

Hatred in the Blood: Edward Said's UC-Berkeley Nephew Declares 'Colonial Zionism Has to End'



Ussama Makdisi

by Andrew E. Harrod

"Colonial Zionism has to end," concluded prominent University of California-Berkeley history professor [Ussama Makdisi](#) during an [October 23 podcast](#) on "Historicizing and Contextualizing the Palestinian Struggle," an episode of "Diffused Congruence: The American Muslim Experience."

Makdisi is the nephew of the late Columbia University English professor [Edward Said](#), whose 1978 book *[Orientalism](#)*, according to historian [Martin Kramer](#), "made it acceptable, even expected, for scholars to spell out their own political commitments as a preface to anything they wrote or did."

As pro-Hamas, anti-Israel protests at colleges nationwide show, the revisionist narrative pushed by Said's disciples has won the day, at least among throngs of students as certain of their righteousness as they are ignorant of history. Following in his Uncle Edward's footsteps, Makdisi's recent lecture left no doubt of his commitment to propagate a fictional history of Israel in which Jews are oppressors, Palestinians the oppressed, and Israel's destruction the final solution.

Makdisi asserted how supposedly "profound" the West's "decontextualization and de-historization" was following Hamas's October 7 offensive from the Gaza Strip into Israel as he sought to relativize Hamas's crimes against Israel's ostensible evil. "This is not a history that begins on October 7," he said. Rather, since the 1917 Balfour Declaration promising British support for a Jewish national home, an "extraordinarily violent dispossession of the Palestinians" has occurred. "You cannot understand a slave uprising or rebellion simply by looking at the uprising and ignoring the history of slavery," he analogized, as "Hamas was not even founded until 1987."

He dismissed Israel, a [pluralistic society](#) in the ancestral Jewish homeland, as an "ethnoreligious" and "settler-colonial state" derived purely from a Zionist movement originating in nineteenth-century imperialism. He marveled at "how racist and colonial the European imposition of a fantasy of a Jewish state that did not come out of the Jewish communities of the Middle East," a [completely ahistorical negation](#) of [Mizrachi Zionism](#). Particularly absurd in this context was his [fantastical claim](#) that "there is no such thing as inherent antisemitism in our part of the world," a willful blindness toward [entrenched](#) Islamic antisemitism that caused the flight of Middle Eastern [Jews](#).

Makdisi [falsely asserted](#) that Israel's creation stemmed from Western guilt for antisemitism following World War II's Nazi genocide. "That the West is claiming to resolve its horrific

history of antisemitism against European Jews at the expense of another non-European people” is “morally outrageous,” he asserted. Yet little reference to Jewish suffering appeared in countries’ official statements in the international discussions leading to Israel’s recognition in 1947, and the Holocaust exterminated millions of pro-Zionist Jews.

Examining Zionist settlement during the post-World War I British League of Nations Palestine Mandate, Makdisi castigated the “racist, orientalist myth” of a “land without a people for a people without a land.” Supposedly Zionists discovered “a lot of people” in the mandate territory, [which](#) in 1918 counted some 600,000 Arabs alongside 60,000 Jews in an [area](#) over 1,000 square miles larger than [Maryland](#) ([2022 population](#) over six million). British governance also somehow “privileged Zionism” in his estimation, even though the British often [severely restricted](#) Jewish immigration while ignoring illegal [Arab immigration](#) into the Palestine Mandate.

Makdisi apparently has never found a two-state solution he can accept, including the [1937 Peel Plan](#), which “privileges the Jewish state” and “gives the minority a huge amount of land,” he said. Yet the proposed Jewish state only encompassed 17 percent of the mandate territory while Jews were then almost 30 percent of the mandate population.

Similarly, the 1947 United Nations General Assembly’s “grotesquely unfair partition” [plan](#) “gives the minority a majority of the land,” Makdisi judged without any factual basis. [Under the plan](#), a Jewish state would receive about 55 percent of the mandate territory (60 percent of which was desert) for over 900,000 inhabitants, over 40 percent of whom would be Arab. The remaining 45 percent would go to an Arab state of over 800,000 inhabitants, over 98 percent of whom would be Arab. He also claimed that the mandate’s land was “owned overwhelmingly by Palestinians,” even though private land ownership [was rare](#) in the mandate, where 70 percent of the territory was state-owned.

Makdisi repeated the common Palestinian [canard](#) that “Zionists put into action a plan to ethnically cleanse” Arabs from the Palestine Mandate during Israel’s 1947-1948 Independence War. “There is almost no doubt amongst most professional historians or people who study this region of the basic narrative,” he said when describing the [myth](#) of the “[Nakba](#), which means the catastrophe in Arabic.” In particular, he lauded the [discredited](#) Israeli historian [Ilan Pappé](#), who has a “compassionate and honest interpretation of what happened in 1948 and the consequences still today.”

Leading Israeli historian [Benny Morris](#) counts among Makdisi’s claimed supporters of this Nakba thesis, yet Morris has repeatedly and [categorically denied](#) that Israeli leaders engaged in any premediated ethnic cleansing. Rather, of the estimated 600,000 – 750,000 Arabs who lost their homes in what became Israel, many fled combat zones, as [recorded](#) by Arab eyewitnesses, often directed by Arab authorities to create free-fire zones for Israel’s envisaged quick destruction. [Arab propaganda](#) about what Makdisi called a “most infamous massacre” at the Arab village of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948, rather than stiffening Arab resistance with fictional atrocity tales, only accelerated Arab flight. Only in some locales did Israeli commanders order expulsions of Arab communities because of tactical military concerns.

In contrast to other refugees throughout history, United Nations agencies have bestowed [hereditary refugee status](#) upon the descendants of the 1948 Arab refugees, now numbering in the millions. Thus, Makdisi, without any qualifications, classified 70 percent of Gaza’s over two million inhabitants as refugees. He repeated the [common falsehood](#) of their “right of return under international law” to the 1948 homes of their ancestors, a move that would demographically destroy Israel and is therefore [unacceptable](#) in any peace negotiations.

Numerous other falsehoods littered Makdisi’s presentation (e.g., “[Jewish-only roads](#)” in the disputed West Bank

territory), making a mockery of his claim that “most Palestinians are not afraid of history.” In his imaginary world, “ Hamas emerges as a symptom” of Israeli “injustice,” while Gaza endures “genocidal violence.” Meanwhile, he rejects an all-too-true “Holocaust, Part II” framing of Hamas’s latest butchery of Jews.

The politicization of Middle East studies launched by Said’s *Orientalism* continues apace, both through his kin like Makdisi, and through kindred spirits – including thousands of college students – marching daily in support of the slaughter of innocent Jews. Outrageously, thanks to massive federal support of virtually all universities, whether public or private, taxpayers are footing much of the bill.

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