

## *Review Essay: Norman Finkelstein's Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*

reviewed by **Matthew Abraham**

*Most of the controversy surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict is, in my view, contrived. The purpose of contriving such controversy is transparently political: to deflect attention from, or distort, the actual documentary record. One can speak of, basically three sources of artificial disagreement: (1) mystification of the conflict's roots, (2) invocation of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust ("ideological instrumentalization of the event, the Nazi Holocaust), and (3) on a different plane, the vast proliferation of sheer fraud on the subject (Beyond Chutzpah: The Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History 7).*

*"The purpose of Beyond Chutzpah is to lift the veil of contrived controversy shrouding the Israel-Palestine conflict" (18).*

The publication of Norman Finkelstein's *Beyond Chutzpah: The Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*—the much-awaited sequel to his controversial *The Holocaust Industry: The Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*—represents a curious moment in U.S. intellectual history. The main title of the book, "Beyond Chutzpah," is a play on the title of Alan Dershowitz's bestselling book, *Chutzpah*—a reference to the Yiddish term which means to be pushy or assertive ("assertive insistence on first-class status among our peers" (*Chutzpah* 9) . To go "beyond chutzpah," then, is to enter a realm of absolutism, intolerance, and fanatical devotion where criticism lodged against someone who has gone beyond chutzpah, even when it is well-warranted, can not be heard because of blind faith in something or someone and a belief in one's own goodness—a clear reference to philosemitic doctrine in its protection and promotion of Jews and Jewish interests (footnote 1). *Beyond Chutzpah* is a curious book because of the remarkable circumstances preceding its publication, with Alan Dershowitz, the author of *The Case for Israel* (a focal point of sharp criticism in *Beyond Chutzpah*), a self-professed civil libertarian who teaches at Harvard Law School, waging an unprecedented campaign against the University of California Press to block the printing and distribution of the

book.

How often does one write a letter to the governor of a state enlisting his help in preventing the publication of a samizdat publication, which has received the imprimatur of a prestigious university's editorial board and the thumbs up from six internationally recognized experts on the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict? Well, that is exactly what Dershowitz did when he wrote a "friendly note" to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger last May seeking the Terminator's help in separating UC Press from the lies of "an academic hitman" and "full-time malicious defamer." In addition, Dershowitz bombarded UC press with call after call and letter after letter throughout the spring and summer in a clear intimidation effort, intimating that he would sue the press if certain libelous accusations—that he did not write and perhaps did not even read *The Case for Israel*—were not removed. While these accusations were relatively minor in comparison to Dershowitz's gross ignorance of the diplomatic and historical record about the conflict, the essence of the debate became embroiled around minutiae pertaining to correct citation protocols.

While claiming that his real intention was never to block publication of the book, "I want it to be published so that it will be demolished in the court of public opinion," Dershowitz clearly sought to create a situation where any press entertaining the publication of *Beyond Chutzpah* would be placed in the crosshairs of potentially lengthy and ruinous litigation. Dershowitz wrote to Colin Robinson, an editor at the New Press, which initially expressed an interest in publishing *Beyond Chutzpah*, about supposed inaccuracies in the manuscript. Dershowitz claimed that upon receiving this letter New Press dropped the book. Not true according to Robinson, who pointed out that it was Finkelstein who withdrew from the contract, using an "opt out" clause, when it became clear that Dershowitz's letters, inquiries, and legal threats would delay publication. As Lynne Withey, UC executive press director, noted in the midst of the controversy "He doesn't want the book published." As Dershowitz stated in one of his many public diatribes, "It is shocking that a university press would hide behind academic freedom in defending its decision to publish such trash by an author of such low scholarly repute." It is somewhat surprising that Dershowitz would argue this point since Finkelstein is a well-respected, Princeton trained, political scientist with several internationally recognized books to his credit. This is not about academic freedom," Dershowitz continued,"—"the University of California Press is free to publish whatever it chooses. It is about academic standards. Plainly, the University of California Press's decision to publish Finkelstein's drivel was influenced largely by sympathy for his radical ideology"

(<http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/dershowitz/statement.html>). Not since the days of Stalin has a devotee, committed to upholding the party line, acted with such discipline toward a holy state. In Dershowitz's case, the holy state is Israel. In *Beyond Chutzpah*, Finkelstein goes into minute detail, leaving no stone unturned, while documenting the bizarre cost discipleship to a holy state extracts from its adherents.

