

Barbara Kay: One of the most popular books in Israel right now is *Catch the Jew!* by gonzo journalist Tuvia Tenenbom. Tenenbom is a German-Israeli Jew who lives in New York. His advantage as a reporter is that his German – his mother tongue – is so perfect he can pass as ethnically German and often does (at such times he goes by “Tobias”).

‘Catch the Jew’ cover

For seven months, Tenenbom rambled around Israel and the Palestinian Authority, talking to anyone and everyone, in search of objective truth. The book is very entertaining, even when uncovering the brazen and ferocious anti-Semitism of the innumerable NGO types from Europe, who think he is German and bare their Judeophobic souls.

One of the book’s more sobering revelations is the depth of self-loathing Tenenbom found among Israeli intellectuals. They condemned Israel unreservedly, but the Palestinians could do no wrong. Tenenbom writes:

“It’s a mental problem... for 2,000 years the Jews have been persecuted, for 2,000 years they have been taught they are the worst... Some people cannot handle it... and they say: ‘If everyone in the world says I’m bad, that I am ugly, a thief, a murderer, horrible shrewd person, a money grubber, I am. What can I do to cleanse myself of it’ And what do they do? Catch another Jew doing wrong... that makes them feel better, makes their ugly skin feel better.”

The internalization of the world’s anti-Semitism has produced a collective monster in our midst. The “as-a-Jew-catch-a-Jew” syndrome has become performance theatre with enthusiastic audiences flocking to enjoy Jews behaving badly. Some call these Jews “Theobold Jews” (Theobold was a Jewish convert to Christianity who made up the first blood libel in the 12th century), and some call them “alter-juifs,” those who have led anonymous, secular lives, but who suddenly decide they must “break the silence” and “as a Jew” denounce Israel for its sins.

READ: FINDING A SPEAKER CAN BE A DELICATE TASK

The problem has also been called “the tyranny of penitence” and “masochistic omnipotence syndrome.” But whatever it is called, it is a contemporary version of the “sinat achim” (fraternal hatred) that has always plagued Jewish life. Today, it is a hatred of a particularly virulent, organized and dangerous strain, allied with global Islamofascism and eager to play with a fire that is meant to consume Israel.

Jonathan Kay: Insofar as Tenenbom’s book title goes, *Catch the Jew* sounds like a game-show idea made up by Borat. And I mean that as a compliment. I also like the idea of going around and seeing what people “really think” about this or that group. Hilarity is always bound to ensue.

But let’s face it: when people think they’re speaking to a sympathetic soul, they say stupid things about all sorts of folks. Or sometimes they just blurt out their negative generalizations in public. Mark Steyn on Muslims; Donald Trump on Mexicans; me on millennials – these are all examples that come readily to mind. As the late George Jonas aptly put it, we’re all bigots at heart.

You’re not going to have to convince me that anti-Semitism is, as Ruth Wisse memorably called it, “The 20th century’s most successful ideology.” And you’re also not going to have to convince me that some left-wing Jews do join joyously in their own denunciation. Where you lose me is in word salad like “the tyranny of penitence” and “masochistic omnipotence syndrome.” What we have here is the left-wing academic fashion for pretentious neologisms flipped on its head. We don’t need fancy new phrases to describe what we have here, which is essentially just a Jewish variation on the well-established western penchant for civilizational guilt and self-flagellation.

‘The End of Racism’

This is a general phenomenon that Dinesh D'Souza wrote about lucidly before he got behind the camera and started producing whacked-out hit jobs on Barack Obama. In his book *The End of Racism*, he noted that western civilization is the only civilization known to mankind whose most refined minds regularly do nothing except excoriate the injustices and evils of their own society, while often sentimentally fetishizing the supposed wonders of more technologically primitive and socially regressive civilizations.

We've been doing this since – what? – the 1960s? Send a kid to a \$50,000-a-year liberal arts college in New England these days, and the teenager who comes back to you at Christmas will be telling you all about how the patriarchal phallocracy is responsible for suppressing authentic aboriginal ways of feminist knowing. Or something. Having waded into these theories a little bit in law school, I can tell you that a lot of it is just socio-babble joined together by one very strong ideological filament, which is the idea that our society is corrupt, cruel and unjust. That's what kids learn today.

