberal sectors. As America moves further toward its demographic destiny, there is a likelihood that a shrinking majority will feel threatened and refuse to accept the changes about to come. Fear is an exploitable, even profitable commodity and may be manipulated for political and financial gain from those unable to foresee a new future where they will not be part of the dominant power structure. The process has already begun to assert and equate America as an eternally “white” country, making the nation’s narrative a racially based, rather than a sociologically or philosophically based imperative.

While white nationalism may identify certain “enemies of the state,” Muslim Americans may be the most convenient target given their numbers and weak political status. The gravamen of most white nationalists may not be the Muslim community; rather, it may be some of the very groups who brought success to the Democratic Party in the 2012 elections—women, Hispanics and the LGBTQ communities. Yet, there is a pragmatism, even among racists, that some battles are either too Herculean to be waged or futile given the low prospect of success. This allows the animus directed at Muslims to not only be an obvious, even easy choice, but ironi-

cally, amplified to compensate for frustrations that would otherwise have been pointed at the other suspect groups.

The Election: The Only News in Town

Notwithstanding the fact that 2020 was in many ways defined by a global pandemic, the US elections certainly followed the course of being yet one more episode in America’s four-year long reality television show with Donald Trump as the headliner. All prognostications of a smooth, immediately decisive outcome that would augur a Democratic landslide proved to be failures on all levels. Once again, the polls that had Biden ahead by double-digit margins in many states gave way to a race that required a shift from the status quo in its determination. Due to both safety concerns surrounding Covid-19, as well as President Trump’s own admonitions about the reliability of the postal service, an agency he has committed considerable effort to undermine, millions of voters, particularly on the Democratic side of the ledger, availed themselves of early voting in person or absentee voting by mail. Thanks to obstacles, largely placed by Republican controlled state legislatures, in-person votes from Election Day had to be counted before a single early vote could be tabulated. This inevitably placed pressure on an already burdened system, now made all the more so because of the unprecedented avalanche of extra absentee votes that required processing. It was no wonder that the returns on Election Night saw Trump ahead, but as absentee votes were compiled, the inevitable reversal of fortune occurred. With absentee ballots trending in some states as high as 4:1 in favour of the Democratic candidate, Joe Biden, began to take the lead. In many states, with a painfully slow processing time, the race went from definitively Trump to “too close to call.” Finally, with the margin for recovery statistically out of reach for the incumbent, media outlets declared Joe Biden to be the 46th President-elect of the United States, pending both certification of the vote from the states and the exhaustion of a litany of litigation by Trump and his campaign.

Voter turnout for the 2020 election was the highest seen since the 1968 campaign that propelled Richard Nixon into the White House. An estimated 75 million Americans voted for the Biden/Harris ticket, a record for the most votes cast for a presidential candidate in US history. At the same time, the person with the second most votes ever cast was his opponent, Donald Trump, with 70 million. Biden won by a margin of over five million votes, roughly 3%, and nearly double the margin of the popular vote won by Hilary Clinton in her 2016 bid. While the largest margin of victory against an incumbent since Franklin Roosevelt’s 1932 victory over Herbert Hoover, a certain level of in-

credulity persists among Democrats as to why the election was as close as it was; conventional wisdom was that an impeached, boorish, heavily flawed Trump, who had proven himself utterly inept at handling the nation’s principal crisis of Covid-19 management and in the process devastating the economy, could and would be defeated in dramatic fashion. Yet, despite his myriad faults and failures, Trump still managed to maintain the loyalty and support of 47% of the electorate. America is indeed, and remains, a divided nation, with both different political affiliations and, seemingly, different realities.

Meet the New Boss; Same as the Old Boss?

The incoming Biden Administration will inherit a White House akin to a former tenant who has left the premises in utter shambles and a tarnished reputation with the neighbours that any new occupant will need to rectify immediately. On the domestic front, the United States will require a tremendous amount of healing and reconciliation. The past four years have been marked by a normalisation and even an endorsement, explicitly or implicitly, of bigotry, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, among a list of attitudes that are antithetical to social cohesion. While the new president can certainly reset the official government tone of what will and won’t be tolerated, a recalibration of civil society may prove far more elusive, given the depth of discord and distrust among various factions in the country. The toxicity of the public rhetoric, enabled and encouraged by several conventional and social media platforms, will require more than a presidential directive; it will require a transformation of the social contract, well outside the presidential brief. The American electoral calendar does not permit a cooling-off period, as midterm elections are only two years away, with some by-elections scheduled sooner than that. The politicisation of discord is too alluring, profitable and exploitable to avoid for politicians, pundits and professional haters alike.

Speculation abounds that President Biden will seek to resurrect and revise some of the hallmark domestic programs and policies from the Obama era, when he served as Vice-President, and which President Trump made it part of an Ahabic mission to dismantle. Chief among these will be the revival and preservation of the Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare). In addition, Biden has declared that he will nullify approximately 100 of Trump’s most odious executive orders within 24 hours of taking the oath of office. This pledge will help reverse many repugnant measures, including the so-called Muslim travel ban as well as other regulations that have adversely affected immigration and refugee relocation. Of course, first and foremost will be the impetus to control and contain

the Covid-19 pandemic by implementing a national plan thus far scorned, ignored and rejected by the outgoing Trump administration.

In the foreign policy arena, the temptation to continue the course of American empire will be strong, but will be tempered by certain geopolitical realities that have evolved in the past four years. Biden will attempt to restore damaged relations with many of America's stalwart allies, especially within North America and in Europe. This will require a retraction from the close ties forged between Trump and authoritarian regimes, both monarchies and also erstwhile democracies, including Gulf states, India, Hungary and Poland. Biden will also have to contend with a China that has taken its most recent great leap forward, especially in regions once dominated by America.

Trump had withdrawn the United States from both the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) as well as the JCPOA (Iran Nuclear Deal), ostensibly because they were Obama era landmark achievements in foreign policy. Both were efforts to curb China's growing geostrategic influence, the former more so explicitly than the latter. Trump's actions facilitated China to enhance its dominance unfettered in the Pacific Rim, and develop close ties with Iran as part of its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative strategy. President Biden has indicated interest in re-engaging, even perhaps renegotiating the agreement with Tehran, in part due to its intended objective under the Obama administration of rebalancing the Persian Gulf and courting Iran away from potential Chinese and Russian influence. While the latter may be an unattainable goal at present, reduction of tensions in the Middle East through a more balanced, equitable approach to several of the involved parties might yet be feasible. It remains unlikely that the US can resurrect the TPP, given the loss of confidence that now pervades the international community in America's commitment to agreements, even ones it brokered itself. Ultimately, and in the short term, Biden's

chief means of restoring America's reputation worldwide may have less to do with a return to some semblance of the pre-Trump dynamics than a full commitment and plan of action to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic.

America After the Election: Lessons Learned or More of the Same?

