

The other pandemic



by Phyllis Chesler

I can't stand it anymore. I'm not talking about masking, social distancing, or going stir-crazy. I'm talking about all the ways in which the word Palestine has infected world consciousness.

It *is* a virus of sorts and it is certainly pandemic. Israel-Palestine appears everywhere. It is meant to signal that the writer is a politically significant thinker, it redeems an otherwise pedestrian play, movie, or book and renders it more relevant than it really is.

Our culture's readiness, eagerness, to believe that men can become women and that women can become men is similar to the belief that "Palestine" is a country that has always existed, that it was there before the Biblical, indigenous Jews left Iraq for Canaan. Forget the inconvenient truth that half of all Israeli Jews are dark-skinned Arabs and that many Palestinian Arabs are white or olive skinned and look nothing like black South Africans—with whom they are always paired in order to better, but falsely accuse Israel of alleged racism and apartheid.

No matter what I'm reading, be it a front page headline, a column about cooking, a book review, an article in a glossy magazine—there it is: "Palestine", always "Palestine". Anyone can pick up an article on any subject and find "Palestine"

injected into it, subtly or brazenly.

For example, take the *New York Times*—please! In their December 26th, 2021 weekend Arts edition, there's a [review of a photographic exhibit](#) by Gillian Laub. She has photographed her very Jewish—and therefore very divided—family. There are the rich, very rich relatives, who have voted for Trump, watch *FOX TV*, and who wear ostentatious and expensive furs. These are the Bad Jews.

On the other hand, the photographer and the younger generations are “guilty” about their “privilege;” they have posters on their walls of Barack Obama in Hebrew, Elizabeth Warren, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and a poster that reads “WE CAN END GUN VIOLENCE NOW.” These are the Good Jews.

The journalist, Yinka Elujoba, wonders if Laub, the photographer, came into her embarrassment through “her earlier work as a photographer in uncomfortable situations like the Israel-Palestine conflict or racism and segregation in the Southern United States as a response to this, a result of her trying to enter head-on into realities that were far from hers?”

I have no idea if Laub ever photographed “Israel-Palestine” and whether Hamas or the Palestinian Authority made her feel uncomfortable—they exert terrorist-style control over foreign media—or whether it was the sight of Muslim Israelis mingling freely with their Israeli Jewish counterparts that made Laub “uncomfortable.”

Just wondering.

But then there's this. *Vanity Fair* is a glossy, gossipy magazine. The current issue has a photo of Priyanka on the cover and pieces about Dave Chappelle, Pornhub Palace, Hugh Jackman, and Snoop Dog. And yet, here's piece by Janine di Giovanni titled [Generation Gaza](#). Photos depict the sea, a modern urban setting (which is headlined: No Exit: Night

descends on Gaza City, urban center of the Gaza Strip.) Guess how it begins?

“Gaza’s latest conflagration, back in May, was ruthless, deadly—and somehow inevitable. After Israeli police tried to expel longtime Arab residents from East Jerusalem (is she talking about the three families that refuse to pay rent to the legal Jewish owners in the Shimon Ha-Tzadik/Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood?), Palestinian demonstrators took to the streets in Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel itself... when violence spread to the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, one of the holiest sites in Islam (really? I thought it was the third holiest site in Islam and that the mosque took over what once was the holiest site in Judaism, the Temple which preceded it by millennia, on that same spot), Israeli security forces clamped down... there was a global chorus of indignation.”

The article is filled with the usual biased and unchecked propaganda: “deeply traumatized children” (only Palestinian Arab, never Israeli), and even though Di Giovanni notes that it is “dangerous” to speak out against Hamas, a group which carries out “collective punishments” and controls Gaza, she manages to blame Israel-only for the misery of Gazans. Israel—not all the other Arab countries which have refused to grant citizenship to the many generations of descendants of those Palestinian Arabs who fled the Holy Land in 1948.

There are so many lies and a total absence of context in this piece that I could barely bring myself to read every word. I did my best.

One day, in a court of law, I imagine that hundreds of thousands—no, hundreds of millions of just such poisoned but polished pieces of propaganda will be entered into evidence in order to hold the propagandists accountable for the maiming of minds and the shedding of blood. Maybe we’ll have to wait for a heavenly court but until then, we must expose it for the lying filth that it is—and keep on doing so.

A Sisyphean task if there ever was one.

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