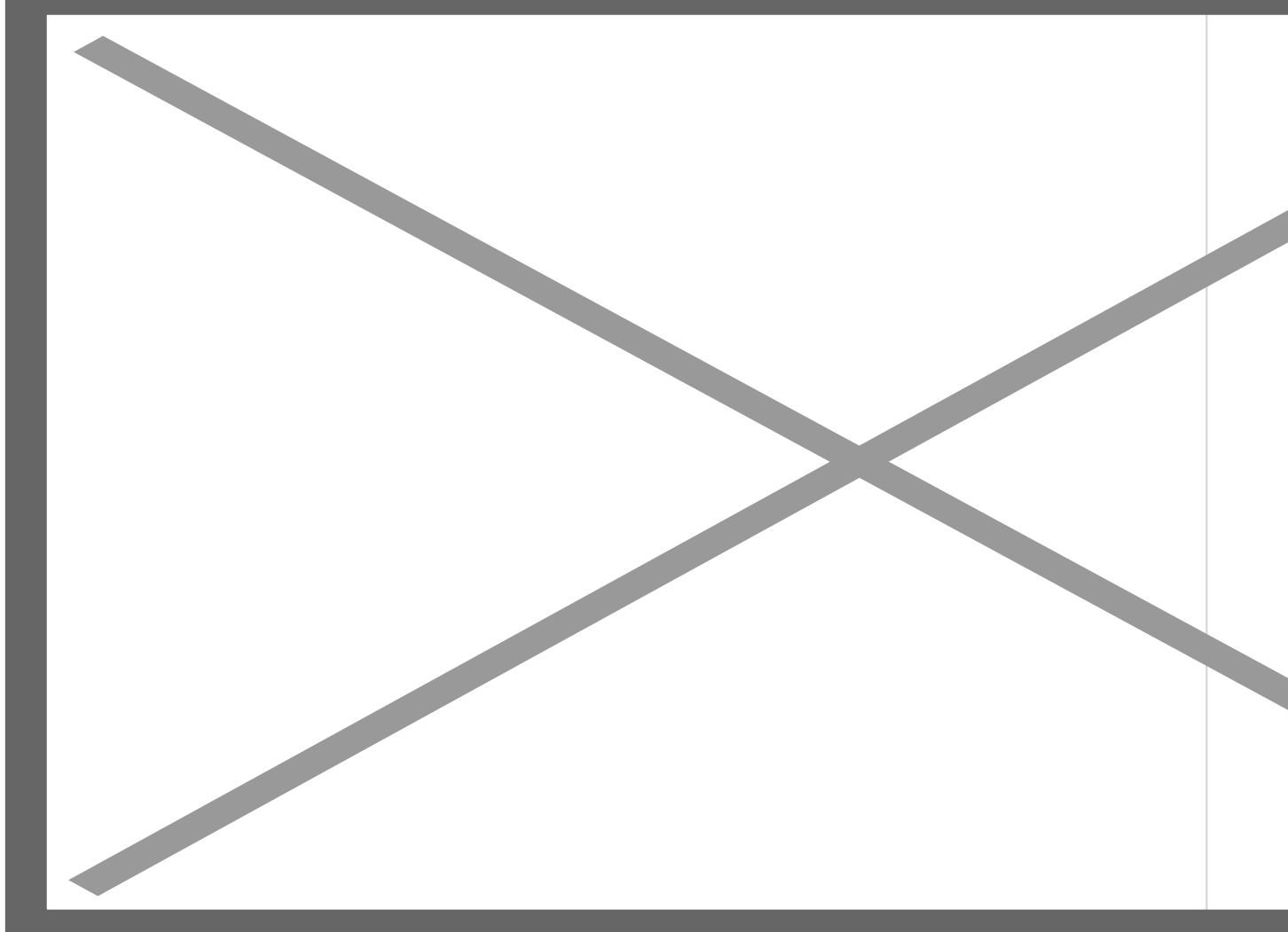


You'll not erase us: Palestinian activist Susan Abulhawa's speech at Oxford Union debate

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Susan Abulhawa, a prominent Palestinian writer and human rights activist, delivering her remarks at an Oxford Union debate on November 28. (Photo from X)

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The Oxford Union at UK's prestigious Oxford University hosted a historic debate on November 28, titled: "This House Believes Israel is an Apartheid State Responsible for Genocide."

The debate followed arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) against Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu and former Israeli military affairs minister Yoav Gallant.

It featured U.S. political scientist Norman Finkelstein, American activist Miko Peled, Palestinian-American author and activist Susan Abulhawa and Palestinian writer Mohammed El-Kurd.

They were pitted against British barrister Natasha Hausdorff and Israeli journalist Jonathan Sacerdoti, who argued against the motion.

We reproduce the full text of remarks delivered by Abulhawa, a noted Palestinian writer and human rights activist. She is the author of several books and the founder of Playgrounds for Palestine.

Here is the full text:

"I will not take questions until I'm finished speaking; so please refrain from interrupting me.

Addressing the challenge of what to do about the indigenous inhabitants of the land, Chaim Weizman, a Russian Jew, said to the World Zionist Congress in 1921 that Palestinians were akin to "the rocks of Judea, obstacles that had to be cleared on a difficult path."