How much will the election result change America? In some ways, of course; the country is polarised in a manner unseen in the past several generations. Victory is now defined as a win for half of the country, with utter neglect, to accompany contempt, for the other half. The notion of a unifying figure occupying the White House will depend both on that individual's nature and character to inspire and call for much needed unity as well as the will and readiness of the body politic to acknowledge that the zero-sum-game of recent American politics has weakened its international standing, its domestic exigencies and perhaps irreparably, its fundamental institutions of governance. On January 20, 2021, the incoming President Biden will steward a nation that has deeply embedded structural flaws and vulnerabilities. The past four years has deftly exposed these weaknesses and has exacerbated their corrosive effects. It is doubtful that the President will possess the will or even the awareness of how these challenges will continue to weaken America because the repair, if even possible, will require an honest assessment that both parties must co-operate and collaborate to come up with ameliorative measures. The demographic shifts that are irreversible must be seen not as an existential threat but yet another recalibration of a nation that has endured several course corrections. They will not signal the death knell of the nation, as dreaded by the right wing, but will compel them to accept a dose of reality that America is and has indeed been a complex, diverse project of imperfection and

opportunity. For those embarking on becoming part of the new plural majority, they would be wise not to gloat because the establishment will be unyielding to a level of change that will threaten its authority, power and dominance. The real question will be whether either side will subvert or pervert the rule of law and the mechanisms of the American constitutional and legal system, as a means of maintaining or gaining power, to the point that the system and the nation become unrecognisable. At the same time, America will be reengaging on the international stage with a world that has changed significantly and has, in fact, moved on from the threat of a unipolar, hegemonic force. While Biden will attempt to restore US standing across the world, he might have to do so by operating off his back foot with greater frequency, as new players and pretenders to the power game have emerged with notable efficiency and efficacy. Trump may be gone but Biden cannot erase the last four years and its dubious legacy. As a consequence, the victory in the 2020 Presidential election may well be remembered for simultaneously delivering a great Pyrrhic victory as well.

• Saeed Khan

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ⁱ In *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, Huntington reorients his attention from the foreign policy arena which he had established in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998, to a domestic focus. A common denominator in his work is the framing of cultures along highly impermeable lines of demarcation.

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by Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria

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Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria

is an Assistant Professor at University of Tehran, Faculty of Islamic Knowledge and Thought.

Muslims' Engagement in 2020 with BLM: Promise and Problems

Dawud Walid discusses Muslim communities' responses to anti-Black racism in the US and within their own circles since the killing of Trayvon Martin in 2012. Despite progress in addressing apathy and internalised racisms, Muslims have a long road to travel in the quest for social justice without compromising Islamic principles.

The summer of 2020 was a moment of resurgence for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, in part owing to many people feeling frustrated due to semi-confinement in their homes because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of them facing perilous financial conditions. Blacks and non-Blacks burst out into streets of not only America but much of the world after video footage went viral of a Minneapolis police officer savagely killing unarmed African American George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for seven minutes and forty-six seconds. His crying out to his deceased mother and pleading "I can't breathe" sparked the largest protests and civil unrest since the chilling homicide of Eric Garner, another unarmed Black man who was fatally choked by the New York Police in 2014.

As outrage spread across the globe, a significant portion of Muslims in various degrees expressed solidarity with BLM which was perceived as the leading voice in the quest for justice. These varying expressions present layers of promise in that Muslims acknowledge the need to publicly resist anti-Black racism in greater numbers. However, it also brings forth challenges in the current alignment with BLM and others who promulgate positions and tactics in their vision of seeking racial justice, some of which are antithetical to traditional Islamic morality and ethics.

BLM began as a Twitter hashtag in 2012 after African American high school student Trayvon Martin was killed by a pseudo-neighbourhood watchman. Two years later it morphed into a movement with the extrajudicial killing of Mike Brown, an unarmed African American teenager, who was shot by Ferguson police. As people took to the streets for weeks of protest and rebellion, those who identified as Muslims were also present, though in small numbers. Some Nation of Islam (NOI) members were in the streets with the masses echoing their pain yet calling for restraint. Also on the ground from day one was Egyptian American attorney [Mustafa Abdullah who was monitoring police misconduct](#) against protesters on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Abdullah, along with the Executive Director of the Missouri chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-MO) Faizan Syed who is a Pakistani American, community organiser Muhammed Malik who is a Kashmiri American, New York based community organiser Linda Sarsour who is a Palestinian American, and myself being an African American founded a collective called Muslims For Ferguson to raise awareness among American Muslims about the systemic issues undergirding what took place in Ferguson and encouraged Muslims to join us in the streets.

Although there was engagement by a

few thousand Muslims when we held a series of teach-in teleconferences and from a couple of dozen of non-Black Muslims who joined protests in Ferguson, much of the non-Black Muslim American Muslim community reactions ranged from apathy to blatant anti-Black rhetoric. In my proverbial backyard of Dearborn, Michigan which is the city with the highest concentration of Arabs outside of the so-called Middle East, I read social media comments such as Brown was not a Muslim, so what does it have to do with us, to Arabs stating that had he and other Black victims of police brutality simply behaved better and did not act like "*hayawan*" meaning animals, they would not be policed in such a manner to begin with. I was forced to discontinue some personal relationships with a couple of men over their vitriolic anti-Black comments.

Even most national American Muslim organisations and scholars were timid about taking a definitive stand against anti-Black violence by law enforcement relating to Brown and other high profile cases which garnered corporate media coverage such as Freddie Gray who was murdered by the Baltimore Police the following year. Even worse, there were instances in which statements were made focusing more outrage against looting than over Gray's homicide. One such statement by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) led the Muslim Anti-Racism Col-



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laborative (MuslimARC) to [issue an open letter](#) to national American Muslim organisations asking them to be more sensitive towards the African American community. There were also unfortunate incidents in which some well-known scholars and imams like [Shaykh Hamza Yusuf](#) who made comments at the 2016 Reviving the Islamic Spirit (RIS) conference in Toronto, Canada, in relation to BLM which were interpreted by many Muslims who are Black as explaining away the reality of systemic anti-Black racism.

In a positive development three years after the Shaykh Hamza Yusuf controversy, different reactions from most major American Muslim organisations, activists, and scholars to the grassroots relating to anti-Black racism and BLM started to be verbalised. From my anecdotal observations, it appears that the same held true in Canada and the UK. As Americans of different creeds (non-Blacks outnumbering Blacks in many cities) poured into the streets protesting the murders of Floyd and Breonna Taylor, there was an unprecedented solidarity from non-Black Muslims. Every national Muslim organisation in America held virtual talks about anti-Black racism and the history of police brutality and mass incarceration in America. For several Fridays pulpits were dominated by lectures about the ills of racism. Many Islamic centres followed up with panel discussions featuring all Black panels talking about their experiences of racism within broader society as well as in the Muslim community. I spoke specifically about these issues over 60 times in the month following Floyd's death to audiences based in America, Canada, and the UK as well as taught classes about Blackness among the companions and descendants of Prophet Muhammad (prayers and peace be upon him & his family). Moreover, Muslims in cities across America not only joined BLM protests but were at the forefront in some places.

Whether this shift was due to a greater consciousness of racism among Muslims in the West especially as it relates to anti-

Blackness at the core of the false ideology of white supremacy or was the result of the mainstreaming of BLM and its wider acceptance amongst whites remains to be seen. Nonetheless, there is some cause for hope that Muslims in the West may be at a turning point in not only joining the greater struggle for racial justice in Western societies but also that they will begin to deliberate more robustly about how anti-Blackness can be systematically tackled within the Muslim community.

African American Muslims have been at the forefront of standing against anti-Black racism and police brutality going back to Malcolm X

With the promise of Muslims becoming more conscious about racism, anti-Black racism in particular, and displaying the willingness to begin challenging systemic racism in the West also come spiritual and intellectual challenges pertaining to many who seemingly jumped on the BLM bandwagon without critical analysis based on our spiritual tradition. This especially holds true for those who sincerely view their identities firstly in terms of faith and objective moral truth which derives from the Qur'an. This must be mentioned before continuing because there is a growing contingent of persons who view being Muslim as a type of inherited secular quasi-ethnic identity with socio-political implications without any real consideration or reference to the Qur'an.