Like you, I have been to Israel many times. In the cafés of Tel Aviv and on the country's university campuses, it is basically a western-style country — with a western-style intelligentsia. And as with any western-style intelligentsia, it is consumed by liberal self-loathing and guilt. I agree with you (and, presumably, Tenenbom) that this is an unfortunate spectacle. But how is it any more unfortunate than the Canadian intellectuals who proclaim Canada to be nothing more than a morally contaminated colonial enterprise built atop the mass graves of First Nations? Or the American intellectuals who still cite Chomsky chapter and verse in describing U.S. influence anywhere on the planet? How is Israel special here? How are Jews special?

READ: JEWISH GROUPS VOICE FRUSTRATION OVER YORK U 'INCLUSION' COMMITTEE

Look at you. Get over yourself.

Barbara Kay: I am surprised that you cannot see the obvious differences between the self-loathing of Israeli intellectuals and the generalized self-loathing of western intellectuals.

Canada, for example, is not in the crosshairs of the United Nations night and day, nor are Canadian students in general running a gauntlet of hatred on their campuses. The most populace and triumphalist religion on Earth does not have hatred of Canadianism built into its sacred texts. There is no long-term hatred called “anti-Canadianism.” There is no great mass of people whose common bond is a hysterical hatred of Canadians and who have declared their chief purpose in life to see all Canadians wiped from the Earth as the eradication of a cancer. Canadian youth do not brood over the massacre of half their numbers in the not-so-distant past. Need I go on?

It is immaterial to Canada – or Sweden, or France (or fill in western nation here) if a clutch of academics hate the West. It will roll on like a big, lazy river with pebbles being thrown into it from time to time. But it is quite material to Jews that – a tiny majority of the population – their own intellectuals happen to constitute a shameful disproportion of the anti-Zionist activism on campuses with large numbers of Jews. That is confusing and demoralizing to Jews who want to feel – and legitimately should feel – proud of their heritage and proud of their attachment to their homeland.

“IF YOU SUPPORT THE BDS MOVEMENT, YOU ARE SUPPORTING THE DEMISE OF ISRAEL AS A JEWISH HOMELAND” – Barbara Kay

Israel has all the appearances of a western-style country on the surface. And many Israelis live ordinary lives much like we do. But dig an inch down, and you cannot compare our experience of life. Israelis contrive to maintain normal lives, even though they know that every day, someone somewhere in Israel is being stabbed or blown up because he is Jewish. Canadians do not experience their lives that way.

So yes, some Jews do participate joyously in the general world pogrom against Jews. But the “some” Jews are probably equal in number to the “some” non-Jews on many campuses. Proportionately that is a crazy percentage of Jews against a minuscule number of non-Jews. You would not find this phenomenon of exterminationist denunciation of its spiritual centre among any other religious or ethnic groups. I say exterminationist in its real sense, not to be dramatic. If you

support the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, you are supporting the demise of Israel as a Jewish homeland.

There are two groups of BDS Jews: the naive kind who think they are helping Israel become a just and moral country, and the hardcore, Hamas-embracing Israel-as-Nazis militants (Max Blumenthal is a good example) who know exactly what they want: Israel erased (catch that Jew!), and their own lives eased.

I'm not saying every Jew has to love being Jewish or love Israel. In the past, Jews with no interest or great love for Judaism dropped out of Judaism, called themselves atheists or secular or ex-Jews or "of Jewish provenance," but they went their own way. The Communist Jews wanted to dissolve their Judaism in the great utopian flow of internationalism. It didn't work out so well, but they at least did not go around bellowing "not in my name" when Orthodox Jews did their thing. In the past you could convert to Christianity or Islam and rid yourself of your Jewishness that way.

But Israel is just this gigantic elephant in the room. It won't go away, and it has influence over them, whether they want it to or not. So Jews who want to be secular, who want to be ex-Jews, find they can't, because the anti-Semites (who won't admit they're anti-Semites) keep judging them against Israel. And it's settled in progressive minds that Israel is apartheid, Nazi, the great oppressor occupier, the source of all evil. So they have to choose. They have to pick a side. And they choose progressivism because it's tough to beat against that current in university, and progressivism is now as synonymous with hatred for Israel as feminism is synonymous with "a woman's right to choose."

You can't be a progressive and a Zionist any more than you can be a feminist and pro-life. It has come to be understood that when a person finds herself unable to identify with Judaism or with Jewish peoplehood, then she must automatically become an anti-Zionist. This is a choice no other ethnic or religious group is forced to make.

