

# The Philosophical Salon

A **LA** **RB** LOS ANGELES REVIEW OF BOOKS CHANNEL

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com>)



[HOME \(HTTPS://THEPHILOSOPHICALSALON.COM/\)](https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/)

[ABOUT \(HTTPS://THEPHILOSOPHICALSALON.COM/ABOUT/\)](https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/about/)

[CONTACT US \(HTTPS://THEPHILOSOPHICALSALON.COM/CONTACT/\)](https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/contact/)

DEBATES

# REHUMANIZING PALESTINIANS? RADICALIZE THE STRUGGLE!

09 | JUL  
2018



BY JAMIL KHADER ([HTTPS://THEPHILOSOPHICALSALON.COM/AUTHOR/JAMILKHADER/](https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/author/jamilkhader/))



SHARE



COMMENT



LOVE

▲ TOP

**A**s the Israeli military continues to carry out its anti-kite air raids in the Gaza strip (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/rockets-fired-gaza-israel-strikes-amas-targets-180620065738008.html>), another war has been raging in the mainstream and social media about Palestinian humanity. Whereas Palestinian activists in the occupied territories are busy refuting the claims that reduce the Palestinian struggle for freedom to a humanitarian issue, as a recent op-ed in the Arabic Alquds newspaper argues, diasporic Palestinian activists have been spotting the light on the persistent denial of Palestinian humanity in Western and pro-Israeli circles. They are rightly outraged ([https://www.vox.com/platform/amp/first-person/2018/5/22/17380950/israel-gaza-conflict-protests-palestine?\\_twitter\\_impression=true](https://www.vox.com/platform/amp/first-person/2018/5/22/17380950/israel-gaza-conflict-protests-palestine?_twitter_impression=true)) not only at the dehumanization of Palestinians (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/18/opinion/israel-defend-gaza-border.html>) as mindless Hamas zombie terrorists in mainstream media, but also at the charade that, in Robert Fisk (<https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/gaza-palestine-israel-conflict-us-embassy-jerusalem-jared-kushner-donald-trump-a8355631.html>)'s words, the “Palestinians are a non-people.”

While appeals to humanity and dehumanization are important as a strategy for combatting the denial of rights and protections to disposable out-groups that are conferred upon other people in liberal discourses, framing the Palestinian struggle for freedom in these terms is not enough. At a time when the liquidation of the Palestinian cause through the “deal of the century” is underway, presenting the debate in these terms effectively depoliticizes the Palestinian struggle for freedom.

The problem is not only that humanization and dehumanization are slippery terms that are subject to reversals, but they also posit the struggle in non-political and cultural terms that have already been compromised by a long history of colonial and liberal notions of humanness. In fact, it has also become the current US administration's response (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-trump-admin-wants-gulf-states-to-invest-up-to-1-billion-for-gaza-1.6180191>) to ameliorating the living conditions in the Gaza strip. Moreover, these arguments about the humanity of the Palestinians have backfired in a politically-correct multicultural context, in which the battle over Palestinian and Jewish dehumanization ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-to-tell-when-criticism-of-israel-is-actually-anti-semitism/2018/05/17/cb58bf10-59eb-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.30e4de923191](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-to-tell-when-criticism-of-israel-is-actually-anti-semitism/2018/05/17/cb58bf10-59eb-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d_story.html?utm_term=.30e4de923191)) can only neutralize and moot each other.

### **The (De)Humanization Conundrum**

This is neither the first nor last time that Palestinian humanity has been the subject of a heated debate. Like many other oppressed and disposable out-groups, Palestinians have been called upon time and again to prove their humanity to the world. Ironically, these calls are issued forth right in crisis periods, when the Palestinians have been subjected to brutal, calculated campaigns of violence, genocide and destruction. However, the grounds for articulating the basis of Palestinian humanity have shifted in the post-Oslo accords era.

Literature on the subject shows that the term humanity is not a given, but a dynamic process that slides among four different categories in relations between in-groups and out-groups: humanity, dehumanization, infrahumanization, and rehumanization. These dynamics are also mediated by third parties. It also shows two main referents for the term humanity: Human nature and human uniqueness, what is essential about being human and what is distinctive about humanity as a species, respectively. These shifting and reversible terms demonstrate that people can be denied humanity one day and granted human status another day. This is not a solid ground for a struggle.