Returning to the heightened expressions of solidarity with Black suffering im-

mediately after the police lynching of Floyd, several national and local Muslim organisations in America as well as ethnic based non-profit groups run by Muslims began to hashtag #BlackLivesMatter or #BLM in social media posts, e-mail updates, and on their websites. When inviting speakers on their panels, they encouraged viewers to attend BLM protests in their respective areas. Some of them even encouraged their non-Black Muslim constituents to donate to BLM. The BLM bandwagon Muslims that many uncritically jumped on, however, raised eyebrows among many Muslims who are African American. I admittedly am one of them.

For instance, the two national Muslim organisations representing African American interests, The Mosque Cares (Ministry of Imam Warith Deen Mohammed) and the Muslim Alliance of North America (MANA), the latter of which I am a board member, do not promote BLM. Moreover, there is not a single Islamic centre in America with an African American congregation and spiritual leader which has BLM signs or banners. Instead of conferring with the organisations which represent the bulk of African American Muslims and taking counsel from Black scholars, these non-Black Muslim entities and leaders stepped over those in their own faith community to champion BLM. To say that this is problematic would be an understatement. Moreover, if these non-Black Muslims did not see the most prominent African American Muslim leaders openly supporting BLM, this should have raised doubts. Had they consulted us they would have soon learned that there is a difference between standing for the dignity of Black life and giving support to BLM. The two are not synonymous.

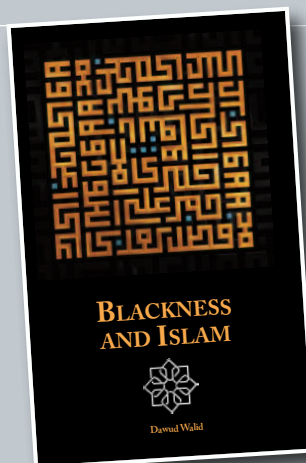
African American Muslims have been at the forefront of standing against anti-Black racism and police brutality going back to when Malcolm X (may Allah have mercy upon him) led members of the proto-Islamic movement the Nation of Islam in protesting, then later successfully

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Dr. Rudolph Bilal Ware - Associate Professor of West Africa, Islamic Knowledge & Spirituality, African Diaspora at the University of California – Santa Barbara

suings the New York Police Department for the 1957 savage beating of Johnson Hinton. Likewise, Malcolm X with NOI members led a Black front including non-Muslim groups in rallying against the Los Angeles Police Department extrajudicial execution of Ronald Stokes. Imam Siraj Wahhaj (may Allah preserve him) of Brooklyn, New York was at the forefront of protests which led to an eventual lawsuit against the New York Police Department for the police lynching of Amadou Diallo in 1999. There have been many more cases of Black-led Muslim efforts for justice against the brutalisation of Black folks by law enforcement long before there was BLM and since it has been in existence. In short, African American Muslims have a legacy of confronting head on the issue of anti-Black police brutality.

The first reason for caution is more philosophical than tangible harm as it relates to not championing the BLM movement. African American Muslim leaders in general have always hesitated to take up the banner of those who are secularly orientated and are predominately funded from outside the Black community. It is no secret that the seed money for BLM did not come from the grassroots of the Black community but from (white) foundations that lean to the far Left. After the homicide of Floyd, several Fortune 500 corporations have cumulatively given millions more to BLM beyond the millions received through foundation money outside of the Black community. The point of contention is that the liberation of Black folks and the fight against anti-Black racism cannot be authentically led by those who are not primarily funded by the Black community and are embraced and supported by the liberal status quo. Who funds the endeavors basically influences the agenda. A clear historical example of this was articulated by Malcolm X in his 1963 seminal speech *Message to the Grassroots* which explained how such funding diverted the original intention and tactics of the March on Washington in 1963.

Another primary point of tension resides in the BLM position that the liberation of Black folks and those who identify with the framework of LGBTQ+ are inextricably connected. This is contentious not only from the point of view of framing the fight against anti-Blackness as being morally equivalent with the acceptance of certain sexual activities and gender identities but also on theological grounds. The LGBTQ+ movement is not simply about protecting persons from being victims of vigilante attacks or hate crimes or being denied basic human rights such as access to housing and basic medical care. It is a movement in which BLM is part and parcel of something that has morphed into aggressively seeking trans, gender binary, and gender fluid public accommodations in lavatories and locker rooms to inserting LGBTQ+ issues and history into public school curriculum for pre-pubescent chil-

dren. The perceived normalisation of homosexuality and redefinition and elimination of gender plus the perception that society must capitulate to accepting such even when going against peoples' sacred beliefs are part of a package deal in supporting BLM because that is part of their intersectional platform.

In addition, there are some protest tactics of BLM leaders which have trickled down to their affiliates that run counter to the comportment of the Prophetic mandate of forbidding evil. That they do not commit nor incite physical violence in achieving their aims is not a high standard for Muslims striving to be involved in the endeavor of sacred activism. For instance, in 2015, BLM leaders stormed a campaign rally stage on which progressive Senator Bernie Sanders (D-VT) was speaking. They forcefully seized the microphone from Sanders in order to [air legitimate grievances](#) relating to the homicide of Brown in Ferguson. Something similar [took place at a private fundraiser](#) for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a donor's home as well. During the summer of 2020, pro-BLM activists confronted white persons in a number of American cities chanting "white silence is white violence" and demanded that they proclaim their support for BLM. One example of this was in August 2020 when a middle-aged white woman [was surrounded and screamed at](#) within centimetres of her face in Washington, DC while she was dining outside while trying to observe COVID-19 social distancing precautions. Whether it is these situations previously mentioned or the purposeful disruption of traffic which blocked roads that ironically impeded poor Black people from getting to work on time or blocked emergency vehicles from reaching individuals with dire medical emergencies to hospitals, such tactics ended up only alienating or distracting people from the actual issues at hand.

As Muslims in the West deal with BLM or other purported justice movements, it is essential that they are guided by sacred principles and Prophetic etiquettes. From this foundation, Muslims can better set our own terms of engagement instead of simply following others. The 15th century Maliki scholar Ahmad Zarruq (may Allah have mercy upon him) stated:ⁱ

It is not permissible for anyone to proceed in a matter until he knows the ruling of Allah pertaining to it. Ash-Shafi'i said, "This is a matter of consensus due to the speech of the Prophet (prayers and peace be upon him) who said, 'Knowledge is the imam of action, and action follows it.'"

And when in doubt about matters and tactics, being cautious, learning the ins and outs, and taking consultation from more than one learned person in both text (sacred law) and context (socio-political

environment on the ground) before acting are better than following the crowd or acting sinfully or mistakenly in haste which could very well do more harm than good. This principle was summed up in the words of the 9th century Persian gnostic Yahya bin Mu'adh (may Allah have mercy upon him) who said, "If you cannot benefit then do not harm."ⁱⁱ

It does not require much explanation from Islamic texts that purposefully brutalising or killing anyone due their race is immoral and should be robustly deterred. When calling for justice for the oppressed, there are indeed times in which public protesting and civil disobedience are necessary strategies. This includes cooperating with those who share different beliefs and values to what is mandated in traditional Islamic teachings. That non-Black Muslims in the West have become more active in racial justice movements and in particular addressing anti-Blackness is a promising sign that our community is moving beyond activism confined to particular issues pertaining to oppression outside the West. When it comes to BLM, there are times when it is appropriate for Muslims to join the masses on the streets when calling for justice in a particular case plus for systemic legal changes. That joining, however, should be on our terms and using our nomenclature without using tactics and terminology that violate our sacred law and Prophetic comportment. It should not be the case that Muslims are completely copying BLM including using their language which seeks to normalise and promote the forbidden, nor should they be actively given platforms within our community which could further confuse our community, especially the youth. Furthermore, there definitely should not be unrestricted donations or sadaqah given to BLM or any other organisation that unabashedly promotes the normalisation of public immorality even if they state that their bread and butter is "social justice." There are ways in which we can stand for Black life and selectively work in coalition with other people within our sacred parameters without violating our noble faith in the process. It is simply not our way to correct injustices by using incorrect means or supporting those who are openly advancing wrongdoing.

