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Goysplaining Away Antisemitism is a Problem on the Political Left | Opinion'

Josh Levs

Recent days have made this clear: Jewish communities are not the ones conflating antisemitism with "criticism of the Israeli government." Antisemites are doing that.



© ED JONES/AFP via Getty Images Pro-Israel demonstrators attend a rally denouncing antisemitism and antisemitic attacks, in lower Manhattan, New York on May 23, 2021.

As the violence in Israel and Gaza flared up, hatred and disdain for Jews, both in Israel and all over the world, was instantly put on display. Threats and attacks on Jewish people and institutions spiked, and vicious loathing of Jews was expressed at numerous pro-Palestinian rallies all over the world.

When Jewish people like me tried to raise the alarms, some self-declared progressives we worked alongside to defeat Donald Trump showed their true colors. Without asking what we were seeing and experiencing or looking into it, they mindlessly launched into the mantra they've been trained to regurgitate: "Criticizing Israel is not antisemitic." As though that's what we were referring to—and as though we don't know the difference.

There's a term for this: goysplaining. As a Ha'aretz column once explained, goysplaining is the tendency of non-Jewish people to "condescendingly explain to Jews why they are wrong at being offended."

Over the last few years, more and more people have finally woken up to the need to listen to women about the many ways sexism rears its ugly, dangerous head. Since early 2020, many have finally done the same with recognizing the horrific dangers Black people face. Progressive leaders have been outspoken in their support.

But when Jews ask some of these same progressives to listen to us about the very real dangers we face—and about how their one-sided, hateful and often false rhetoric against Israel inflames and radicalizes dangerous people—they write us off immediately.

The belief that Jewish people reject all criticism of Israel as antisemitic is, itself, antisemitic. It's a false belief used to deny real dangers. Jewish people criticize the Israeli government all the time. Speaking up is endemic to our culture. We also support and express gratitude for the groups in Israel that fight for peace and against human rights abuses of all kinds, including against Palestinians.

Sudden 'Allies'

When the wave of antisemitic attacks became too prominent to ignore, some goysplainers suddenly sought to portray themselves as allies against

antisemitism. They sent out a tweet or posted a blue square on Instagram. But there's no sign that many have learned their lesson.

If you want to be a real ally, stop reflexively repeating what *isn't* antisemitism, and learn what *is*. For example: Saying or suggesting that Jewish civilians in Israel deserve to be bombed. Supporting Hamas, which has a stated goal of killing as many Jewish people as possible. Describing the conflict without mentioning the constant terror attacks on Israelis, Hamas' use of human shields, or other Hamas tactics. Anytime you condone, ignore, or downplay this part of the violence, you're devaluing Jewish lives. (Take note, Trevor Noah and John Oliver.)

If you echo and rush to share every negative accusation or description you hear about Israel without bothering to educate yourself, you're being antisemitic. If you believe that state religions are fine except a Jewish one, that's antisemitic too.

If you liken Jews in Israel and/or elsewhere to Nazis, you're engaging in Holocaust Inversion, which is antisemitic for many reasons. You may also be unaware that leaders of Jewish communities in Germany weren't committed to killing as many Aryans as possible, nor were they amassing rockets to bomb German civilians in an effort to exterminate Germany. But if you want to bring up Germany, maybe address the fact that even the more moderate Fatah in the West Bank still celebrates the Munich Olympics terrorists as "heroic" to this day.

Goysplaining is not the only tool some progressives use to ignore antisemitism. There's also deflection, in which they try to change the subject to the etymology of "Semite," as though that has anything to do with what we're talking about. And some use tokenism, highlighting their support from "anti-Zionist" Jews. Never mind that to the overwhelming majority of Jews, Zionism is simply a recognition that of course Jewish people deserve to hold onto their state in their existing homeland alongside a Palestinian state. The fact that this tokenism is exactly what Trumpists do to write off accurate accusations of racism and antisemitism in their movement is lost on these progressives.

To be clear, it's only *some* progressives who engage in goysplaining. Many absolutely recognize the simmering antisemitism on both sides of the

political spectrum, care about it deeply and fight against it. Many also openly support Israel, noting that it's the only nation in the Middle East with free speech, women's rights, LGBTQ+ rights and more of the things progressives stand for everywhere else in the world. And many Democrats insist the party is not shifting on Israel as much as anti-Israel progressives want.

Still, many who have been loudest in their one-sided attacks on Israel haven't woken up to how their words and actions fuel hatred and violence against Jewish people all over the world. If they're going to stay true to the principles they claim to stand for, it's time.

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The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*