### **Rehumanization through Human Rights**

For the last two decades, Palestinian humanity was framed in terms of the international human rights regime. Palestinian activists, international human rights organizations, and NGO's sought to legitimize the Palestinian struggle for freedom, by incorporating Palestinians under the protections of universal human rights law. However, admission into cosmopolitan human rights law is not automatic: Palestinians can become truly human—that is, subject to the protections of international law, only when the UN and the international human-rights law confers upon them the status of humanity and afford them the rights and protections that other proper subjects of human rights law enjoy.

Nonetheless, international law has been impotent in guaranteeing the protections and safety for Palestinians in the face of the thick Israeli record of human rights violations (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/18/gaza-international-inquiry-needed-stem-bloodshed-and-advance-accountability>) in the occupied territories and Gaza. Needless to mention, the US has been the major obstacle to actualizing this aspiration, even though the current US administration (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-trump-admin-wants-gulf-states-to-invest-up-to-1-billion-for-gaza-1.6180191>) has coopted the same language of human rights and humanitarianism. The Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that Trump asked (ordered?) Gulf countries to invest in Gaza's economy as a prelude to his attempt to pitch the “deal of the century” to the world community.

The problem is that humanitarian intervention ideologues do not take the term humanitarian seriously—they merely pay lip service to it or put it under erasure. As the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek argues, humanitarian interventions are grounded in clear political motivations (<https://libcom.org/library/against-human-rights-zizek>) and presuppose an absolute victim (<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/slavoj-zizek/articles/nato-the-left-hand-of-god/>) who is reduced to nothingness and incapable of defending itself. Obviously, for the gods and goddesses of the international human rights regime, Palestinians have not met their preconditions to be worthy of all human rights goods.

## **The Shift to Non-violent Resistance**

In the aftermath of the Great March of Return, the grounds for attributing humanity to the Palestinians shifted from human rights to commitment to non-violent resistance.

Commentators invoked the non-violent and peaceful demonstrations that characterized the March as incontrovertible proof of Palestinian humanity. As one journalist wrote (<http://inthesetimes.com/article/21148/palestinians-gaza-israel-massacre-jerusalem-embassy-donald-trump>), “the Palestinians are forcing the world to see their humanity.”

Appeals to non-violence have to be understood in the context of the categorical liberal renunciation of violence in all its forms, even though the right to resist an occupying force (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/north-africa-west-asia/poorna-mishra/right-to-resist-in-occupied-palestine-denial-and-suppression>), for example, is enshrined in international law. For liberals, as Zizek states in one of his essays (<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2011/05/the-jacobin-spirit>), “violence is never legitimate, even though it may sometimes be necessary to resort to it.” Zizek suggests that from a radical emancipatory perspective, this motto should be reversed: “For the oppressed, violence is always legitimate (since their very status is the result of the violence they are exposed to), but never necessary (it will always be a matter of strategy whether or not use violence against the enemy).”

What needs to be emphasized is that not all Palestinians are encouraged to renounce violence. The Road Map (<https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/20062.htm>) sanctions violence on the part of the PA security forces to combat terrorism, including “commencing confiscation of illegal weapons and consolidation of security authority, free of association with terror and corruption.” The demand for non-violent resistance is ultimately embedded in the semi-state’s exclusive monopoly over violence as we have recently witnessed in the brutal repression of the demonstrators in Ramallah (<https://www.counterpunch.org/2018/06/20/the-palestinian-tipping-point/>) over the deteriorating economic and social conditions in Gaza. This is not a fight over humanization, but a symptom of the eruption of the class struggle in Palestine in all its ugly realities.

## **Jewish Humanity and Zionist anti-Semitism**

These debates about Palestinian humanity were met with denunciations ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-to-tell-when-criticism-of-israel-is-actually-anti-semitism/2018/05/17/cb58bf10-59eb-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.30e4de923191](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-to-tell-when-criticism-of-israel-is-actually-anti-semitism/2018/05/17/cb58bf10-59eb-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d_story.html?utm_term=.30e4de923191)) of the dehumanization of Jews and Zionists by leftist circles on account of their purported anti-Semitism. The backlash came pretty quickly: In an op-ed ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-to-tell-when-criticism-of-israel-is-actually-anti-semitism/2018/05/17/cb58bf10-59eb-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7d0f67c6dbdb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/how-to-tell-when-criticism-of-israel-is-actually-anti-semitism/2018/05/17/cb58bf10-59eb-11e8-b656-a5f8c2a9295d_story.html?utm_term=.7d0f67c6dbdb)) for *The Washington Post*, Tru'ah (<http://www.truah.org/>)'s Executive Director Rabbi Jill Jacobs apologizes for and defends the horrors of Israeli violence against Palestinians during the Great March of Return. Jacobs is clearly interested in a dehumanization Olympics, in which the humanity of Jews and Zionists matters more than the Palestinians.