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is an imam based in Detroit, Michigan, USA and author of the book *Towards Sacred Activism*. His book *Blackness and Islam* (2021) is being published by Algorithm. Pre-order [here](#).

ⁱ Zarruq, Ahmad, *Qawa'id al-Tassawuf 'ala Wajh Yajma' Bayna al-Shari'ah wa al-Haqiqah wa Yasil al-Usul wa al-Fiqh bi al-Tariqah*, (Damascus: Jami' al-Huquq Mahfuzah., 2004), p. 114

ⁱⁱ Ibn Rajab, 'Abd al-Rahman, *Jami' al-Ulum wa al-Hikam fi Sharh Khamsin Hadith min Jawami' al-Kalim*, (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2002), p.408

Peace is still holding

The guns stopped 25 years ago, but is the war over and can territorial unity survive in Bosnia and Herzegovina? **Demir Mahmutćehajić** discusses the problems of the Dayton Peace Agreement, in particular the issues it has created around representation, what it means to Bosnia and the impact this has on current and future stability.

"The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), Dayton Accords, Paris Protocol or Dayton-Paris Agreement, is the peace agreement reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States, in November 1995, and formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995. These accords put an end to the three and a half year-long Bosnian War; one of the armed conflicts in the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. The current Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the Annex 4 of the DPA."

This is how the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), introduces the [Dayton Peace Agreement](#) on its web page. You can also download its English version, but there is a [mystery surrounding the whereabouts](#) of the original, signed copies of the Dayton Peace Agreement. There were five of them. One for the delegation of the Republic of Croatia, one for the delegation of Yugoslavia (Serbia), one for the Serb side in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one for the Croatian side in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one for the delegation of the government of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The copy carries the original signatures of Croatian President Franjo Tuđman, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Alija Izetbegović, and Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milošević.

The Serbian copy is assumed to have disappeared in 2000, during the overthrow of Milošević's regime. The only copy whose whereabouts are known with certainty is that one that belongs to the Republic of Croatia. Apparently, it is safely kept in a vault. The original copy that belonged to the delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina was supposed to be in the archive of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but there is no certainty that it is there. There are suggestions that it has never even reached any of the state institutions.

The original of the Dayton Peace Agreement, which had been missing for years, was found during a police raid in Pale near Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 31 October, 2017. It was offered for sale on the

black market, and the seller asked for 100,000 convertible marks (50,000 euros). Immediately afterwards Milorad Dodik, at that time president of the entity Republika Srpska, publicly announced that: "Here, we have found our copy of the Dayton Peace Agreement, now others are left, let them deliver their copies." By 'them', he meant, the Bosniac and the Croatian sides in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Just over a month later the police of the entity of Republika Srpska announced that, after detailed forensic analysis, they had established that the document in question was not the original copy of the Dayton Peace Agreement. To make matters more complicated there is no official, certified, translation into "our" languages. The Serbian side in Bosnia and Herzegovina has translated it into the Serbian language, and a professor of constitutional law, Kasim Trnka, claims that it differs from the translations into Croatian and Bosnian.

Who gets to represent?

This is especially important because of the following article of the Dayton Peace Agreement:

"Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs, as constituent peoples (along with Others), and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina hereby determine that the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is as follows:" Serbs, Croats and Bosniacs are the three dominant ethnic, and religious, Orthodox, Catholic and Muslim communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The term 'Others' is used for all those citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina who do not declare themselves to be either Croats, Serbs or Bosniacs. So, the Others are Romas, Jews, those who consider themselves to be Bosnian, Italian, Ukrainian, Yugoslavian, or those who do not declare their nationality at all.

The term "constituent" is translated, interpreted, and implemented differently according to which side you "represent" in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Serbian side, and also the Croatian side, interpret and translate this term, "constituent", as constitutional. With this they are claiming that the Dayton Peace Agreement, in its original meaning, acknowledged, and ruled, that Bosnia and Herzegovina is the creation of its three peoples (Bosniacs, Serbs and Croats), and that, therefore, representation

is possible only on nationalistic bases. The Others have been discriminated against from the start. There are rulings by the international courts regarding this, but those rulings are not being implemented. The Sejdici and Finci case at the European Court of Human Rights is the best known, but it is just one of many.

The case of Sejdici and Finci v Bosnia and Herzegovina (2009) arose from two separate claims being brought to the European Court of Human Rights, where both parties claimed that the Bosnian constitution discriminated against them on the bases of race, religion and association with a national minority, with reference to a failure to comply with Protocol 12 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Sejdici, is a Roma Bosnian who was unable to stand as a candidate for the presidency. Finci is a Jewish Bosnian who was prevented from being a candidate for the House of Peoples of the parliamentary assembly. Both argued that their inability to stand for high office positions were a direct result of Articles IV and V of the Bosnian constitution (Bosnian Constitution 1995) which reserves these positions for the constituent peoples. The constituent peoples comprise Bosnian Serbs, Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats, the majority peoples when the Dayton Agreement was drafted in 1995. The court found this to be discriminatory against the 14 other national minorities in Bosnia.

What – or when - is national?

Now, there are a lot of cases like that presented above for any dedicated, and interested, researcher. Most of the materials and references are available online. They highlight how complicated is the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On 21 November this year we "celebrated" 25 years of the Dayton Peace Agreement. In the entity of Republika Srpska of Bosnia and Herzegovina, they celebrate 21 November as a National day, while in the entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of the Federation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina, 25 November is celebrated as the National Day (I am deliberately simplifying all this).

What is important to know is that although the Dayton Peace Agreement ended the fighting in the Bosnia and Herzegovina, it did not end the war. There may be peace, but it is rather a ceasefire, albeit one that is

Bosnia: A fragile peace

long and lasting. There are many factors that support this view. The Bosnian Serbs do not even like to be called Bosnian Serbs. The majority of them deny genocide in Srebrenica, and all of their political representatives see the current Bosnia and Herzegovina as something that is not here to stay. Many of them publicly call for the cessation from Bosnia and Herzegovina, independence of the Republika Srpska, and unification with Serbia. The Serbian government, and most of the public in Serbia, are very open and forward about this, and it is only a question of time as to when the right geo-political conditions allow them to translate this into direct actions.

There are many such provocations even now. As recently as December 2020, the minister of defence of Serbia, Aleksandar Vulin, was in Banja Luka, the capital of the entity Republika Srpska, meeting with Milorad Dodik, member of the joint Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the leader of the Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is a very provocative gesture, because it shows disregard for the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but what is even more alarming is the audacity of Vulin. During this visit he has [publicly proclaimed](#) that “...while the Republika Srpska may not have an army, the Serbian people have...” It was a direct, and unapologetic message, because the army in question is the Army of the state of Serbia. That army has been [busy modernising its forces](#), buying new weapons, and flexing its muscles. For Bosniacs this is a very worrying development.

