

Two allegedly great thinkers think the Jews are Nazis



Masha Gessen

by Phyllis Chesler

Why are Judith Butler and Masha Gessen so popular? First, they are prize-winning public intellectuals. They are also very trendy in terms of their LGBTQ credentials. Gessen identifies herself as non-binary and trans and uses “they/them” pronouns. Butler, alas, is merely a lesbian, but one who is legally non-binary and uses both “they/them” and “she/her.”

Strangely, they do not identify themselves as “feminists.” (Thank God for small mercies.)

Both of them are also dedicated conformists in terms of how they identify themselves personally and in their profoundly

disturbing anti-Zionist views. They write “as Jews,” as if being Jewish is a sacred credential that entitles them to attack the Jewish state, including in antisemitic terms. Perhaps they are J Street’s Peter Beinart in drag.

Gessen recently published an article in [The New Yorker](#) titled “In The Shadow of the Holocaust” and [appeared](#) on the notoriously anti-Israel Christiane Amanpour’s PBS program. Butler has just published two pieces on the same subject, one in [The London Review of Books](#) and another in the *Boston Review* titled, [“There Can Be No Critique.”](#)

Both Butler and Gessen seem to revere Jewish vulnerability, statelessness and martyrdom. Are they also Nazis in drag?

The two conformists see Jewish vulnerability to persecution as far more “ethical” than the Jews’ ability to defend themselves from persecution and genocide. According to Prof. Corinne Blackmer in her brave book [Queering Anti-Zionism: Academic Freedom, LGBTQ Intellectuals and Israel/Palestine Campus Activism](#):

“Butler implicitly argues that Jews were better off suffering rather than perpetrating state-sponsored persecution. ... Two possible lessons or conclusions can be drawn from the fact that Jews experienced considerable state-sponsored violence, persecution and discrimination in the *galut* [exile], culminating not only in the Holocaust but also the forced removal of nearly one million Mizrahi Jews from their ancestral homes in the Middle East before or during the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state in 1948. One, supported by Butler and other BDS advocates, states that precisely *because* Jews suffered extreme state-sponsored violence, they should endeavor to avoid state-building, although this formulation leaves unanswered precisely under what political system Jews should (peacefully?) reside.”

In her piece in *The London Review of Books*, Butler does

“condemn without qualification the violence committed by Hamas. This was a terrifying and revolting massacre. This was my primary reaction, and it endures.”

However, she then goes on to “contextualize” this statement by trotting out all manner of false allegations against Israel: “We should develop some understanding of why groups like Hamas gained strength in light of the broken promises of Oslo and the ‘state of death, both slow and sudden’ that describes the lived existence of many Palestinians living under occupation, whether the constant surveillance and threat of administrative detention without due process or the intensifying siege that denies Gazans medication, food and water.”

Butler appears to be either ignorant of or deliberately concealing several important facts: Israel left Gaza in 2005. Hamas—an Iranian-funded Islamist terror group—controls, indoctrinates, tortures, torments and impoverishes Gazans. Hamas has taken the lion’s share of the aid meant for Gaza civilians and diverted it into their own bank accounts abroad and into building their terror tunnels and weaponry. No Arab country has been willing to offer Gazans refuge, even temporarily. Egypt has walled off Gaza from the Sinai. Hamas has increasingly forced women to wear veils, marry into polygamous families and risk being honor-killed if they “shame” their families.

Do this non-binary lesbian and this non-binary trans man not understand that, if they lived in Gaza, Hamas would torture and behead them—along with any other LGBT person Hamas could get its hands on?

Apparently not. Instead, both Gessen and Butler view Israel as committing genocidal violence and Hamas as a resistance movement whose patience has finally ended.

Gessen, unlike Butler, did not bother to condemn Hamas for its Oct. 7 rampage of crimes against humanity. All they (Gessen)

write is “The video was set in [Kibbutz Be’eri](#), the community where, on October 7th, Hamas killed more than ninety people—almost one in ten residents—during its attack on Israel, which ultimately claimed more than twelve hundred lives.”

Gessen further asserts that Zionists have “weaponized” the memory of the Holocaust to conceal their genocide of either Gaza or “Palestine.” They (Gessen) refer to both entities. They go further and, in their *New Yorker* piece, declare Israel a “Nazi,” genocidal state—a claim even the U.S. State Department considers antisemitism. They risibly compare what the Nazis did in the Warsaw Ghetto to what Israel is doing in Gaza.

“The term ‘open-air prison’ seems to have been coined in 2010 by David Cameron,” they claim, “but as in the Jewish ghettos of Occupied Europe, there are no prison guards. Gaza is policed not by the occupiers but by a local force. Presumably, the more fitting term ‘ghetto’ would have drawn fire for comparing the predicament of besieged Gazans to that of ghettoized Jews. It also would have given us the language to describe what is happening in Gaza now. The ghetto is being liquidated.”

Thus, these two presumably Great Thinkers imply that Jews were born to suffer persecution and that doing so brings out our best selves because it means living with the “Other” in a non-violent way. The violence of the “Other” appears to be irrelevant.

Please allow me to give Blackmer the last word: “Just as Herzl was wrong to conclude in *The Jewish State* (1896) that creating a Jewish nation would end antisemitism, so too does Butler err in contending that eliminating Zionism will also end hatred of Jews and, indeed, politically motivated violence, in her conception of Greater Palestine.”

First published in [JNS.](#)