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# Reinventing the Blood Libel for Contemporary Consumption



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A mock Israeli checkpoint set up during "Israeli Apartheid Week" at the University of California, Los Angeles campus. Photo: AMCHA Initiative.

Blood libels have typically focused on far-fetched accusations that the Jews are to blame for whatever ills inflicted a community. More specifically, the claim was that Jews needed the blood of Christian children to bake matzot for the festival of Passover.

Numerous cases of blood libels were recorded, and not all in Europe. As an extension of the phenomenon, false and incendiary charges against Jews were introduced by the Church with political motivations (i.e., the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) and by the Nazi Germany propaganda machine, which used the Big Lie technique to propagate charges against Jews that led to the murder of six million in the Holocaust.

What is common to all these blood libels (figurative or symbolic) is that they are based on falsehoods. The more far-fetched the falsehood, the more it was accepted by the mob that acted on it and the leadership that disseminated it. What links the *Protocols* and the Nazi ideology is the universal damage they inflicted.

In the 19th century, the blood libel was "imported" to the Middle East. Damascus in 1840 saw Christian antisemitism reinforced by local Muslim anti-Jewish sentiments. The Damascus Affair is important, because the falsehoods on which it was based were widely accepted on the European continent, which originated

them in the first place. Since then, these lies have served as the basis for TV series in Egypt and Syria, usually broadcast during Ramadan, which promote the notion that Jews kill small children to extract their blood for Passover and help engender an age-old stereotypical view of the Jew as evil and conniving.

The establishment of the state of Israel was met with fierce resistance by the surrounding Arab countries, which, in 1948, tried to obliterate the nascent country. That attempt failed, as did ensuing wars, particularly in 1967 and 1973. In addition to doing military battle, the Arab countries — through the Arab League — declared an economic boycott (which was a continuation of the Arab boycott against the pre-1948 Jewish community in Palestine). The 1994 Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf ended its member nations' participation in the boycott, and since then, the economic boycott no longer has a significant impact on Israel.

With the failure of military offensives and economic boycotts, a new form of a boycott re-emerged after the UN World Conference against Racism (Durban, South Africa, 2001). The UN conference was hijacked by pro-Palestinian activists who — on the platform of the fight against racism — propagated an effort to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel.

This campaign, like the Big Lie technique before it, was based on falsehoods, such as accusing Israel of being an “apartheid state” and a “colonialist entity” that “stole the land from the native inhabitants.” In a sense, the antisemitic charges were now channeled into anti-Zionist charges and the individually persecuted Jew morphed into the persecuted country of Israel. Thus far, the impact of the economic boycott and divestment is relatively small, yet the danger of the BDS movement lies in its spewing of vicious falsehoods about Israel in an attempt to erode the Jewish state's moral foundation.

In today's age of technology, we see more rapid use of social media and soft power by pro-Palestinian groups hijacking the narrative of peace, justice and human rights, while in reality they yearn for Israel's destruction.

Moreover, we have now witnessed groups — predominately on the political Left — adopting the Palestinian cause as their own under the guise of “intersectionality,” a term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s to highlight the dual oppressions faced by black women (sexism and racism), and to bring attention to the feminist and anti-racism movements that failed to fully represent and advocate for them. Currently, it has become a slogan under which minority groups join to fight what critics see as unrelated battles, but what activists see as iterations of the same struggle for justice.

As it is clearly articulated by the Black-Palestinian solidarity statement:

Palestinian liberation represents an inherent threat to Israeli settler colonialism and apartheid, an apparatus built and sustained on ethnic cleansing, land theft, and the denial of Palestinian humanity and sovereignty. While we acknowledge that the apartheid configuration in Israel/Palestine is unique from the United States (and

South Africa), we continue to see connections between the situation of Palestinians and Black people.

Israel's widespread use of detention and imprisonment against Palestinians evokes the mass incarceration of Black people in the US, including the political imprisonment of our own revolutionaries. Soldiers, police, and courts justify lethal force against us and our children who pose no imminent threat. And while the US and Israel would continue to oppress us without collaborating with each other, we have witnessed police and soldiers from the two countries train side-by-side.

As for the "D" in divestment, the long-term effect is not measurable as of yet, but poses a risk of setting the exact state of mind that allowed the Damascus Affair to be accepted at face value in Europe. Indeed, when an interest group demands that the mayor of Atlanta "divest" the police budget, it is fairly clear which terminology inspired this rhetoric. And that "D" for divestment is then followed by the "B" in boycott, which calls for a stop to professional ties between US law enforcement agencies and the Israel Police.

BDS constitutes the modern version of the old blood libel. It is targeting Jews and Israel (even if some vocal Jews are helping this effort). It ignores any transgressions in the Arab and Muslim worlds and other locations where major atrocities take place, and it is focused on national character assassination that is aimed to set the ground for the annihilation of Israel. It is time that the marketplace of ideas forthrightly reject such discriminatory, racist and despicable ideas.

Finally, we can no longer ignore, wish away or hide from the problem. The onslaught is vigorous, well-funded and deadly serious. Therefore, joining forces against BDS is important not only for Israel's sake but for the sake of democracies anywhere in the world. Legislators, elected officials and civic associations have recently demonstrated the power of public resilience in the face of BDS activities, thus paving the way for an effective strategy. More should join in this effort.

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