David Gruen, a Polish Jew, who changed his name to David Ben Gurion to sound relevant to the region, said: "We must expel Arabs and take their places."

There are thousands of such conversations among the early Zionists who plotted and implemented the violent colonization of Palestine and the annihilation of her native people.

But they were only partially successful, murdering or ethnically cleansing 80 percent of Palestinians, which meant that 20 percent of us remained an enduring obstacle to their colonial fantasies, which became the subject of their obsessions in the decades that followed, especially after conquering what remained of Palestine in 1967.

Zionists lamented our presence and they debated publicly in all circles—political, academic, social, cultural circles—regarding what to do with us; what to do about the Palestinian birthrate, about our babies, which they dub a demographic threat.

Benny Morris, who was originally meant to be here, once expressed regret that Ben Gurion "did not finish the job" of getting rid of us all, which would have obviated what they refer to as the "Arab problem."

Benjamin Netanyahu, a Polish Jew whose real name is Benjamin Mileikowsky, once bemoaned a missed opportunity during the 1989 Tiananmen Square uprising to expel large swaths of the Palestinian population "while world attention was focused on China."

Some of their articulated solutions to the nuisance of our existence include a "break their bones" policy in the 80s and 90s, ordered by Yitzhak Rubitzov, a Ukrainian Jew who changed his name to Yitzhak Rabin (for the same reasons).

That horrific policy that crippled generations of Palestinians did not succeed in making us leave. And frustrated by Palestinian resilience, a new discourse arose, especially after a massive natural gas field was discovered off the coast of Northern Gaza worth trillions of dollars.

This new discourse is echoed in the words of Colonel Efraim Eitan, who said in 2004, “We have to kill them all.”

Aaron Sofer, an Israeli so-called intellectual and political advisor, insisted in 2018 that “we have to kill and kill and kill. All day, every day.”

When I was in Gaza, I saw a little boy no more than 9 years old whose hands and part of his face, had been blown off from a booby-trapped can of food that soldiers had left behind for Gaza’s starving children. I later learned that they had also left poisoned food for people in Shujaiyya, and in the 1980s and 90s, Israeli soldiers had left booby-trapped toys in southern Lebanon that exploded when excited children picked them up.

The harm they do is diabolical, and yet, they expect you to believe they are the victims. Invoking Europe’s holocaust and screaming antisemitism, they expect you to suspend fundamental human reason to believe that the daily sniping of children with so-called “kill shots” and the bombing of entire neighborhoods that bury families alive and wipe out whole bloodlines is self-defense.

They want you to believe that a man who had not eaten a thing in over 72 hours, who kept fighting even when all he had was one functioning arm, that this man was motivated by some innate savagery and irrational hatred or jealousy of Jews, rather than the indomitable yearning to see his people free in their own homeland.

It’s clear to me that we’re not here to debate whether Israel is an apartheid or genocidal state. This debate is ultimately about the worth of Palestinian lives; about the worth of our schools, research centers, books, art, and dreams; about the worth of the homes we worked all our lives to build and which contain the memories of generations; about the worth of our humanity and our agency; the worth of bodies and ambitions.

Because if the roles were reversed...

If Palestinians had spent the last eight-decade stealing Jewish homes, expelling, oppressing, imprisoning, poisoning, torturing, raping and killing them; if Palestinians had killed an estimated 300,000 Jews in one year, targeted their journalists, their thinkers, their healthcare workers, their athletes, their artists, bombed every Israeli hospital, university, library, museum, cultural center, synagogue, and simultaneously set up an observation platform where people came watch their slaughter as if a tourist attraction.

If Palestinians had corralled them by the hundreds of thousands into flimsy tents, bombed them in so-called safe zones, burned them alive, cut off their food, water, and medicine.

If Palestinians made Jewish children wander barefoot with empty pots; made them gather the flesh of their parents into plastic bags; made them bury their siblings, cousins and friends; made them sneak out from their tents in the middle of the night to sleep on their parents’ graves; made them pray for death just to join their families and not be alone in this terrible world anymore, and terrorized them so utterly that their children lose their hair, lose their memory, lose their minds, and made those as young as 4 and 5-year-old were die of heart attacks.

If we mercilessly forced their NICU babies to die, alone in hospital beds, crying until they could cry no more, died and decomposed in the same spot.

If Palestinians used wheat flour aid trucks to lure starving Jews, then opened fire on them when they gathered to collect a day’s bread; if Palestinians finally allowed a food delivery into a shelter with hungry Jews, then set fire to the entire shelter and aid truck before anyone could taste the food.

If a Palestinian sniper bragged about blowing out 42 Jewish kneecaps in one day as one Israeli soldier did in 2019; if a Palestinian admitted to CNN that he ran over hundreds of Jews with his tank, their squished flesh lingering in the tank treads.

If Palestinians were systematically raping Jewish doctors, patients, and other captives with hot metal rods, jagged and electrified sticks, and fire extinguishers, sometimes raping to death, as happened with Dr Adnan alBursh and others.