*Beyond Chutzpah* is basically divided into three main parts. The first part examines the rise of the "new anti-Semitism" as a political weapon employed by U.S. supporters of Israel that accomplishes three basic goals: a) detracts from the historical and diplomatic record, which confirms that Israel has never been interested in having peace with its Arab neighbors (particularly the PLO), and in fact has been fearful of a cessation of conflict and hostilities which would put in a place a comprehensive settlement that has been supported by an international consensus for thirty-eight years but its implementation has been blocked by the U.S and Israel; b) creates controversy where no real controversy exists to confuse and obfuscate the conflict's roots, i.e. Israel's systematic ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza from the beginning of Zionism's entry into Palestine; and c) employs holocaust imagery and rhetoric which casts Jews, not Palestinian Arabs, as the victims at the present historical moment—suggesting that Israel, as a haven for all Jews in the event of another holocaust, must be defended at all costs no matter how indefensible its behavior.

The second part of the book, and perhaps the most important, focuses on the Israeli government's thirty-eight year commitment to implementing ethnic cleansing policies and apartheid practices against Palestinian Arabs in the form of torture, targeted assassination, the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, administrative detention, home

demolition, illegal seizures of land and water aquifers, and the unequal application of the law. As Ze'ev Schiff, a celebrated Israeli military correspondent, has confirmed, Israel as a matter of policy has long targeted the Palestinian civilian population—in fact, the IDF has drawn no distinction between Palestinian combatants and Palestinian civilians. Much of the evidence for this claim can be found in the writings and diaries of Moshe Sharett, Moshe Dayan, and Ben-Gurion. Using the findings of mainstream human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, B'tselem (an Israeli organization), Human Rights Watch, as well as Palestinian human rights organizations, Finkelstein in six tightly-argued chapters provides a near point-by-point demolition of Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel*; revealing that there truly is very little quality control regulating the production of “scholarship” about the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict in the United States. Otherwise, how could *The Case for Israel* have been showered with so much praise by U.S. cultural elites when it is so at odds with what is found in the writings of Israeli prime ministers, military historians, and scholars? (footnote 2). The third part of *Beyond Chutzpah* contains the appendixes documenting that Dershowitz lifts material from Peters' *From Time Immemorial* without proper attribution in his *The Case for Israel* (see:

<http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/article.php?pg=11&ar=1>); misrepresents the history of the conflict and recent “diplomatic efforts” such as Sadat's offer of peace in 1971 and the Camp David meeting between Clinton, Barak, and Arafat in 2000; and badly distorts the positions of his key nemesis, Noam Chomsky, who has favored a resolution of the conflict according to the international consensus. Now, Dershowitz claims Chomsky's thirty-eight year position as his own, while portraying Chomsky as an “extremist” for rejecting what Dershowitz says he has supported all along—a two-state solution. Twenty-two of the fifty-five footnotes in the first two chapters of *The Case for Israel* come from *Time Immemorial*, although Dershowitz cites the primary sources and the page numbers that Peters lists, as if Dershowitz actually checked the original documents. Anyone who checks the original sources can see that Dershowitz simply reproduces Peters' research as his own—often with comical results. In advanced page proofs of *The Case for Israel* it is clear for all to see that Dershowitz directed his research assistant, Holly Beth Billington, to cite various obscure nineteenth century sources back to the primary sources instead of to *From Time Immemorial* where he originally found them. It's clear that Dershowitz did not check the primary sources when, for example, he cites the 1996 edition of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*. Here is the citation as provided in *The Case for Israel*: “Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 485, 508, 520, 607-608.” These pages, which Dershowitz lists as coming from this edition, correspond to the pages of the 1881 edition that Peters relied upon. This discrepancy is corrected, along with all the other twenty-one other misattributions Finkelstein highlights, in the paperback edition (footnote 3). Despite all the contrived controversy, Finkelstein claims that the Israel-Palestine conflict—at least within serious scholarly treatments—is fairly straight forward from the standpoint of the historical record (footnote 4). Unsurprisingly, as those who are familiar with Finkelstein's previous books surely know, *Beyond Chutzpah*, in describing the sad state of affairs governing discussion of the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict is very, very funny—relentless in its documentation of how morally and intellectually bankrupt what Finkelstein calls the Holocaust Industry has become in shielding Israel against critical discussion, while also unsparing in noting the cruel irony that pro-Zionist Jews are no longer perceived as the world's greatest victims, but because of their privileged status as an ethnic group and Israel's ruthless assault on international law, the world's most coddled apologists for state violence. Indeed, as Finkelstein has spent much of his adult life demonstrating, the Holocaust Industry actively fears that the Holocaust, Israel, and the conflict will become objects of a rational discussion. As Finkelstein's rigorous and tightly argued polemic proves, Israel's apologists, in an attempt to obfuscate the roots and real grievances within the conflict, employ the charge of anti-Semitism to remove from the playing field anyone who questions the legitimacy of Israel's right to exist as an apartheid state with no declared borders and which seeks to impose unheard of measures upon its Arab neighbors under the mantra of “security needs”; the U.S.-Israel special relationship; and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Unfortunately, these very important points often got lost in the midst of Finkelstein's public feuds with Dershowitz. The public spectacle