Jonathan Kay: Look, guilty left-wing western intellectuals are guilty left-wing intellectuals — whether they are Jewish or gentile. It's a fundamentally Marxist reflex, rooted in the idea that people who are poor and oppressed (Palestinians) have the moral upper hand over those who are rich and powerful (Israel). And these same intellectuals don't care a whit for your colourful denunciations of the Islamic threat. Just the opposite: they view terrorism and Islamic militancy as a form of blowback from generations of western colonialism and occupation and such.

We all know these arguments, and I will not recite them here. The point is that these left-wing, Israel-hating Jews you speak of are not suffering some sort of unique psychological pathology that requires an esoteric new label. It is, as I say, just the standard application of a Marxist oppressed-oppressor paradigm to the Jewish state. It's Naomi Klein redux. And it's not new. Or even particularly interesting.

But as I read this last response from you, it occurred to me that the tenor of what you write explains why so many younger Jews are turned off by dogmatic Zionism. I recognize all of the talking points you have listed here, as I once used them all in my own editorials at the National Post. And they are all true in some way. But it is dispiriting to see that much of the writing about Israel that appears in, say, Commentary magazine, or the columns of Charles Krauthammer, still largely consists of a mechanical repetition of this same catalog of arguments, without much variation. In this way, the Zionist right has created a dogma that is just as tiresome (though not quite as other-worldly) as the anti-Zionist dogmas that exist among doctrinaire anti-Zionist liberals.

"THERE IS NO ADMISSION OF THE INCREASINGLY SHRILL CHARACTER OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM IN ISRAEL" – Jonathan Kay

In these colour-by-number fusillades, the Arabs are always cast as unremittingly bellicose and anti-Semitic, the Israelis always patient and civilized. There is no hint of any real curiosity about the range of opinions that now exist among Palestinians, or Arabs more generally. Nor is there any admission of the increasingly shrill character of religious Zionism in Israel, nor the many completely gratuitous humiliations and inconveniences that Israel imposes on ordinary Palestinians. Where Iran is concerned, it's always Munich 1938. And Obama is always Chamberlain. Let's not pretend that left-wing Jews are the only blinkered dogmatists here.

I am on your side when it comes to those Jews who support BDS. But BDS types actually comprise a very tiny part of left-wing Jewry. Globally, the BDS movement has been a complete failure when it comes to hurting Israel's economy. But it has been a massive success in driving North American Zionists bug-eyed with unhinged hostility against this tiny fragment of extreme leftists who waste their time trying to set sail "boats for Gaza" and such.

A few months ago, I started participating in events organized by the New Israel Fund (NIF) here in Canada. And my old National Post friends warned me that NIF was a hive of strident Jewish anti-Zionists. But that turned out to be completely false. Not only do NIF types generally reject the BDS movement, they also entertain a wide range of opinions about Israel, good and bad. It was actually refreshing to be in a room full of people who actually seemed curious to learn more – even from people who didn't share their views.

All of which to say: if hardline North American Zionist Jews (such as yourself) wonder why some of their Jewish friends have become radically alienated from the Zionist project, they might want to examine the brittle, tribalizing sloganeering – not to mention casual denunciation of the entirety of Arab and Islamic civilization – that now has become a casually recited component of pro-Israel advocacy.

Barbara Kay: I reject your all-the-same lumping of Jews against Jews with the general anti-westernism of the intelligentsia, which is, as you say, grounded in the Marxist paradigm of oppressed-oppressor. A true parallel would be an organized movement consisting of Christians-against-Christians in league with ISIS. That never happens in any organized way with other religions.

Paroxysmal hatred of Israel by Jews expressed in an organized and proud alliance with those sworn to the extermination of Jews is an entirely new thing. It arose in 1967 when the left turned against Israel and demanded that Jews choose between progressivism and Zionism. Those who chose the left have been put through their paces to prove their allegiance. I consider their desperate ingratiating with Israel's enemies with the same mixture of revulsion and pity I reserve for adolescents who "cut" themselves. This is, I insist, a new phenomenon. There was no Nazi-Jewish alliance. There was no organized Jewish support to convict Dreyfus.

