

A Comprehensive Response to Anti-Israel Tourist Activism Talking Points, Part II

Behind the selective criticism: Boycott advocacy for a one-state solution

by Robert Harris (August 2016)



This article addresses the propagandistic talking points of tourist activism, so designed to undermine the international standing of Israel. The anti-Israel commentaries by former RTE producer, Betty Purcell, in the aftermath of a 2015 visit to Judea and Samaria/West Bank, organised by the Bethlehem branch of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), in which she toured and lived with a Christian family, are utilised as a starting point for the arguments of rebuttal featured in this essay. [the "water apartheid" charge](#), which many anti-Israel

NGOs have advanced. Some NGOs [took issue](#) with her claim that Israeli people have a tendency to use as much as eight times more water than that of Arab-Palestinian people:

“Ms Purcell repeats the old canard that Jews are stealing the water of the West Bank. In fact, since the Oslo Accords in the mid-1990’s Israel has far exceeded its pledge to increase water resources to the Palestinian Authority; currently, the availability of fresh water to West Bank Arabs is more than two-thirds per capita to that of Jews living there and the gap is narrowing.

Moreover, the Palestinian Authority has not helped itself by doing nothing to repair water infrastructure under its own control or to recycle water for irrigation, despite international funding.”

Purcell was unmoved by the reply, [allowed water consumption](#) to effectively double that of the period under Jordanian control. The improvement of such infrastructure greatly improved the health of these communities, with a reduction in infant mortality rates, and a dramatic increase in life expectancy – indicators markedly better than many Arab nations [water rights at the Oslo talks](#), which resulted in the Jewish State losing substantive control of a large portion of its water resources – a major issue which has led to the development of highly efficient drip-irrigation techniques, and the substitution of fresh water with recycled water for agriculture usage.

Today, the Palestinian Authority run their own water supply, and access their own water sources so it is quite absurd to suggest Israel is purposely starving the PA of water resources. Israel provides a [a study](#) that notes, in depth, the damage that the Palestinian Authority has caused to the supply. He notes that there are problems with the supply, even though Israeli citizens pay more for their water to subsidise the supply of water to the PA at discount prices. The Palestinian Authority has rejected the use of advanced water conservation techniques, and has failed to maintain water infrastructure to a reasonable standard. It continues to drill water wells without authorisation from the Israel-PA Joint Water Committee, which has compromised water quality.

Purcell blames Israel for the presence of sewage on farms, echoing the claims of anti-Israel activists that Jewish neighbourhoods [failing to build sewage](#)

[treatment plants](#), with the co-operation of the Sewage Committee, allows sewage to flow untreated into waterways, and has [has led to substantive public health concerns](#), and regional inoculation programmes.

A free pass for Arab-Palestinian elites

Purcell said she felt depressed at the level of the “hardship and oppression” Arab-Palestinians endured:

“But that would not do justice to the brave and kind Palestinian families we were honoured to meet on our trip.

They deserve nothing less than equal treatment in a fair democratic society.

Only the international community can deliver that for them, by supporting their call for the isolation and boycott of Israel, until it agrees to a settlement that is fair and just for all.”

Purcell’s absurdly one-sided notion of injustice is rendered ever more fanciful for blithely ignoring the wrongdoing of the Palestinian Authority. Purcell complains about a deficit of freedom, fairness and democracy, but says nothing of the PA’s [PA administered prisons](#).

A few months before Purcell visited the region, Israeli Christian, Druze and Bedouin leaders met in Nazareth [treatment of religious minorities](#). Indeed the Constitution for the prospective Arab-Palestinian nation [disenchantment with Zionism](#). The “meme of the “disaffected Jew” can often be little more than a [pretending to be Jewish](#) to adopt this posture. There is an equivalent narrative for non-Jewish advocates who claim to have once supported Israel. In a letter Purcell [chaired ‘Irish Palestine Solidarity Campaign’ talks](#) in 2014. Such activism suggests that Purcell had a far from impartial stance before visiting the region.

Purcell described the contingent of fellow Christian tourists from various parts of Europe and the US:

“We are a group of international visitors from 13 countries around the globe who have come on a fact finding trip with the Bethlehem YMCA...”

The contingent stayed with Christian Arab-Palestinian families in Bethlehem, and travelled to other parts of Judea and Samaria/West Bank, under the auspices of the YMCA. It suggests a pre-existent bias in her choices. In view of her activism, her choice may have been knowing, because the YMCA has [trade of anti-Zionist tourism](#), to Judea and Samaria, which is sponsored by a whole host of anti-Israel NGOs. In 2013, Ardie Geldman, a nearby resident of Efrat, [documentary by Pierre Rehov](#) addresses the falsified “Jenin Massacre” narrative, where it was claimed that the IDF killed 500 civilians in the Jenin Arab-Palestinian camp in 2002. However, it was subsequently discovered that 47 died, most of which were terrorists. The documentary [gruesome horror](#) of an Arab-Palestinian child-bomber explode, leading to the realisation that the supposed images of torture were a result of suicide bombing.

Anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian?

The contrasting way in which Purcell addresses violence by a subset of the Jewish people of the region, and that of Arab-Palestinians, presents as a normative dichotomy within the anti-Israel movement:

“These settlers are aggressive and heavily armed. In Hebron, they throw rubbish down on the Palestinian street sellers who have managed to remain open.”

This singular thematic narrative leads many commentators to question the motives of the anti-Israel movement, for it seeks to [overstating the level of violence](#) from Jewish sources.

