

The Op-Ed *The New York Times* Will Not Publish

After a peaceful, snowy Shabbat, I opened my iPhone to catch up on the news as presented by *The New York Times*. I read two op-eds, the first by Max Fisher entitled “The Jerusalem Issue Explained,” and the second by David Halbfinger entitled “Daily Life in Jerusalem? Difficult and Intense for Arab and Jew.”

One cannot read those op-eds without concluding that they represent fictional accounts intended to create a narrative which is critical of President Trump and United States policy to the extent it tilts ever so slightly in favor of the democracy Israel.

Max Fisher may be the most culpable of all in falsely claiming that Jerusalem has been officially disputed since at least 1948, but before then the U.N. had declared it a Special International Zone. The remarkably disingenuous piece claims that in 1948, Israel seized the western half of the City and, in 1967, the eastern half.

Fisher does not relate that the San Remo resolution of 1920, the Feisal-Weitzman Treaty of 1919, the Anglo-American Treaty of 1924, among others, designated the area that is now Israel, including Jerusalem, Judea/Samaria and present-day Jordan as its sacred trust for close Jewish settlement and reconstituting the Jewish homeland. It has been both history and reality that Jerusalem has been Jewish for well over 3,300 years, and only was not so during periods of genocide and persecution against the Jewish people.

In 1948, Israel did not “seize” the western half but rather the Jewish majority in the Old City, the “eastern” half, were driven out by Jordanian troops equipped by their British allies and agents. Jordanians broadcast messages to the Jewish fighters in eastern Jerusalem, threatening to slaughter them “like chickens.” In 1967, Israel fought a war when it was attacked by six nations. It “seized” nothing, but rather defended itself from an intent on the part of its Arab neighbors to “drive it into the sea.” Until 1967, there was no request for Jerusalem to be anything other than Jewish. Jerusalem became a pawn in the dishonest Arab game after 1967 when Israel, for the first time, could adequately defend its interests throughout the historic land of Israel.

Notwithstanding the Max Fishers of the world, the Koran never mentions Jerusalem is holy. Muslims have directed their prayers to Mecca in the Saudi Arabian Peninsula. It is the truth, no matter how inconvenient, that Arab-Muslim intentions are the destruction of Israel, not the desire for a capital in eastern Jerusalem. When the Palestinian Authority came into being as a result of the Oslo Accords, it made its capital in Ramallah.

The Halbfinger article is pure fiction. He writes about a section of Jerusalem some call French Hill. Israelis and those who live there, including Arabs, call it Har Hatzofim, Mount Scopus. My daughter lives there, across the street from Hebrew University. One of the defamations pronounced by Halbfinger is that an Israeli friend of his moved because of the increasing religiosity of the area. Halbfinger's friend is not talking about increasing Muslims, of which there are many, but rather Jews. The disdain and distrust for religious Jews, usually called "ultra-Orthodox," to equate them with terrorist fundamentalist Muslims is too routine for serious discussion. In fact, French Hill is a mixed community of Arabs who have differing religious intensities as well as Jews and some Christians. It is one of the most diverse and democratic neighborhoods I have ever seen. Has David Halbfinger never been in the ghettos of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Los Angeles? To label, as the columnist does, French Hill or Jerusalem at large as a place of fear is remarkably shallow.

I too have been on the light rail many times. I have always marveled at how it passes through Arab and religious Jewish neighborhoods. Everyone sits peacefully on the train, many times together, and without a noticeable police presence. I cannot recall seeing such a blend of humanity on any subway or bus that I have taken in the United States. On more than one occasion, I have walked from my daughter's apartment on French Hill through Jerusalem, past Arab neighborhoods, past Jewish neighborhoods, past the Damascus Gate where many Arabs gather, and eventually to the Western Wall. I have never been molested or felt afraid. I have felt afraid, and I have been the subject of angry looks walking down the street in Philadelphia. I once asked an African-American man for directions to the Wannamaker in Philadelphia, and was responded to this way, "I don't have to give no ----ing white boy directions anywhere." I then asked an African-American woman for directions, who was kind and thoughtful and walked me to the building. Same color, different people. Welcome to the real world, Mr. Halbfinger. I have never had such an experience in Jerusalem or any other Israeli city. My cousin teaches in a college in Acco, where he trains both Muslim-Arab and Jewish policemen. I have asked him whether there is any political contention. He looked at me strangely, and indicated none whatsoever. "Real history is neutral," he said. "We never have any problems." Ronan in fact has been invited to speak in both Arab countries and European countries.

David Halbfinger, like Max Fisher, is part of an attempt by editors and newspapers like *The New York Times* to create a portrait that fits their view of the world and turns the Jewish State into a pariah among the nations. It plays into the hands of anti-Semites and bigots around the world. The reality is different thing, and unfortunately organizations like *The New York Times* seem intent on shutting the door on legitimate debate.

I was once on a walking tour of some ancient sites in Jerusalem. I was distressed, as were many of the other academics, by the constant inaccurate criticism by one

particular individual on the walking tour. She was so obnoxious, that people of both left and right wing stripes started to avoid her. The man I was walking with told me who she was and noted that she was one of the major Jerusalem correspondents for *The New York Times*!

Israel is a dynamic, democratic society that welcomes into its midst Africans, gay people, transgender couples, and Muslim-Arabs in a way that our own society and Western Europe in general could learn from. It would be hard to find a more welcoming or friendly environment than a Muslim-Arab finds in Israel. It is for that reason that in polling, Israeli Arabs make clear that they would not want to live anywhere else or under any of its totalitarian regimes such as those Mohammad Abbas runs for the Palestine Authority. Even less Arabs would ever want to live under the despotic, hate-filled government that rules Gaza.

The New York Times may want to send those same columnists to Gaza and to Ramallah to find out how its citizens feel about the corruption and exclusionist policies of those governments. Democracy? Freedom? Treatment by police? Nobody asks those questions where the Palestinian Authority or Hamas rules, or their lives would be shortened indeed.

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