Secessionist allies

As regards to the Bosnian Croats’ situation, it too is alarming. Even though they can, in some respects, claim that they have not been treated equally by the Dayton Peace Agreement because they did not get their separate entity like the Serbs, their po-

litical aspirations are the same and they form a joint front with the secessionist Bosnian Serbs. Through their main political party, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ), they have tied their flag to the mast of the Bosnian Serbs. The alliance of the HDZ and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), the main Bosnian Serb party, is now in its second decade,

In their efforts to build a legal case for the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina both secessionist Serbs and secessionist Croats have the support of their national mother states, Serbia and Croatia

and is very strong, unshakeable and persistent. The main aim of the Bosnian Croats’ political representatives is to empower the “constitutional” part of the Dayton Peace Agreement. This is why their alliance with the Bosnian Serbs’ main party is so strong. They clearly share the same aim. If the “constitutional” interpretation becomes accepted as the right meaning of the Dayton Peace Agreement then they have a full right to claim that only Croats can vote for Croats, only Serbs for Serbs, and only Bosniacs for Bosniacs. This would, finally, bury Bosnia and Herzegovina as a citizens’ state. It would legally become just a formal union of its constituent peoples. If that turns out to become a norm then each constituent peoples, as they are

a part of the union, could leave that union.

One of the greatest achievements of the Bosnian people in the last hundred years was the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an equal republic with other republics in the Yugoslav federation. This recognition was formalised by the antifascist partisans in Mrkonjić Grad on 25 November, 1943. For this reason this is the day, also accepted by the Dayton Peace Agreement, that is marked as the Statehood Day of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is why secessionist Serbs do not celebrate this day, but instead they celebrate 21 November as the anniversary of the Dayton Peace Agreement. Denying the statehood of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a strategic aim, so that in future an attempt to destroy Bosnia and Herzegovina could have a legal argument or even provide a basis for secession. Currently, there is none, but the interested parties are doing everything to create it.

In their efforts to build a legal case for the dissolution of Bosnia and Herzegovina both secessionist Serbs and secessionist Croats have the support of their national mother states, Serbia and Croatia. The governments of both Serbia and Croatia, and their media, intellectuals, and other institutions constantly are working to undermine the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are doing this in various ways. There are economical influences, special relations, cooperation, lobbying in the international political arena, etc.

On 8 July, 2015, just three days before the commemoration of 11 July and the funeral prayer for the victims of the 1995 genocide in Srebrenica, Russia vetoed a United Nations Security Council resolution that would have described the Srebrenica massacre as “genocide”. Four other members of the council abstained while the remainder voted in favour. The motion had angered Serbia, which rejects the term. The resolution said that “acceptance of the tragic events at Srebrenica as

US BOOKS - NOW ON OFFER

The New Colonialism: the US Model of Human Rights

With contributions from: Saied R. Ameli, Ramon Grosfoguel, Mary K. Ryan, Saeed A. Khan, Sandew Hira, Tasneem Chopra, Rajeesh Kumar, Laurens de Rooij and Sohail Daulatzai.

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genocide is a prerequisite for reconciliation". But Russia's UN Ambassador Vitaly Churkin said adopting it "would be counter-productive, [and] would lead to greater tension in the region". The vote had been put back a day to allow the US and the UK - which drafted the resolution - to try to persuade Russia not to veto it. The Serbian President, Tomislav Nikolic, called it a "great day" for his country, according to the AFP news agency. Serbia does not have a seat on the Security Council, and had asked ally Russia to block the resolution, warning it would be divisive.

This is just one example of how Serbia uses all that it has at its disposal to defend, strengthen, encourage, and support secessionist Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other examples are direct investments in the entity of the Republika Srpska by Serbia proper including, the building of schools, roads, factories, and helping reduce the budget deficit.

The Republic of Croatia is continuously doing almost the same through secessionist Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The only difference is that because it is an EU member it cannot do it so openly. Unfortunately, shortsighted pro Bosnia politicians, and political parties, have given Croatian secessionists many opportunities to claim that they are organisationally minoritised by the Bosniacs. The most explicit case that they cite, is the election to the joint Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of three members (one Bosniac, one Serb, one Croat). The Serb member of the Presidency is elected from the entity of Republika Srpska (49% of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Croatian and Bosniac members are elected from the entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (51% of the territory of the Bosnia and Herzegovina). The entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina is populated

with roughly 70% Bosniacs and 30% Croats. Therefore, mathematically, it is possible that Bosniacs elect both Bosniac and Croat members of the Presidency, leaving Croats without their, as they call it, legitimate representative in the Presidency. In practice it has happened on three occasions when Željko Komšić, declared Croat, but former soldier of the Bosnian Army and holder of the highest military medal, the Golden Lily, was elected to the Presidency. Bosnian Croats claimed that he was not elected by them, because a majority of Bosniacs voted for Mr. Komšić. Therefore, they present the case that Mr. Komšić did not represent Bosnian Croats but that he was a second Bosniac member of the Presidency. Even though he was elected legally, because of their belief that constituent means constitutional they deny his legitimacy. Through their main political party, HDZ, and together with the main Serbian party, SNSD, they demanded a change of election law so that only Croats could vote for a Croat member of the Presidency.

This election, on three occasions, of Mr. Komšić is a proof for secessionist Croats that they are not equal to Bosniacs in the entity of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their position is strongly supported by the government of the Republic of Croatia.

The Republic of Croatia is continuously and constantly encouraging the narrative that Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina are minoritised and discriminated against. Even though there could be many issues to discuss internally, and maybe some concerns are even justified, the direct involvement of Croatia in internal matters of a sovereign state undermines any and all possibilities of finding proper solutions. By weakening the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina it only creates further instability. Just recently the Croatian President, Zoran Milanović, wel-

comed in Zagreb, capital of the Republic of Croatia, Milorad Dodik, the Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Dragan Čović, president of the main Bosnian Croat party, HDZ, and former candidate for the secessionist Croats for the Presidency of the Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dragan Čović had lost to Željko Komšić. This visit was contrary to established international diplomatic norms, particularly because they were discussing changing the Constitution (Dayton Peace Agreement) on the basis that a Croat member of the Presidency of the Bosnia and Herzegovina can be elected by non-Croats in Bosnia.

The institutions of the Republic of Croatia refuse to have any cooperation with Željko Komšić and use every opportunity everywhere to emphasise that their co-nationals are oppressed in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

We are facing a very uncertain and dangerous future. There are number of factors why peace is still holding. I have tried to present to you, in my humble opinion, one of those factors. The enemies of Bosnia and Herzegovina have learned from the last aggression on our country that before the next attempt they must have an internationally legal case for secession from, and by it dissolution of, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

• Demir Mahmutćehajić

is from Stolac in Bosnia. After some years in the UK where he helped found the Islamic Human Rights Commission in 1997, and later became the president of the London Islamic Community of Bosnians, he returned to Bosnia. Since 2005 he has been constantly engaged in the civil rights movement in the Bosnia and Herzegovina, at one time leading the DOSTA! (Enough!) movement. He has written and spoken about genocide in Bosnia, its causes and consequences over the last 25 years. Many of these speeches, reports and articles can be found on the [IHRC website](https://www.ihrc.org/).

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Samson's Rage: A Critique of Modern Zionism

Jennifer Loewenstein looks at the devastation caused by modern Zionism and finds the roots of these calamities in the ideology that underpins the nation state of Israel today.

Modern Zionism contradicts what we, in the West, claim as our fundamental political and social values. It does this by undermining the norms and standards we claim as the foundation of the modern democratic state.