Thus, we have “aggressive and heavily armed” Jews in Hebron, but no mention of the fact that Hebron has been cleansed of its Jewish populace, by genocidal methods, in successive eras. Unfortunately, Purcell did not mention the [Three Nos](#)’ at the Arab League’s Khartoum conference of 1967. Egypt was expelled from the Arab League for making peace with Israel in 1978/79. More recently, Mahmoud Abbas rejected John Kerry’s 2014 [as Abbas has noted](#).

Purcell was interviewed on RTE Radio One’s [Arab-Palestinian origin](#).

“Marian I have to say, I read a bit before I went, I was absolutely shocked by what I saw. I mean, really whats there is a system of apartheid, and I’m not surprised that in the news headlines what we’re getting is an

escalation in the violence in the region.”

The host responded by arguing that Jewish people didn’t “feel” safe, a point which Purcell rejected, stating:

“But this isn’t even in the Jewish State. This isn’t even in Israel. This is in the Palestinian part if you like, the West Bank. [...]

There are no security threats because they are in the West Bank. They’ve no access to Israel.”

The above stance might be described as a “cake and eat it” line of argumentation. There are of course *fewer* terror threats (rather than none) originating from the Judea and Samaria/West Bank region, as a consequence of the very security barrier, and associated security restrictions, to which Purcell most trenchantly objects.

Purcell’s article similarly describes the presence of the IDF in a melodramatically malign fashion:

“From the moment they wake up, until they close their eyes at night, every man, woman and child in the West Bank of Palestine is under the control of the Israeli army and government.”

The claim is extraordinary, given that the Palestinian Authority rules 97% of the Arab-Palestinian populace, in Areas A and B. The PA has full security control over Area A, with Israeli oversight in B.

Objectively speaking, can it be said that Israel would have anything to fear from a full military withdrawal from the region? During the last two decades, Israel has withdrawn its troops from various regions, but reaction in each instance was an increase in terrorist attacks. Israel withdrew from the majority of Hebron in 1997, but was rewarded with substantive attacks during the Second Intifada, and latterly during the time of Purcell’s own visit. Israel withdrew from Lebanon (2000), which led to indiscriminate rocket attacks on Northern Israel’s civilian populace, temporarily displacing several hundred thousand people. Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and [reaction of the Israeli security services](#) during terrorist attacks. Other deaths were attributed to clashes during violent riotous incidents, which Purcell misleadingly describes

as “demonstrations.”

Advocating a one-state solution

Purcell would write in a [135 schools in the Bethlehem area](#) while the Aida refugee camp [draws attention](#) to what she feels are additional double-standards. She blames Israel because local “Palestinian women are limited to the Bethlehem maternity hospital” while Jewish people “have quick and easy access to the modern hospitals of Jerusalem.” The Palestinian Authority receives a substantial amount of donor aid from international sources, while access to health care medicines and technologies is unrestricted. How is it Israel’s fault if PA health care is not up to the standards of Israel? Why is Israel not allowed restrict access to its sovereign territory to non-nationals? Perhaps the Palestinian Authority should spend less rewarding terrorists a [ignore](#) the widespread intensive sectarian incitement against Jewish people, [insisting](#) that Jewish people would be unwelcome in a prospective Arab-Palestinian state. A look at the Palestinian Authority’s [discriminate against the grouping](#), to restrict the allowance of citizenship, and to pursue better conditions of employment. Similarly, Purcell only affords space for criticism of Israel, and labels it an “apartheid” state, despite the wrongdoing of these other nations being more redolent of the formal legal structures of apartheid South Africa.

Critics of the BDS campaign argue that the movement’s ultimate intent is to facilitate the destruction of the Jewish State. Such claims may be cast as pro-Israel propaganda, but criticism of the movement is also voiced from sources quite unsympathetic to the Jewish State. The vice-chair of ‘Americans for Peace Now’ [better employment terms](#) than they get at home. Forbes points out that boycotts cause far greater economic [dim prospects for peace](#), between the respective peoples. This would suggest her advocacy is not motivated by a desire to right such supposed wrongs, as indicated by the rigid insistence that Israel providing substantive amounts of water to the Palestinian Authority, as well as a belligerent Hamas, somehow amounts to “apartheid.”

The boycott movement effectively closed SodaStream’s factory in Judea and Samaria/West Bank, despite providing an economic model for greater co-operation, philosophically akin to the steel and coal treaties between France and Germany, which lent a hand in bringing a meaningful long-term peace to Western Europe. Indeed, some within the boycott movement express a blithe disregard when their

campaigns cause difficulties for the very people that they purport to support. Mahmoud Nawajaa, a [terror-analyst Jonathan Schanzer](#), revealed there are established links between the supposedly non-violent BDS movement and Hamas. Schanzer is the vice-president of research for the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

The Irish Examiner

The Irish Examiner's November 2nd, 2015 [politically-partial sources](#) like the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme (EAPPI), without advising of their pointed activism. The EAPPI, under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, has promoted a narrative that [legitimises Arab-Palestinian terrorism](#) as "resistance."

Op-eds should transparently declare any interests that authors may possess. Purcell's prior anti-Israel advocacy was not noted, nor the politicised nature of the organisation that facilitated her visit to Judea and Samaria/West Bank or the NGOs she cited. Such groups campaign on openly anti-Israel platforms.

The account Purcell gave of her visit to the territory provided an insight into the trenchant political culture found at RTE, because it is so comprehensively one-sided, and unashamedly propagandistic in nature. Purcell found no time to criticise Arab-Islamic society, which is determined to deny all Jewish independence on their homeland, nor the religious-sectarian extremism that motivates indiscriminate violence, both at an individuated level and within ruling terror organisations, against Jewish civilians.

Robert Harris contributes articles to several websites on contentious political issues (not to be confused with the popular English novelist (1957-) of the same name). He also blogs at [here](#).

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