

Is Anti-Zionism Antisemitism?

The Zionist ideology based on the Jewish plan to return to Palestine, where they were expelled by the Romans in 70 BCE, and the establishment of a state which belongs to the Jews have encountered the opposition of both Muslims and the Jews as of its emergence in the 19th century. After Zionism reached its aim by establishing Israel in 1948, religious and ideological opposition to Zionism has gradually increased and shifted to humanitarian grounds due to Israel's expansionist politics toward neighboring countries, and its merciless attitude toward the local people most of whom is comprised of Muslim Arabs. Today, while not only the Muslims in Palestine but also about the 2 billion Muslim population around the world have been decidedly maintaining their opposition to Zionism and the state it created, roughly two million Jews out of the total 15 millions Jewish population all over the world is opposing to this ideology and its state as much as Muslims. According to a recent survey conducted by Pew Research Center, while 73 percent of the total 6,5 million Jews in Israel think that Zionism identifies them largely or completely, approximately 24 percent of the total 6,5 million Jews in Israel have indicated that they do not identify themselves as Zionists.

Jewish opposition to Zionism which seems like a paradox at first glance, is actually based on religious and ideological reasons, is a reasonable opposition. Ran Greenstein mentions 3 approaches regarding the criticism of Zionism: religious rejection of secular-nationalism; the left-wing opposition that favors universal socialist norms rather than national goals; liberal and humanist critics of a Jewish state in Palestine. However, that most of the Jews rejected this ideology when it emerged and there are still many anti-Zionist Jews today are rarely known facts today. This is because of the effort to legitimize the Zionist historiography by ignoring this antagonism in history books and by declaring this opposition as illegitimate by blaming it of antisemitism.

One of the important policies that Israel follows to sustain its existence is to blur the distinction between Judaism and Zionism. Thus, Israel, which claims to represent all the Jews around the world, blames those who question its legitimacy and policies, especially the Muslims and the Jews, of antisemitism. The opposition to Zionism having religious, ideological and humanitarian dimensions cannot be counted as antisemitism which is an irrational bias towards a particular race. At the same time, Zionists' effort to equalize the concepts of "Zionist" and "Jew" have created the impression that anti-Zionist Jews deny their own identity. The Jews who refuse Zionism and its state, and organize demonstrations by using the slogan of "Not in my name" all around the world have been labeled as "self-hating Jews" or "traitors" by the Zionists. Thus, the Zionists try to defuse these Jews who refuse Zionism and its state by announcing them illegitimate on all platforms. Muslims' opposition to Zionism is mostly blamed for antisemitism by Israel and the Zionists, in this way, they attempt to legitimize Israel's violent politics toward the Muslims.

While opposition to Zionism is a dissent against an idea, antisemitism is a prejudice directed toward a certain people, namely the Jews, which is independent of any objective reality. Just as a German who criticizes Nazi policies cannot be considered as an anti-German or a white person who criticizes the apartheid South Africa regime cannot be considered as an anti-white person, similarly, the Jews who criticize Zionism which had been accepted as a racist ideology once by the UN cannot be considered as antisemitic. Likewise, Muslims who hosted Jews, let them even hold positions in state and protect those Jews who lived in Jerusalem until a century ago for hundreds of years, cannot be accused of antisemitism. These examples stand still in the history despite the blind accusations that Islam is inherently antisemitic.

Today, the misconception that all Jews are Zionists has become so strong due to Israel's strategy to equalize Zionism and Judaism or Jewishness. As a matter of fact, the distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism has become ambiguous, and many people unintentionally adopt an antisemitic manner when they, in fact, intend to be anti-Zionists. The disagreement between the two communities has been escalating as a result of the negative perceptions that arise from this confusion of conceptions. This attitude also serves Israel's interests and makes its policy of violence look innocent. In this context, the distinction between the Zionism and Judaism which improperly come to mean the same thing should be better realized, and it is necessary not to create grounds for Israel's policies of violence by unconsciously being antisemites.

The opposition to Israel which comes to the fore with child-terrorism nowadays, and to Zionism as its main ideology is expanding gradually among certain Jewish groups and Muslims. Israel wants to make this opposition illegitimate by labeling it with antisemitism and use it as a trump for reproducing its entity which

is in more and more danger every passing day. These oppositions to Israel which becomes more and more aggressive as the antagonisms toward itself increase are not antisemitic -as we see the real antisemites in history are the ones who cooperate with Israel today. That is to say, these anti-Zionisms are not antisemitism. The Jewish opposition to Zionism in particular which represents a very small part of the overall Jewish community has not been minded and thrust aside. Nevertheless, as Paul Johnson said, the Jewish history suggests that rigorous minorities tend to become triumphant majorities.