If Jewish women were forced to give birth in filth, get C-sections or leg amputations without anesthesia; if we destroyed their children then decorated our tanks with their toys; if we killed or displaced their women then posed with their lingerie...

If the world were watching the live-streamed systematic annihilation of Jews in real-time, there would be no debating whether that constituted terrorism or genocide.

And yet two Palestinians—myself and Mohammad el-Kurd— showed up here to do just that, enduring the indignity of debating those who think our only life choices should be to leave our homeland, submit to their supremacy, or die politely and quietly.

But you would be wrong to think that I came to convince you of anything. The house resolution, though well-meaning and appreciated, is of little consequence in the midst of this holocaust of our time.

I came in the spirit of Malcolm X and Jimmy Baldwin, both of whom stood here and in Cambridge before I was born, facing finely dressed well-spoken monsters who harbored the same supremacist ideologies as Zionism—these notions of entitlement and privilege, of being divinely favored, blessed, or chosen.

I'm here for the sake of history. To speak to generations not yet born and for the chronicles of this extraordinary time where the carpet bombing of defenseless indigenous societies is legitimized.

I'm here for my grandmothers, both of whom died as penniless refugees while foreign Jews lived in their stolen homes.

And I also came to speak directly to Zionists here and everywhere.

We let you into our homes when your own countries tried to murder you and everyone else turned you away. We fed and clothed you, gave you shelter, and we shared the bounty of our land with you, and when the time was ripe, you kicked us out of our own homes and homeland, then you killed and robbed and burned and looted our lives.

You carved out our hearts because it is clear you do not know how to live in the world without dominating others.

You have crossed all lines and nurtured the most vile of human impulses, but the world is finally glimpsing the terror we have endured at your hands for so long, and they are seeing the reality of who you are, who you've always been.

They watch in utter astonishment the sadism, the glee, the joy, and pleasure with which you conduct, watch, and cheer the daily details of breaking our bodies, our minds, our future, our past.

But no matter what happens from here, no matter what fairytales you tell yourself and tell the world, you will never truly belong to that land. You will never understand the sacredness of the olives trees, which you've been cutting down and burning for decades just to spite us and to break our hearts a little more. No one native to that land would dare do such a thing to the olives.

No one who belongs to that region would ever bomb or destroy such ancient heritage as Baalbak or Bittir, or destroy ancient cemeteries as you destroy ours, like the Anglican cemetery in Jerusalem or the resting place of ancient Muslim scholars and warriors in Maamanillah.

Those who come from that land do not desecrate the dead; that's why my family for centuries was the caretakers of the Jewish cemetery in the mount of olives, as labors of faith and care for what we know is part of our ancestry and story.

Your ancestors will always be buried in your actual homelands of Poland, Ukraine, and elsewhere around the world from whence you came. The mythos and folklore of the land will always be alien to you.

You will never be literate in the sartorial language of the thobes we wear, that sprang from the land through our foremothers over centuries—every motif, design, and pattern speaking to the secrets of local lore, flora, birds, rivers, and wildlife.

What your real-estate agents call in their high-priced listings “old Arab homes” will always hold in their stones the stories and memories of our ancestors who built them. The ancient photos and paintings of the land will never contain you.

You will never know how it feels to be loved and supported by those who have nothing to gain from you, and in fact, everything to lose.

You will never know the feeling of masses all over the world pouring into the streets and stadiums to chant and sing for your freedom; and it is not because you are Jewish, as you try to make the world believe, but because you are depraved violent colonizers who think your Jewishness entitles you to the home my grandfather and his brothers built with their own hands on lands that had been in our family for centuries. It is because Zionism is a blight on Judaism and indeed on humanity.

You can change your names to sound more relevant to the region and you can pretend falafel and hummus and zaatar are your ancient cuisines, but in the recesses of your being, you will always feel the sting of this epic forgery and theft, that's why even the drawings of our children hung on walls at the UN or in a hospital ward send your leaders and lawyers into hysteric meltdowns.

You will not erase us, no matter how many of us you kill and kill and kill, all day every day. We are not the rocks Chaim Weizmann thought you could clear from the land. We are its very soil.

We are her rivers and her trees and her stories because all of that was nurtured by our bodies and our lives over millennia of continuous, uninterrupted habitation of that patch of earth between the Jordan and Mediterranean waters, from our Canaanite, our Hebrew, our Philistine, and our Phoenician ancestors, to every conqueror or pilgrim who came and went, who married or raped, loved, enslaved, converted between religions, settled or prayed in our land, leaving pieces of themselves in our bodies and our heritage.

The fabled, tumultuous stories of that land are quite literally in our DNA. You cannot kill or propagandize that away, no matter what death technology you use or what Hollywood and corporate media arsenals you deploy.

Someday, your impunity and arrogance will end. Palestine will be free; she will be restored to her multi-religious, multi-ethnic pluralistic glory; we will restore and expand the trains that run from Cairo to Gaza to Jerusalem, Haifa, Tripoli, Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Kuwait, Sanaa, and so on; we will put an end to the Zionist American war machine of domination, expansion, extraction, pollution, and looting.

..and you will either leave, or you will finally learn to live with others as equals."

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