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'Not in my name': Jews against the Gaza war

In Indonesia, which as a Muslim-majority nation naturally stands strongly in support of Palestinian rights and freedoms, there is a tendency to conflate Jewish people and Israelis with the Israeli government.

Julia Suryakusuma (The Jakarta Post) PREMIUM Jakarta Wed, May 29, 2024



[Photo] Avenue of escape: Displaced Palestinians of the Salman family ride in a vehicle on May 27, 2024, as they prepare to flee Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip following a nearby Israeli strike. (Reuters/Mohammed Salem)

"Isn't Julia afraid she will get in trouble?" This is a comment I have heard so often, from so many people, since I was a teenager up to now, referring to the critical tone of my writing. Their concern is not unfounded, especially under the New Order regime (1966-1998), when critical voices and dissidents could be blacklisted, taken in for interrogation, tortured or "disappeared".

But even when people disagree with my views, not once have they ever called me a "self-hating Indonesian".

So isn't it strange that Jews who are critical and opposed to the Gaza war, are called "self-hating Jews"?

This was initially brought to my attention by a 27 minute ABC documentary titled *Not in My Name* about Antony Loewenstein (born 1974), which traces his life from a traditional Jewish upbringing in Australia to becoming an international critic of Zionism and Israel.

Loewenstein, a Jewish Australian-German investigative journalist and filmmaker, is the author of several books, including *My Israel Question* (2006) and *The Palestine Laboratory* (2023. See "Pegasus, 'The Palestine Laboratory', and our dystopian future", *The Jakarta Post*, Oct. 25, 2023).

The attacks on him had started already in 2003 when he published his first major article in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. He argued that "many of the Israeli government's actions paralleled apartheid-like policies, that its treatment of Palestinians centre around a racist ideology".

He wasn't the first Jewish person to write such things in the mainstream media, but the reaction was explosive. He had touched a raw nerve.

Outraged by the rising death toll in Gaza, in another article two decades later, he stated that in the ensuing 20 years he had been called "a Nazi collaborator. Traitor. Self-hating Jew. Terror supporter. Anti-Semite. Propagandist. Arab lover" ("Being Jewish and critical of Israel can make you an outcast. I should know", *SMH*, May 13, 2023).

Loewenstein rejects the notion that the military campaign has been carried out in self-defense, to make Jews safe, as PM Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing allies claim.

Some Australian Zionists see activists like Loewenstein as a danger to the Jewish community amid rising antisemitism over the war in Gaza. However, a growing number of Australian Jews have expressed similar concerns as Loewenstein. Even the Jewish Council of Australia has become critical of Israel's actions in Gaza.

In the United States, in early 2023, US President Joe Biden appointed Lily Greenberg Call as special assistant to the chief of staff of the Interior Department.

However, on May 15 of this year, the 26-year-old daughter of Thomas Call, an executive at an arms company that provides weapons for Israel's Dome anti-missile system, quit her position. Her choice of

the date of her resignation was because May 15 marked the 76th commemoration of the Nakba (Arabic for "catastrophe") when, in 1948, 900,000 Palestinians were displaced during the founding of Israel.

In a four-page letter, she slammed Biden's "disastrous, continued support for Israel's genocide in Gaza". In a May 21 interview on *Democracy Now!*, Greenberg Call claimed that it was precisely because of her Jewishness that she was "standing up for Palestinians" and "demanding their freedom".

She added, "I am so angry at the president that he is using my community as justification for this slaughter, making us the face of the American war machine." Like Loewenstein, she is saying, "not in my name".

Other prominent American Jews, such as Noam Chomsky, 95, have also been very critical. Nine years ago, Chomsky called Israel's assault on Gaza and US support for the occupation "a hideous atrocity" (*Democracy Now!*, Aug. 7, 2014). In an interview on May 15, 2023, he stressed the US' decisive role in the Israel-Palestine conflict, wherein it supports Israel's actions and vetoes Security Council resolutions condemning the Israeli occupation.

Naomi Klein, 54, renowned Canadian author, activist, professor and filmmaker, was born into a Jewish family with a peace activist background. In a speech at the Emergency Seder in the Streets in Brooklyn on April 23, 2024, she pointed out that Zionism was "a false idol that takes our most profound biblical stories of justice and emancipation from slavery – the story of Passover itself – and turns them into brutalist weapons of colonial land theft, road maps for ethnic cleansing and genocide." Wow!

And then, of course, there is Gabor Maté, 80, a Jewish Hungarian-Canadian physician and best-selling author known for his insights on intergenerational trauma and the connection between trauma and addiction. His books have been translated into over 30 languages.

He claims that in the past he used to be a Zionist, understandably, given his background as a Jew in German-occupied Hungary in 1944. But after he understood that Israel's establishment involved the extermination, expulsion and massacre of Palestinians, he changed his position. He says he is not the only one who has left Zionism.

Referring to the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas attack, without justifying it, Maté emphasized "the necessity of understanding the historical context to understand the current conflict and move forward".

Even in Israel there are anti-Zionists. One of the most vocal is Ofer Cassel, 59, a member of parliament representing the Hadash Party in the Israeli Knesset, who has openly called Israel's actions against the Palestinians genocide. During the First Intifada (Dec. 1987-Sept 1993), a Palestinian uprising against

Israeli occupation, he was sent to military prison four times for "refusing to oppress the Palestinians, to take part in the oppression and occupation of the Palestinians". Check out his bold extended interview on the "Unapologetic" podcast!

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In reality, there are many citizens of Israel who abhor PM Netanyahu's bellicose policies. A month ago, tens of thousands of Israelis protested against Netanyahu in Tel Aviv.

After a military invasion of East Timor in 1975 by Indonesian military forces, on July 17, 1976, the territory was annexed by Indonesia.

I happened to be attending a conference on East Timor in Australia around that time. There were angry calls by Australian participants to boycott Indonesian goods. I stood up and spoke out, "We Indonesians are also oppressed by the Soeharto military dictatorship. If you boycott Indonesian goods, it will only hurt the Indonesian people."

In any case, the Australian government allegedly helped cover up Indonesian atrocities in East Timor. Ironic, huh?

In an online discussion titled "From Palestine to the World" on May 18, legendary feminist Angela Davis and Maté explored "the intersections between the Palestinian struggle for freedom and broader global movements for justice, equity and human liberation. The oppression in Gaza reflects the systemic injustice that marginalized communities and peoples face around the world, which have common roots of violence, occupation and dehumanization."

The film "*Where Olive Trees Weep*" is a collaborative effort by Palestinians and Jews, about the struggles and resilience of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, to be released on June 6. Watch out for it!

So folks, it's not just about defending Palestine and Palestinians, which in itself is enough, but also about defending ourselves and our common humanity!

*** The writer is the author of *Julia's Jihad*.