The Letter of the Law

At the 94th plenary meeting of the United Nations on 7 Dec. 1987, on the eve of the first Palestinian Intifada, the General Assembly passed a resolution on the subject of terrorism. In an effort to define the parameters of 'terror', UNGA Res. 42/159 highlighted the exceptions to its characterisation by noting that "nothing in the present resolution could in any way prejudice the right to self-determination, freedom and independence, as derived from the Charter of the United Nations, of peoples forcibly deprived of that right..." In other words, all people are entitled to seek and establish these rights without being labelled *terrorists*.

This is one of many resolutions passed by the United Nations over the decades that differentiates between terrorism, which involves the use of violence against innocent civilians for political gain, and the struggle for freedom and independence of oppressed peoples, "...particularly peoples under colonial and racist regimes and foreign occupation or other forms of colonial domination..."

The United States and Israel opposed the resolution in part because it explicitly recognised the right of occupied peoples to resist their persecution and "to struggle to this end and to seek and receive support..." for their aims. Had they voted in favour of this resolution they would have, in effect, acknowledged the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to resist Israel's occupation of their lands in whatever manner they saw fit. This was not something either state was ready to do. The United States and Israel instead maintained their rejectionist stance opposing a just and lasting resolution to the question of Palestine.

For over half a century now, therefore, the US has unconditionally supported the subjugation and occupation of the Palestinian people by Israel. In so doing, it accepts implicitly the right of one people to

rule over another based, in this case, on an ethno-national supremacist world view. To be a first-class citizen in Israel one has to be Jewish – a characteristic that elevates the intrinsic value of those who belong to that group above those who do not. In practical terms, it has had the effect of dehumanising an entire people.

Allowing as well for the process of orthodox conversion, being Jewish entitles a person in Israel to flout the norms of a functioning democratic society and to claim rights determined by blood. Modern Zionism upholds this system, defying the very essence of the Enlightenment, the age of reason, and the sanctity of the rule of law. To support modern Zionism, therefore, is to reject the central tenet of democracy as "the will of the people"; it is to justify and accept, whether by the rule of one person – or of one select group of people – the inevitability of state tyranny. This approach to governance is intrinsic to modern Zionist ideology.

Although in 1948 Israel's Basic Law pledged that the State of Israel would "foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants" and "ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race, or sex," Israel never set out to guarantee equality under the law or universal human rights.

Israel's founders intended its Basic Law to look attractive to the West at a time when its future was unclear. As those who framed it worked, the processes of expulsion, dispossession, and dehumanisation were underway. As its generals and enlisted men engaged in terrorising, clearing out, and massacring entire segments of the Palestinian population, the Basic Law for "Human Dignity and Liberty" yellowed somewhere on a dusty shelf where it could be retrieved when convenient.

This did not trouble its leaders in the least. What is surprising is that the July 2018 Nation State Law took as long to be codified as it did. In it, Israel's existence as the *Nation State of the Jewish People*, without any democratic pretence, is unambiguously acknowledged:

1) Jews alone have the right to exercise, within the deliberately imprecise boundaries of the Israeli state, national self-de-

termination based on 'natural,' 'religious,' and 'historic' qualifications;

2) Hebrew shall be the sole official language of Israel while Arabic is relegated to a "special status"; and

3) Israel shall promote, as a national value, Jewish settlement throughout the land – a quasi-religious form of 'redemption'.

It should surprise no one that Israel has criminalised the efforts by Palestinians and others to resist this state of affairs. The more determined, well-organised and vociferous criticism of modern Zionism becomes, the more hysterically the 'pro-Israel' camp reacts – labelling even the mildest critics of Israeli society "racist" and "anti-Semitic". The alternatives are few. One can rush to adore Israel in all things and claim it is a free and democratic country; one can defend Israel's national exclusivism, including its treatment of the Palestinians, based on its history or on one's religious beliefs; one can ignore the issue and remain silent in order to keep the peace; or one can protest the century-long efforts to deny another people their most fundamental rights doing whatever is practically possible to erase their historic and physical presence in the land.

Illustrations of what life is like for people imprisoned by the manifestations of modern Zionism range from the dark to the damned. Anyone interested need spend less than half a day in a Palestinian community within Israel or within the occupied Palestinian Territories – including East Jerusalem – in order to experience life at the bottom of an ethnic hierarchy. One comes away almost gasping for breath, seeking to escape the suffocating air of oppression; seeking open sky and sunlight.

Baptism of Fire

From the convenient distance of a helicopter gun ship, an Israeli Air Force pilot fired a missile at a group of men gathered around a burst water pipe in the small village of Beit Hanoun in north Gaza. There to inspect his home and gather up some belongings during a cease fire, Anwar Z'anin noticed there was no running water

in the house. Outside, some neighbours had assembled to assess the damage. In July, 2014, Operation Protective Edge raged through Gaza with a ferocity that stunned even the war-weariest inhabitants of the Strip.

More than two men standing together in Gaza make a justifiable target for the IDF. One Palestinian man is an enemy; two are terrorists; and three or more make a cell of militants plotting Israel's destruction. Anwar, the janitor and caretaker for a local human rights organisation, had taken his wife, mother, and five children to Gaza City to shelter them in relative safety. He'd gone back during the temporary ceasefire to fetch some of their modest possessions. Later that day, he died of his wounds at the Kamal Adwan hospital minutes after the ambulance brought him there. Blood pooled on the floor beneath him. The sole breadwinner for a family of eight was gone.

In a hallway of the hospital, a child lay upon the floor, arms curled tightly around the family dog. The child's face was buried in the dog's fur. He lay there, motionless, eyes opened, as if the commotion around him were taking place on a separate plane of existence. He and the dog alone survived the bomb that destroyed his home, his parents, grandparents, siblings and cousins.

Milk & Honey or Violence & 'Security'?

According to the [Jewish Virtual Library](#), Zionism means, "the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel." Since 1948, it goes on to explain, "Zionism has come to include the movement for the development of the State of Israel and the protection of the Jewish nation in Israel through support for the Israel Defense Forces [IDF]."

This definition is problematic because it precludes a context. What if the land Jews are returning to is already inhabited? What if those inhabitants wish to rule themselves, and what if they don't want to change their society to incorporate the wishes of the settler population that claims that the land they are settling is theirs? What are the boundaries of this homeland?

Find me a people willing to vote away more than half their ancestral homeland. When the settlers conquer the remaining lands, find me a people happy to live under an illegal military occupation. What group of people is ready to surrender their houses, businesses, schools, mosques, churches, orchards, fields, streets, and villages, ready to flee indefinitely to an unknown world and forced to relinquish their right to return home? What people would be willing to renounce their history and culture, or see it grafted as a form of treachery onto someone else's? What peo-

ple want to become stateless refugees?

A "Jewish State" is, by definition, territorial. If non-Jews also live on the land, a "Jewish State" will become anti-democratic, chauvinistic, and discriminatory. Conversely, "a State for Jews to live in free from persecution and discrimination" is different. Only a democratic state of all its citizens can avoid succumbing to the inherent flaws of the ethno-nationalist and ideological state, a phenomenon chillingly familiar to students of 20th and 21st century national miseries. Only a democratic state of all its citizens free of the violence of mob rule can guarantee equal treatment and

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equal protection under the law.

No people will ever live in a state free from persecution and discrimination until the rule of law, including international law, takes precedence over aggression, tyranny, and the misguided but ubiquitous principle that might makes right. Jews living in America have the same ability to demand protection under the law as they do the rights and privileges granted everyone equally under the US Constitution. The US, therefore, offers Jews – just as it does other minorities who struggle for justice – more genuine security and protection than any militarised garrison state whose *raison d'être* is to maintain expand while guaranteeing supremacy to a single ethno-religious nation.

