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'Jews Are Our Dogs'

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A man brazenly shoots his way into the Jewish Federation of Seattle, kills a woman, and wounds four others, three critically. As he opens fire, the alleged assailant shouts, "I am a Muslim and I'm angry at Israel," as if to indicate that his religious affiliation gives him permission to kill Jews.

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In a second incident, Mel Gibson, a Hollywood director and actor, is arrested in Malibu on suspicion of drunk driving. He allegedly screams at the officer, "The Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world," not realizing that nearly all today's wars are Islamic wars. He also asks his arresting officer, "Are you Jewish?"

While Jew hating is not a new phenomena, it has recently become the insult de riguer in many parts of our society. And it isn't just gun-toting rampagers or drunk celebrities — the hatred is evident in the streets. Nowhere is that clearer than in a third recent incident, in which Palestinian Arabs in the streets of San Francisco chant proudly in Arabic and without fear of being castigated, "The Jews are our dogs."

It happened at an anti-Israel demonstration in front of the Israeli consulate in San Francisco on Thursday, July 12, organized by a Palestinian group called Al Awda. The demonstration was loud, boisterous, and passionate. Suddenly, demonstrators began chanting in Arabic "Al Yahud Kelabna," "the Jews are our dogs."

As troubling as it is to hear such sentiment voiced on a street in America, it was even more distressing for me since it conjured up terrible memories of when I was a young boy growing up in Egypt. These memories included Egyptian mobs descending upon the Jewish quarter of Cairo chanting "Al Yahud Kelabna," followed by violence that left some Jews dead and injured and the community dazed.

Egyptian Muslim mobs no longer do this, but only because there is no longer an Egyptian Jewish community to speak of. We once were over 80,000. Today there are fewer than 50 Jews remaining in Egypt, according to one official tally. Indeed, once thriving Jewish communities in 10 Arab countries were likewise cleansed. Today, only about 5,000 Jews remain in the Arab Muslim world, mostly in Morocco and Tunisia. Arab sympathizers blame the creation of Israel, but in reality Middle Eastern Jewry began to deteriorate years before Israel was established.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Egypt was a much more cosmopolitan place than it is today. Whatever the broader ills of colonialism, Egypt under British rule was at least a place where Muslims, Jews, and Christians got along fairly harmoniously. But all this began to change as the Muslim Brotherhood, a radical Islamic group two of the offspring of which are Hamas and Al Qaeda, began agitating against both the British and the Jews.

Along with the rise of Arab nationalism and Arab independence, life for Jews in Egypt and other Arab countries became intolerable. All this started happening years before Israel was established. Within a 20-year period starting in 1945, nearly a million Jews were forced out of Arab countries. Being Jewish was criminalized in Egypt in the late 1940s. Other Arab states such as Iraq, Libya, and Syria, passed similar laws. Jews began facing iron walls of discrimination and harassment by the authorities. Most of us were dispossessed. Our schools, homes, synagogues, businesses, farms, and hospitals, were all confiscated by Arab governments. Our rich, 3,000-year-old culture and heritage was decimated. No trial, no jury, no justice.

The demonstrators in San Francisco last week attacked Jews, not Israel. They did it in Arabic, perhaps thinking that only they would be in on the "joke." They didn't count on a group of indigenous Middle Eastern Jewish "dogs" being present at the counter rally across the street. In Arab culture, dogs are considered filthy, dirty beasts, and negotiating with "dogs" is not an option. Jews were often identified this way because for centuries we were living as a subjected people under the dominant culture of Islam.

We were a "protected" minority living under a religious caste system where we had to wear identifiable clothes, pay a special tax, were not allowed to ride horses, were forced to live in ghettos, and were subjected to other indignities. Our fortunes fluctuated with the benevolence of whoever was ruling at the time. When the ruler was fair and just, Jews prospered. Otherwise, watch out. Massacres of Jews by Arab Muslims were not unknown. While most people know how European Jews suffered, little is known of the Jews of the Arab world.

Today, the Middle Eastern Muslim world is the most anti-Semitic of any region. Much of their media — television programs, cartoons, editorials — promote the kind of anti-Semitism not seen or heard since the time when Hitler walked the earth. In many mosques, too, throughout the region, religious leaders who are quick to take offense over such matters as cartoons about Islam regularly teach the vilest anti-Jewish defamation.

The effects of this "education" are seen and felt even in San Francisco, where a crowd of young Arab men and women feel perfectly free to chant "Al Yahud Kelabna." As long as Palestinian and other Arab children are taught such dehumanizing hatred of Jews, there is no hope for them, and there is no hope for us. Peace in the Middle East will not come with the next ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah, but only when tolerance, compassion, understanding, and respect for religious freedom become the dominant value in Arab society. When Arab young people honestly feel too ashamed to chant about Jews being "our dogs," then there will be real hope.

Mr. Wahed is a co-founder of Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa.

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