"HATRED OF JEWS IN THE MIDDLE EAST HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SETTLEMENTS OR CHECKPOINTS OR 'OPPRESSION'" – Barbara Kay

Your use of the words "dogmatic" and "hardline" to describe Zionists like me is off-putting and patronizing. I suppose that you would have called me a "hardline" capitalist in the 1950s because I felt Communism was an existential threat to the democratic way of life. I was right then, and I believe I am right today. I think there are all kinds of things wrong with capitalism. But one had to take a side in that conflict, and I chose the side of freedom. One must take a side today and for the same reason: democracy against totalitarianism.

Hatred of Jews in the Middle East has nothing to do with settlements or checkpoints or "oppression." It is a question of honour and shame. Muslims are shamed by having Jews in their midst as a sovereign nation. Period. Nothing will satisfy them but a Judenrein Middle East. Anyone who has the effrontery to call himself a Jew and yet align himself with Hamas and Hezbollah has not come to that position through reason; he is culturally disordered.

I also take issue with your stereotyping me as a reader of Commentary and Charles Krauthammer and nobody else, implying that only you and your thoughtful friends at the New Israel Fund read everyone. If by "dogmatic" you mean that I prefer Israel to be in the right in conflicts, but will still stand by Israel as a homeland to take pride in even when she is not always right, then colour me dogmatist. I would prefer to describe myself as someone who has taken a side at a historical junction. You cannot be neutral any more than Switzerland was in World War II, when neutrality meant a refusal to choose between outright evil and imperfect good. I hope that is not your position.

The BDS movement does not really care if they have quantifiable success. They are playing the long game of relentless indoctrination, convincing the leaders of tomorrow that there is something inherently illegitimate about Israel's existence. It is working, and thanks in large part to the Naomi Kleins of our people. I despise them and so do their

Palestinian friends in the BDS movement. They are to the Palestinians what the “Useful Idiots” of the intelligentsia were to the Communists (I call our Jewish version “Useful Jewdiots”). With the added feature that to militant Muslims, Jews who turn on their brothers are people without honour. It’s the one point in this discussion on which Hamas and I would agree.

Jonathan Kay: I love how you refuse the labels “dogmatic” and “hardline,” and then in the same breath compare Palestinians to Nazis and suggest BDS types are akin to mentally ill adolescents who slice themselves with knives. I really couldn’t have made the point any better myself.

Hardline Zionists are so used to talking to one another in echo chambers that they no longer consider how off-putting their slogans are for people expecting fair-minded debate. Re-read what you’ve written here. Do you think this sort of language makes your side attractive to open-minded liberal Jews? Or do you think it confirms the caricatures of op-ed-page Zionists they heard from their friends over orange slices at the Bard College Feminist Seder?

READ: DREYFUS – FROM DEVIL’S ISLAND TO AUSCHWITZ

One more thing. You say you “despise” the Jews who disagree with you on this, and suggest they are also despised pariahs among all the world’s peoples – completely Medieval imagery. Aside from being a Jew, you are also an intellectual. And it is an intellectual’s mandate not to “despise” anyone. Not bigots, not hatemongers, not conspiracy theorists. They all have things to teach us, even if it is not the lesson they intend, and even if we find their views self-evidently wrong and even dangerous. You blind yourself to learning if you are full of hate. You become an activist instead of an intellectual – an especially dangerous position for an intellectual who is also a journalist.

Last week, on the National Public Radio podcast Hidden Brain, the host profiled two amazing people: a Palestinian academic who brought his West Bank students to Auschwitz so they could understand the Holocaust, and a religious Jewish soldier who became alienated from the IDF after witnessing the inhumane treatment of an elderly Palestinian woman in her own home. That soldier now articulates views very much in harmony with the left-wing types you dismiss as self-cutting pariahs. Do you “despise” him? Because, frankly, I’d be more interested in talking to these two men than the whole parade of party-line Netanyahu boosters who tend to dominate the speaking roster at many North American big-budget public affairs events.

I will end this exchange on a personal note, since all of my intellectual learning began with the bookshelf in our family home. On that bookshelf, I found both the Jewish tradition of Talmud and scholarly debate, but also the plain-spoken literary tradition of the modern West – my favourite specimen, of course, being George Orwell. Both influences teach us that you learn through observation and humility. Simply telling your debating opponents that they are pathological nutcases who deserve the world’s hatred may allow one to feel like a successful Zionist. But it marks failure for an intellectual – and perhaps also for a Jew.

See Barbara and Jonathan Kay in conversation at Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto on April 12. For more information, [click here](#).