During an interminable curfew in Ramallah, A. had to sneak out in the back of a Press jeep, crouched like a cat, ears pricked up and silent, as it passed the checkpoint at Qalandia, now fully mechanized. From there she travelled by taxi across Israel to the Erez Crossing and into Gaza. At a small shop near her flat, the owner looked at her imploringly and said, "look at us here. What kind of life is this? What kind of future do my children have?" What could she say? She nodded her head. Would it help him to know that she'd felt relief when she got back into Gaza? That she'd felt her muscles relax once she'd gotten out of Israel, away from the omnipresent soldiers with their guns and the

endless parade of blue and white flags lining the streets? In Gaza she felt protected, away from the 'how dare you' gaze of a state whose rogue behavior punished its most prescient, devoted critics. What an exquisite irony: to feel safe among people whose lives are perpetually in danger.

Jews living in Israel will never know true security until the rules of war are abandoned; until the creeping annexation of territory for its resources but without its indigenous people ceases. In a state where violence, however visible or unseen, dictates the actions of people and organisations, true security will always remain elusive. This is as real for African Americans drawn into the cruel orbit of a modern American police force as for Palestinians living within the savage confines of legal terror – terror that imprisons their daily lives and inhibits their futures; that surrounds them with the external iron, barbed wire, and concrete barriers of checkpoints and closures, and the internal manacles of unrelenting subjugation. The violence that murders protesting children and renders dissent to an indefinite administrative detention, has no room for the dispassionate, 'self-evident truths' of universal human rights and justice.

Violence both contradicts democracy and undermines what began as early Zionist ideals. As a weapon of the rulers it destroys the will of the people. As a tool for the suppression of free will, violence impedes the establishment of peace. That modern Zionism is considered inextricable from "the protection of the Jewish nation in Israel through support for the Israel Defense Forces [IDF]" leaves it fatally flawed. Militarism as a preeminent value indivisible from an expansionist state devalues societal harmony necessary for coexistence.

And the Walls came Tumbling Down

In Jenin, the dead men were laid out in rows upon the dirt in their white linen shrouds.

A group of journalists dispersed upon the moonscape. Two men carrying a dead body on a stretcher wound down along a dirt road to the camp hospital – damaged but still standing. Outside, at the back of the hospital, four men loaded the bodies into the back of an old pick-up truck. To their right, also covered in white shrouds, were more rows of dead people awaiting identification. An old woman, weeping, among the bodies turned and cursed the journalists taking pictures. Other people mulled over the dead. A young man crouched and prayed over the shroud of someone he knew. Along the bottom of the shrouds in black ink were labels in Arabic with the names of the victims.

Further back, men were digging up dirt-covered, shrouded bodies of people who had died during the siege. They'd had

to be buried there temporarily to avoid the spread of disease because ambulances - like all other vehicles - had been prevented from entering or exiting the camp as it was being demolished and flattened by Israeli army bulldozers. The dead had had to wait for a proper burial.

During the siege, soldiers commandeered a school building at the back edge of the camp. It was still partially standing. Inside, a colourful mural of students at play, at work, at rest, together with friends, decorated a long hallway. On close inspection, one could see it had been vandalised: a soldier had taken a sharp tool, like an exacto blade and, with precision, scratched out the eyes of every single child.

A Law Unto Themselves.

On May 7, 2020, an editorial appeared in the *New York Times* by Daniel Pipes. ("Annexing the West Bank Would Hurt Israel," NYT, May 7, 2020) President of the Philadelphia based think tank, Middle East Forum, Pipes has long been known for his right-wing, anti-Arab and Islamophobic views.

"I am not someone who frets over the 'occupation' of the West Bank," he writes, reminding us that there are still people who refer to the 'so-called' occupation. Israel's Arab citizens, Pipes continues, "constitute what I believe is the ultimate enemy of Israel's status as a Jewish State. ... Citizens of Israel, unlike external enemies, cannot be defeated. Their allegiance must be won over, and the larger their number, the harder that becomes." He is right, of course, but it will remain difficult to win over the allegiance of a subset of people who are guaranteed permanent inequality.

While Pipes is considered an extremist by some, his views in fact reflect mainstream Zionist thought. Anyone who believes Israel must remain a Jewish State - the state of the Jewish people and a state in which Jews must remain sovereign - ultimately accepts that being non-Jewish, especially being Palestinian, constitutes being part of the "Other"; that which threatens Israel's organic nationhood.

In Khan Yunis, before the "disengagement", an ambulance used to park each day in the shadows of a brick building near where the younger boys still played. IDF soldiers maimed or killed them so frequently by then that it was necessary to have medics on standby. Some of the boys wore big, Palestinian flags around their shoulders like superman capes, but these capes bestowed no superpowers.

Post "disengagement," the situation remains virtually the same: Be sure to show them who's boss. Be sure to let them know they're dead if they defy you. Maintain the starvation diet; the electricity blackouts; the scarcity of goods; the lack of construction materials; the outdated medicines; the poisonous water; the constant uncer-

tainty; the perfect level of torture. Be sure to keep them imprisoned in this vast and rotting camp, blockaded by land, sea, and air. Be sure the stifling air asphyxiates their will; smother them in their desert prison; this oven on the Mediterranean.

There are many people who claim that a person can be non-Jewish and equal in Israeli life. The facts do not support this claim, however, especially with regard to,

1) land ownership (93% of Israel's land is under direct control of the state and of the Jewish National Fund and cannot be owned by or sold to non-Jews);

2) military conscription and the rights and privileges that having served in the IDF automatically confer upon an individual;

3) residency and marriage (a spouse from the occupied territories cannot come to live permanently with his or her partner in Israel.

In fact, the Israeli government issued a ban on family unification in July 2003 such that Palestinians from the Occupied Territories are unable to acquire residency or citizenship in Israel based on their nationality); and governance (no Arab party has been included in a ruling coalition government since Israel's establishment in 1948).

Try as one might to argue that Israel can be Jewish and Democratic simultaneously, the history of Israel and the facts of daily life belie this claim. The mechanisms of exclusion reach far beyond empirical data. An ingrained system of belief and more than 70 years of indoctrination sponsored by state legal, educational, and military institutions will remain no matter how eloquently Israel's apologists might hope to wish them away.

In a state that has no intention of legislating Jewish and Palestinian equality, it is difficult to imagine the shackles of prejudice dissolving at all.

A young mother smiling, but with frightened eyes, stood just outside the flaps of her tent holding her baby daughter. She would be there night after night as bullets whizzed by striking the grey walls of the apartment block opposite her temporary shelter. She would be there in her 'home' where her children would reach out to her, terrified, for comfort. She wanted to fill up a jug with water from a nearby spigot but was afraid that if she went on her own she would be shot. If the soldiers' shooting had been predictable, her fears might have been unjustified, but no one knew when they would fire, or if they would seek a living target.

Uncertainty is part of the game just like at the Great March of Return gatherings that lasted for two years before the pandemic hit: one day no one would die.

The next a journalist was dead and the next a female paramedic [quickly labelled a Hamas terrorist by the grinding machine of state propaganda eager to qualify anyone a legitimate target]. A wheelchair bound man with no legs carrying a Palestinian flag would be shot dead too. No one outside Gaza cared.

Western visitors offered to fill the water jug for the stranded mother. They were desperate to help; eager to show their defiance and march right past the guards in their cylindrical concrete tower. That was before Rachel Corrie and Tom Hurndall; before James Miller, Ian Hook, and Brian Avery (www.B'tselem.org) before the Mavi Marmara - before it was understood that the Jewish State will maim and kill anyone who stands in its way. It is a symptom of 'Nishtagea' ("to go crazy") - a precursor of unbridled state insanity if the pressure to back down becomes extreme, even if - in its fury - the state self-destructs along the way.