Nonetheless, she hypocritically implies that she is interested in a movement that “requires caring about the dignity, well-being, concerns and self-determination of all people.” She does not acknowledge the humanity of the Palestinians in her piece, not even once. In the process, she co-opts a charge levelled against Palestinians in mainstream media to talk about the victimization of the Israelis who are allegedly blamed by leftists “for their own deaths.”

This might be the lesson of the controversy over (<http://mondoweiss.net/2018/06/roseanne-palestinians-muslims/>) American Jewish comedian Roseann Barr's anti-Palestinian “Hitler cookie joke.” Asked recently whether the cookies in her infamous “The Oven Feelin” photos (<https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/did-roseanne-pose-as-adolf-hitler-photo-shoot/>) were Jews, she retorted, “No, it was not Jews; it was Palestinians.” Even though the original photos appeared in a satirical Jewish magazine, these photos were met with such an intense uproar that the magazine had to come to her defense and pull the issue out.

At one level, this shows that dehumanization of the Jews is unacceptable in mainstream public discourse, whereas the infra-humanization of the Palestinians is still legitimate—Barr did not expect and will not confront any backlash against her dehumanization of the Palestinians. Ironically, though, Barr seems to be unwittingly drawing implicit parallels between the Israeli

Zionist-settler colonial project and apartheid politics and the Nazi extermination of 6 million Jews. If the cookies are not really Jewish but Palestinians, then the one responsible for their extermination is not Hitler but the Israeli government. Such parallels should be rejected outright, even though they might fit in with Barr's earlier criticism of Israeli genocidal politics (<http://mondoweiss.net/2018/06/roseanne-palestinians-muslims/>).

But the real problem with Jacobs' essay is that she opportunistically refers to the horrors of anti-Semitism and the dehumanization of the Jews, while conveniently ignoring the role Zionist anti-Semitism plays today in recycling and spreading anti-Semitic tropes and rhetoric. The Israeli and Zionist establishment has made allies with right-wing populist nationalist (<http://forward.com/news/breaking-news/326020/5-criingeworthy-things-donald-trump-has-said-about-the-jews/>) and white supremacist forces that have been known to spew anti-Semitic propaganda. Trump's recent "infestation" comment reeks of noxious anti-Semitic Nazi language (<https://forward.com/culture/403526/infest-the-ugly-nazi-history-of-trumps-chosen-verb-about-immigrants/>).

The fiasco of the opening (<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-david-friedman-behind-anti-semitic-pastor-invite-at-embassy-ceremony-1.6093731>) of the US embassy in Jerusalem speaks loud and clear about the complicity of the Israeli and Zionist establishment in the promotion of Evangelical Christian anti-Semitic discourses that use the Jews as tools for the realization of their pre-millenarian dispensational prophecies. Moreover, this Zionist anti-Semitism has also targeted Jewish organizations (<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-publishes-bds-blacklist-these-20-groups-will-be-denied-entry-1.5729880>) that are critical of Israeli policies and Zionist politics. Finally, as Zizek points out ([http://inthesetimes.com/article/17702/slavoj\\_zizek\\_zionism](http://inthesetimes.com/article/17702/slavoj_zizek_zionism)), the Israeli government's calls on European Jewry to immigrate to Israel is the wet dream of every European anti-Semite, for it helps realize their dream of a Europe free of Jews.

Nevertheless, we should reject all nonsensical claims (<https://www.veteranstoday.com/2018/06/10/was-anthony-bourdain-murdered-for-humanising-palestinians/>) that blame the death of internationally renowned chef Anthony

Bourdain as a revenge for his solidarity with the Palestinians and his unapologetic campaign to humanize them (<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1731096/3-anthony-bourdain-celebrity-chef-humanised-palestinians/>). This vile conspiracy theory should be rejected for its underlying anti-Semitic hate.

## Radicalizing the Struggle

Articulating the Palestinian struggle for freedom in terms of Palestinian humanity is a slippery strategy. Instead, we need to work with other disposable groups, whom Trump has compared to “garbage and waste (<https://truthout.org/articles/palestinians-must-unite-with-others-the-trump-administration-deems-disposable/>),” “worst of the worst” and an “infestation ([https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1009071403918864385?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fthehill.com%2Fhomenews%2Fadministration%2F392977-trump-dems-want-illegal-immigrants-to-infest-our-country/](https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1009071403918864385?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fthehill.com%2Fhomenews%2Fadministration%2F392977-trump-dems-want-illegal-immigrants-to-infest-our-country/)),” in a common emancipatory struggle for freedom and justice. In the context of the geopolitical changes in the region and the world and the polarization of wealth through the consolidation of authoritarian capitalist regimes as well as ultra-right populist nationalist movements, we would do better to invent new ways to align the Palestinians with the “worst-off” parts of the world’s population around the same antagonism that cuts across all our differences. This is the only way to be true to the radically egalitarian message (<http://mondoweiss.net/2018/04/great-return-history/>) of the Great March of Return.

