

**What does a Chukchi author,
an Australian journalism
student, and an American
journalism professor have in
common?**



by Lev Tsitrin

Even in our age of instant communications, some news travel slowly. It took papers almost a month to report on an article calling, in that many words, for “Death to Israel.” Ordinarily, such an article would be neither particularly shocking, nor newsworthy: the sentiment is far from uncommon in some parts of the world. What made it into a “story” [was the place of publication](#) – not Gaza, not Ramallah, not Tehran – but a civilized, Western country, Australia; it was posted in Adelaide University’s student-run magazine called *On Dit*.

What somewhat blunted the edge of the fiery appeal “to demand the abolition of Israel,” with “Free Palestine and Death to Israel” for a punchline, was that the author was hijab-clad, and bore a name of Habibah Jaghoori. Although a journalism student (and even a magazine editor) at an ostensibly Western institution, both her knowledge of facts, and her murderous passion came straight from Gaza or Tehran. Transplanting an apple tree to another country won’t make it bear peaches, I guess. You can’t make an impartial journalist out of a bigoted propagandist, even in Australia.

Why? Because to make a journalist, you need to teach her to follow facts, and apparently Adelaide University’s professors of journalism do not deem it necessary to teach students that particular journalistic virtue. Else, Ms. Jaghoori would have learned about the early history of the Middle East before writing – which is the history of Arab conquests that went on for centuries after Mohammed’s death, and dramatically expanded Moslem empire from a corner of western Arabian peninsula to half of the then-known world, stretching from the border of France in the West, to that of India in the East; in this process, Palestine fell to the Arabs in 636 AD. The Arab conquest was exactly analogous to European takeover of the Americas after Columbus’ voyages – it was the same exercise in colonialism and imperialism, if one wants to use big words. Ms. Jaghoori would have also learned that Palestine was fully Jewish for some millennium and a half, from the Exodus of circa 1200 BC to the expulsion of Jews by the Romans of around 200 AD after the Bar Kokhba revolt. Hence, she would have known that Jews have a very sound claim on the land, and Zionism is by no means “A military occupation, a colonial project, a Western capitalist endeavour” accompanied by “ethnic cleansing” as Ms. Jaghoori tried to assure us; it is, if anything, a national liberation movement.

But does Ms. Jaghoori’s monumental ignorance come as a surprise, though? Not really. If her professors are like

American journalism professor Peter Beinart, who recently published in the *New York Times* a monumentally bizarre piece titled "[Has the Fight Against Antisemitism Lost Its Way?](#)" that is premised on the view that all that Hamas, Islamic Jihad, PLO and their ilk want is "human rights" for Palestinians. Professor Beinart has not the slightest suspicion, let alone knowledge of the fact that Palestinians wage a war on Israel – a diplomatic, military, and terrorist war – aiming to destroy the Jewish state. Since he does not see Palestinian terrorism, Israeli countermeasures are in his eyes unprovoked, racist, apartheid actions undertaken by cruel Israelis against Palestinian innocents. Hence, he is appalled that mainstream Jewish organizations would dare accuse Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch of antisemitism when their own one-sided reports accuse Israel of apartheid.

With such professors, why wonder that we have such students? Why be surprised that Beinart's bile also flows from Jaghoori's pen? If in the *New York Times* publishes anti-Israel drivel, why not *On Dit*?

Yet amusingly, reading Jaghoori and Beinart merely made me laugh, for they brought to my mind an old, Soviet-time ethnic joke (there were plenty of those in the Soviet Union, most featuring Jews, Georgians, and Chukchi – a people living at the far north, near the polar sea, whose presumably uncouth mores became a butt of jokes – usually rather innocent ones.) In the one that instantly came to mind, a Chukchi youth tries to get into a university that trains professional writers (and yes, there was such institution of higher learning in the Soviet Union). So the examiner asks him: "did you read Tolstoy?" No, replies Chukchi, I did not. – But did you read Chekhov? – No, I didn't. How about Dostoyevski? – the same, negative reply. "So why did you come here?" asks the annoyed examiner. "There is some misunderstanding here" answers Chukchi. "Of course I belong here. Chukchi is not a reader. Chukchi is a writer!"

At this point everyone laughs; yet I am not sure that Chukchi's writing was indeed the worse for his not having read Russian classics. To write fiction – which after all, is one's fantasies put on paper, one does not really need to know what, or how, his predecessors wrote.

Not so with journalism, though. Journalism is no fiction. Journalists write about facts, and basic factual knowledge is a must for this profession. Yet, ask Ms. Jaghoori, "have you studied world history?" "No," will be her answer. So how did she get into a journalism school? Well, apparently she was examined by a journalism professor of the ilk of Beinart – a professor for whom ignorance of facts is no barrier to being a journalist. Why wonder then that *On Dit* publishes hateful drivel – or that the *New York Times* does so, for that matter? With professors like Beinart, why wonder at students like Jaghoori? With the *New York Times* serving as an instrument of hate, why be surprised that *On Dit* does?