began nearly two years ago when Finkelstein squared off in a debate about *The Case for Israel* on Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now*. During that debate, Finkelstein vowed to provide documentation, which would disprove Dershowitz's insistence that he was the target of a simple ad hominem and bigoted attack, alleging that *The Case for Israel* was "a fraud concocted from another fraud": a reference to Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial* which sought to prove, in the words of Golda Meir, that there are in fact "no Palestinians."

As Finkelstein recounts in the book's introduction, he reached a personal milestone in the course of writing *Beyond Chutzpah*. Nearly twenty years earlier, he came upon Peters' *From Time Immemorial*, a book that sought, in light of Israel's public relations disaster in Lebanon, to shore up the faith among the Zionist faithful by insisting that Palestinians do not and have never had a valid moral, diplomatic, or legal claim about land dispossession against Israel. In fact, in Peters' world, the Palestinian claims of injustice and dispossession were manufactured to advance the political objectives of the Arab states against Israel. Finkelstein's decision to publicly expose *From Time Immemorial* as a "threadbare hoax" was a definite turning point in his life and academic career. Indeed, as Finkelstein reflects in the book's first few pages, his work has since that time been in one way or another been connected to the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict. Finkelstein has long been known as an intellectual who shatters favored pieties, and as a result, often faces extraordinary barriers in reaching a mass audience. As a Jew and the son of Holocaust survivors, Finkelstein has been battling the U.S. Zionist establishment in one way or another since the since his parent's passing. He has in many ways been preparing to write this book, a slaughter-house of sacred cows if you will, for the last twenty-five years. *Beyond Chutzpah* is one of those rare books that has the potential to change the very nature of the debate about the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict because of its unstinting devotion to seemingly long-lost intellectual ideals such as truth, intellectual honesty, integrity, the historical record and a willingness to go where others refuse to go in crying out "J'accuse" against the powerful—even when doing so will lead to your ostracism and perpetual underemployment (footnote 5). Finkelstein's most devastating indictment, however, is not necessarily of Alan Dershowitz; instead, he goes much further, exposing much of the U.S. intellectual culture and the cultural institutions within the United States which have actively conspired in blocking an accurate rendering of the historical and diplomatic record on the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict. I suspect Mario Cuomo and Henry Louis Gates Jr., who both provided gushing praise for *The Case for Israel*, will now be asked "Did you really read the book, and if so, do you really understand what's at stake in this conflict?"

The point, of course, is not that Dershowitz is a charlatan. Rather, it's the *systematic institutional bias* that allow for books like *The Case for Israel* to become national best sellers. Were it not for Dershowitz's Harvard pedigree, the praise heaped on this book by Mario Cuomo, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Elie Wiesel, and Floyd Abrams, the favorable notice in media outlets like the *New York Times* and *Boston Globe*, and so on, *The Case for Israel* would have had the same shelf life of a publication of the Flat-Earth society (17; emphasis in original).

If often seem that much of academic life revolves around moving people away from commonsense understanding, with the insistence that the world is more complex than it seems on first impression. But when the straight-forward analysis is often more accurate than the complex one, particularly with respect to a miserable state of affairs, one must then wonder what is gained by the hand-wringing, polite evasion, and obfuscation. Attempts to evade accountability, which is often the case when evaluating the Israeli government's criminal behavior, the deployment of the so-called new anti-Semitism, and the U.S. intellectual community's seeming steadfast commitment to avoiding its complicity in crimes of state. Indeed, one gets the sense that education often pushes individuals to shut down their ability to connect with average beings. Through his conception of the differend, for example, the postmodern dandy, Jean Francois Lyotard, sought to definitively prove the existence of the Nazi gas chambers, despite the fact that the people who manned them and those who passed through them are long gone. How, Lyotard seems to ask, do we obtain justice for those who can no longer speak for themselves, or for those who have no access to this thing called "justice" through the

dominant discourse? How can the powerless ever obtain justice? No one has yet to use Lyotard's questions, nor his concept of the differend, to explain how a Palestinian might prove that he was in fact dispossessed of his land, his livelihood and his dignity and how he lives under occupation in the face of the daunting obstacle of ever locating a critical idiom which would allow him to convince a U.S. audience that he has in fact suffered an injustice.