## THE AUTHOR



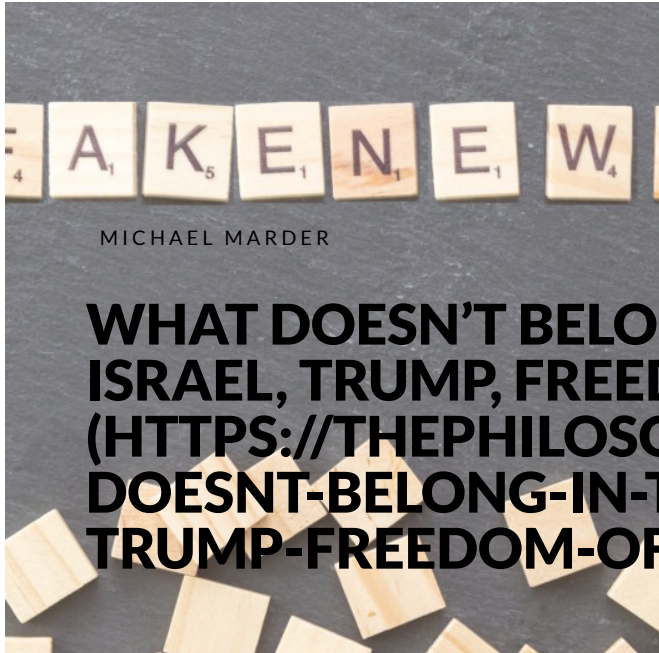
Jamil Khader is Dean of Research and Professor of English at Bethlehem University, Palestine. He is also the author of "Cartographies of Transnationalism in Postcolonial Feminisms: Geography, Culture, Identity, Politics" (Lexington Books 2012) and is the co-editor, with Molly Rothenberg, of a collection of essays on the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek, entitled, "Žižek Now: Current Perspectives in Žižek Studies" (Polity 2013).

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/author/jamilkhader/>)

**Jamil Khader**  
(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/author/jamilkhader/>)



YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



0 Comments The Philosophical Salon

1 Login

Recommend

Share

Sort by Best



Start the discussion...

LOG IN WITH

OR SIGN UP WITH DISQUS

Name

Be the first to comment.

ALSO ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL SALON

Is Your Healthy Lifestyle Bad for You?

1 comment • 9 months ago

Dhiyan mahabir — What absolute hogwash.

Post-Truth or: Why Nietzsche is not Responsible for Donald Trump

1 comment • 10 months ago

Bonifacio Moreno-iñigó — Nietzsche's statements should not be taken that literally all the time, as he likes to play -let us say ...

Blade Runner 2049: A View of Post-Human Capitalism

27 comments • 8 months ago

Copyright101 — Scott has been explicit that he sees Deckard as a replicant and the directors cut makes this pretty clear.

Hegel on Donald Trump's "Objective Humor"

1 comment • 6 months ago

Isidore Ducan — Who has chosen the illustration for this article ?Does SZ claim anywhere that Trump is Putin's baby ...

Subscribe Add Disqus to your site

Disqus

ARCHIVES

July 2018

(https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/07/)

June 2018

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/06/>)

May 2018

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/05/>)

April 2018

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/04/>)

March 2018

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/03/>)

February 2018

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/02/>)

January 2018

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2018/01/>)

December 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/12/>)

November 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/11/>)

October 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/10/>)

September 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/09/>)

August 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/08/>)

July 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/07/>)

June 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/06/>)

May 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/05/>)

April 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/04/>)

March 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/03/>)

February 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/02/>)

January 2017

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2017/01/>)

December 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/12/>)

November 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/11/>)

October 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/10/>)

September 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/09/>)

August 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/08/>)

July 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/07/>)

June 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/06/>)

May 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/05/>)

April 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/04/>)

March 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/03/>)

February 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/02/>)

January 2016

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2016/01/>)

December 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/12/>)

November 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/11/>)

October 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/10/>)

September 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/09/>)

August 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/08/>)

July 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/07/>)

June 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/06/>)

May 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/05/>)

April 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/04/>)

March 2015

(<https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/2015/03/>)