

Jews Behaving Like Muslims

by Lorna Salzman (July 2014)

Since I circulated my criticism of the Metropolitan Opera for cancelling HD screenings of John Adams' opera, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, I haven't received too many comments, a handful on both sides of the issue. But the dissenting responses, all from observant Jews, were disturbing, not least because they are an echo of the responses of Muslims to speech or written material which they find offensive to their religion. As a result, the Muslim leadership, with CAIR leading the pack, invented the term "Islamophobia" so as to brand anyone who criticizes Islam or shariah law as anti-Muslim.

Across this country but mostly on university campuses, Muslim groups routinely disrupt lectures by ex-Muslims (apostates) as well as by anyone who attacks Arab violence against Israel or, worst of all, defends Israel. In only one of dozens of cases in recent years did the university administration impose any kind of punishment on the disrupters. Muslims routinely indulge in demented tirades against Jews of course, in print and in mosques, in a firestorm of defamation ("The Jews are our dogs.") without end.

On the other side, sadly, Zionists and observant Jews have indulged in identical tactics, as they did against a very bad play based on the writings of the late Rachel Corrie, an American girl who was naively induced to join Hamas protesters in Israel and was run over and killed by a tank. But the most recent manifestation of the Arab habit of suppressing free speech has arisen over the screening, quickly cancelled, of the Adams opera. Unfortunately the Philistine complaints found a receptive audience at the Met because the opera house is having financial difficulties and did not want to risk losing donor money from wealthy Jews. (They did not cancel any actual performances on the stage).

The complaints over the opera were almost identical to those I received after strongly supporting the screening and deploring censorship of any kind.

They rested on what the complainants considered offensive and hurtful content that did moral injury to all Jews but especially to those who had lost family in the holocaust. They also rested on the quite mistaken notion that the composer was committing an equal injustice by even allowing the murderers of Klinghoffer to express their motivation. They accused Adams, again mistakenly, of creating a "moral equivalence" between the victim and his assassins. And they feared that the lack of an outright condemnation of the killers would stimulate anti-Semitism. (They might well address the liberal Jewish community, many of whose younger

members have gone over to outright support of Hamas and its vilification of Israel by actively supporting the BDS campaign against Israel). This can be compared to those who blame science and scientists for controversial technologies that are based on primary research, which would be like blaming Gregor Mendel for genetic engineering and GMOs.

It is commonplace today to to read about Muslim complaints of victimization coupled with demands for the right of free speech even as they resist assimilation and readily censor and squash the speech of those who criticize Islam. But it is equally disturbing to see some American Jews who demand those same rights for the critics of Islam or supporters of Israel now clamoring to censor a work of art on grounds of insensitivity. For one thing, the assumption that the speech of a character in an opera (or work of fiction for that matter) represents the views of the artist reveals an aesthetic blind spot and lack of comprehension of the nature of art. (Vladimir Nabokov, after the publication of *Lolita*, had to endure rumors that he was a pedophile). But the main blind spot is the implication, sometimes clearly spoken, that the depiction of evil by a character and the character's explication of his motives should be censored.

This is at its core a call for moral polemics, not for art. And it is illustrated by what is called agitprop, the enunciation of heroic and righteous words and deeds by a single character in order to promote a particular ideology or belief system. It was of course standard in the former Soviet Union and is still on view in China and North Korea. It is standard in the Muslim world. And it is standard in the pulpits of all religions around the world. The demand by observant Jews to censor "insensitive" or "offensive" language is backed up with high moral dudgeon and a demand that the offender adopt the moral stance of the listener or viewer. The personal moral code, to the critic of art, becomes definitive, the sole criteria of what is fit to be shown to the public. On these grounds censorship of Shakespeare's character Iago would be justified, or Macbeth, or numerous other conflicted and flawed characters in literature. And to be strictly consistent, one would have to censor the writings of Hitler, Stalin and Mao. And so forth and so forth....

America's civil society, legal system and Constitution are under constant pressure from Muslims to be ignored or twisted so as to confer privileges on Muslim or exemptions from civil law based on their religion. This is a campaign of non-violence called stealth jihad. It is going on across the country, where Muslims have sought support from fuzzy-thinking religious leaders and others who think that "interfaith dialogue" will end religious hatred. It has already recruited unthinking liberal organizations such as the Center for American Progress, as well as many rabbis and Christian ministers, who are always the initiators of these dialogues. And it has been embraced by leftist blogs like *truthdig* and *countercurrents*, among

others, who obstinately deny that religion is the foundation and motivation of Islamist terrorism, blaming American "imperialism" or the need for oil and natural resources or other such nonsense. Of course this makes sense; if they admitted that the religion of Islam was at the root of terrorism and jihad, this would render their virulent hatred of this country moot.

In view of the persistence of stealth jihad, one puzzles over the fact that most American Jews have chosen the defense of Israel as their primary interest. The erosion of that very democracy, that Constitution, that rule of law that protects them from persecution and allows them freedom of speech and worship, is of little interest to them. Add on to their indifference the ever-present spectre of anti-Semitism (revived and encouraged by the left itself), and persistent memories of the holocaust, embellished with censorship demands cribbed directly from the Muslim world, and you have a moral crusade based on ignorance that would welcome authoritarianism in any form as long as it privileged their religion over all others. This is in effect what the calls for censorship of Adams' opera infers. It is truly tragic to see how so many Jews have not learned the lessons of the past.

Lorna Salzman's career as an environmental activist and writer began when the late David Brower hired her to be the regional representative of Friends of the Earth in NYC. Later she worked as an editor on *National Audubon's American Birds* magazine and as director of Food & Water, an early opponent of food irradiation, and then spent three years as a natural resource specialist in the NYC Dept. of Environmental Protection. She co-founded the New York Green Party in 1984 and in 2004 she sought the U.S. Green Party's presidential nomination. She is the author of "