In the Temple of the Philistines

In the Hebrew Bible, Samson is the last of the warriors and judges of the ancient Israelites mentioned in the Book of Judges. He is renowned for the exceptional strength he derives from his uncut hair. Seduced by Delilah who is bribed by the Philistines, Samson falls asleep one day and has his hair cut. He is reduced to being a humble servant and miller in what today is Gaza. As his hair begins to regrow, Samson prays to God to have his strength restored and God grants him this wish. In the Philistine temple of Dagon where more than 3,000 Philistines have come to worship, Samson is tied to two pillars but there, with his strength returned, Samson pulls down the pillars and with them the entire temple.

And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the [temple of Dagon] stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, 'let me die with the Philistines.' And he bowed himself with all his might; and the [temple] fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.... [Judges: 15:29-30]

In his desire for vengeance against the Philistines, Samson prefers to die with those he kills than to return to the Israelites. The "Samson complex" or "going crazy" is an option Israelis have entertained even with regard to nuclear weapons. A moshav settler once remarked to the Israeli novelist and writer, Amos Oz, that "...Israel should be "a mad state,"

so that people “will understand that we are a wild country, dangerous to our surroundings, not normal,” quite capable of... “opening World War III just like that,” with nuclear weapons if necessary. Then “they will act carefully so as not to anger the wounded animal.” [*The Fateful Triangle: The US, Israel, and the Palestinians*, by Noam Chomsky; South End Press; Cambridge, Mass; 1999, pp. 447]

Chomsky notes Israeli journalist Yaakov Sharett who wrote that “the greatest danger facing Israel now is the ‘collective version’ of Samson’s revenge against the Philistines...” This Samson complex, writes Noam Chomsky, “is not something to be taken lightly” and “is reinforced by the feeling that ‘the whole world is against us’ because of its ineradicable anti-Semitism, a paranoid vision that owes not a little to the contribution of supporters here...” [*The Fateful Triangle*, pp. 467-8]

My Brother’s Keeper

Zionism has littered the pages of modern Palestinian history with the debris of hatred. Its military operations alone read like biblical chronicles of battles against a mighty enemy. In the 21st century alone we’ve had Operation Noah’s Ark, Operation Defensive Shield, Operation Determined Path, Operation Rainbow, Operation Days of Penitence, Operation Autumn Clouds, Operation Cast Lead, Operation Sea Breeze, Operation Pillar of Defense, and Operation Protective Edge – to name but a few. Who would guess that the dreaded adversary is a stateless people with no national military, no air force, no navy, no state-of-the-art arsenal of deadly, precision guided weapons or defensive, missile-detecting domes to shelter the millions of people within its ever-shrinking, resource-deprived enclaves?

What does it say about a modern ideology, whose state maintains one of the world’s most lethal collections of mass murder, that its self-declared adversary is a people living half scattered across the globe? A people more than half of whose members live either in squalor and misery as refugees, behind concrete and barbed-wire walls under a crippling blockade, or surrounded by remote-controlled checkpoints, high tech surveillance systems, army patrolled roads, illegal settlements expanding across stolen lands, and other trappings of an illegal foreign occupation? A people whose rite of passage into adulthood so often involves detention or imprisonment for engaging in legally recognised forms of resistance?

Blessed Are...

Rising numbers of coronavirus cases within the Gaza Strip threaten to overwhelm the Palestinian territory’s already collapsing healthcare system within a matter of days. As of November 22, 2020,

there were more than 14,000 confirmed cases and 65 deaths. Those numbers have risen dramatically since. There are 100 ventilators in the Gaza Strip, 79 of which were in use as of 22nd November. The Hamas government has imposed a partial lockdown of the Strip – weekends only – and set a 6:30pm curfew for the rest of the week. It fears a total lockdown because too many Gazans are going hungry or cannot afford to feed their families. Many parents cannot afford to buy the masks required by law and for which the failure to wear one will result in a fine.

On his way into the Gaza City, Jamil – alongside his donkey cart- spotted a policeman giving out fines to anyone not wearing a mask. Unable to afford one, let alone pay the fine for not doing so, Jamil spied a used, dirty mask on the side of the road and placed it over his nose and mouth. Back at home, he tossed the mask into the garbage and washed his face with the brackish, salty water that trickled into his hands from the sink. Less than 4% of Gaza’s water is drinkable and the sea surrounding Gaza is polluted by sewage. Rewashable masks will be washed in this water when there is electricity to power the pumps or the washing machines necessary to clean them.

The average Gazan can expect 7-8 hours of interrupted electricity on a good day. As the weather gets colder, this will decrease to between 2-6 hours. With over 50% of the population of Gaza living under the poverty line it is difficult to imagine how disease and hunger will be averted. In a sobering letter, Ruba – a human rights office worker – describes her day to day life:

Living every day in Gaza is a struggle. Everything is a challenge. We toil to make sure our basic needs are met and to secure some kind of future. We spend each day afraid for our lives – and now doubly so because of the virus. I cannot expect to get good care should I become sick.

I long for the night when I can sleep without the sound of Israeli drones buzzing in my ears. What is it like to lie under the stars and gaze up at a non-militarised sky? How has it come to be that even the heavens have been polluted with the weapons of war?

Gaza is under permanent siege, separated from the rest of the world. We are alone and must figure out how to accomplish the simplest things without the means and materials accessible to other modern societies. We have been pushed backwards in time and told to reinvent bricks and mortar – homes and businesses bombed years ago lie in ruins because we are forbidden from importing the staples

necessary to rebuild them.

We live on the sea, and yet the sea is a prison. Our fishermen are gunned down if they exceed the number of nautical miles Israel permits when they are out fishing. As a result, the fish they catch are small and swim in the waters most polluted near the shores.

We must find alternative sources of water to drink because what drips out of the tap is brown and salty and putrid to taste. This is what we bathe, cook, clean and brush our teeth with. If we swallow it we feel sick. Purified water costs money and not every family can afford to buy it. How can we go on living like this?

Indeed, not everyone can go on living. The suicide rate among young people in Gaza is alarming. The Palestinian Center for Conflict Resolution reported 30 suicides and 600 attempted suicides in the first seven months of 2020 – a threefold increase over the last five years. [www.english.alaraby.co.uk; July 29th, 2020]

Recently, M., the son of a good friend of this author’s brother had a fight over money. He could not afford to feed his family. Sometime later, he set himself on fire and burned to death. Hopelessness and despair are rampant in Gaza. It has one of the worst mental health crises in the world. The 13-year-old blockade must come to an end if any semblance of normal life is to return to the Gaza Strip. As of this writing, there is no sign that this is in the works or that the desolation of Gaza is a priority for anyone.

Bitter Fruit

Israel’s “friends” are its enemies; its enemies are its Prophets; and its Prophets are silenced, discredited, or outlawed. We live in formidable times when to champion universal human rights, self-determination for all peoples, freedom, independence and democracy is denounced, legislated against and declared anti-Semitic. In what upside down, through-the-looking-glass or metamorphosed reality can we retrieve the laws of reason, the art of compassion, the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and the self-evident truth of human equality? Zionism as a modern ideology has failed and will either self-destruct or bring down with it all its partisans.

• Jennifer Loewenstein

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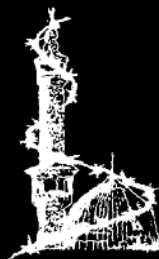


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