It's long been recognized, within the humanities disciplines of the academy, for example, that to speak of such entities as "facts," "the historical record," "scholarly consensus," and—heaven forbid—"truth," is to make oneself vulnerable to the charge of being a simpleton. After all, interpretative or discourse communities determine what is "truth" based on agreement. Even when faced with the painful task of owning up to gruesome realities, invocations of such academic mainstays as the "social construction of truth," "postmodern geographies," and "the radically perspectival and indeterminate nature of language," the utter simplicity of some phenomena in the world continue to defy the academic intelligentsia, particularly in the United States. While we often smirk when we hear the phrases "intellectual honesty" and "intellectual integrity," because the powerful don't have to subscribe to these norms, often—figures such as Dershowitz—blatantly flout them, leaving members of the common herd aghast when, in the defiance of all available evidence, Israel can be described as the main proponent of peace in its ongoing removal of the Palestinians from what will soon be a greater Israel. Just as he described what he termed "the Holocaust Industry," in a book of that title, creating a distinction between the holocaust (the historical event) and the Holocaust (the ideological creation carefully nurtured by Israel's apologists to immunize the Israeli government against the international community's condemnation of the occupation of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza). Finkelstein alleges that there's anti-Semitism, a age-old form of prejudice directed against Jews that any decent person would be opposed to and dedicate their life fighting against, and then there's "anti-Semitism"—the latter being an ideologically serviceable mystery religion which accrues considerable benefits for the Israeli government in its oppression of the Palestinians. Finkelstein goes even further, claiming that the new anti-Semitism ends up coddling Zionist Jews, particularly American Zionist Jews, protecting them from much-deserved scrutiny in their toadying for special dispensations as oppressed "chosen people," while in fact being the most privileged ethnic group in the United States. As he writes:

Legitimate questions can surely be posed regarding when and if Jews are acting as people who happen to be Jewish or acting "as Jews," and, on the latter occasions (which plainly do arise), regarding the actual breadth and limits of this "Jewish power," but these questions can only be answered empirically, not a priori with politically correct formulae. To foreclose inquiry on this topic as anti-Semitic is, intentionally or not, to shield Jews from legitimate scrutiny of their uses and abuses of formidable power (83).

Finkelstein determines that Abraham Foxman, Elie Wiesel, Daniel Goldgagen, Israel Singer, Edgar Bronfman, Alan Dershowitz, and a whole host of others—who Finkelstein derisively labels as "the Holocaust Industry"—have been running a lucrative extortion racket with the sole aim of shielding Israel from worldwide scrutiny as it continues an all-out assault with the United States on international law. In various ways, throughout *Beyond Chutzpah*, Finkelstein demonstrates that the very logic behind the charge of "the new anti-Semitism" falls apart when it is subjected to elementary rationality. It is, according to Chesler's *The New Anti-Semitism*, anti-Semitic to associate all Jews with Israel ["Anyone who does not distinguish between Jews and the Jewish state is an anti-Semite"], but by Chesler's lights it is also anti-Semitic not to do so ["American and Diaspora Jews" must understand that "Israel is our heart and soul...we are family" (her emphasis)] (qtd. in *Beyond Chutzpah*, 82). The charge of anti-Semitism, and the concomitant fear of being labeled an anti-Semite, has led too many people to stop thinking for themselves; relying instead upon necessary political results instead of serious analysis. If the charge of anti-Semitism can be used so widely, to thrash anyone who challenges so-called "Jewish interests,"—which usually means one has dared to criticize "Israeli policies"—what in fact has been constructed but a new form of totalitarianism? This is, in fact, Finkelstein's larger question: when will the hysteria and madness—which parade as serious argument—stop and rationality set in within this discussion about Israel-Palestine,

where the baldest clichés parade as serious argument?

As Finkelstein explains, each time the Israeli government faces a public-relations disaster usually in the form of international condemnation for its military exploits, as it did after the '82 Lebanon War and in light of the Sabra and Chatila massacre, which Israeli troops oversaw, or as it did during the First and Second Intifada, a new alarm is raised about anti-Semitism being on the rise. A more fundamental question arises in this context: How is it that the anti-Semitism of the Nazis has been transferred to the Palestinians of the occupied territories? This transfer is a part of Zionism's deal, which is rarely problematized. This facile transfer represents one of the Holocaust Industry's greatest triumphs and requires a good deal of historical reckoning. A lachrymose narrative has been accepted as "standard history," whereby the hatred that Palestinians direct toward Jewish occupiers must be understood through the lens of anti-Semitism. As Joseph Massad points out:

While much of Israel's violence is "explained" by the pre-Israel status of European Jews, Palestinian violence is also viewed hermeneutically through the status of those same Jews, the status of the Palestinians as products of their own separate history being deemed irrelevant. After all, "[t]he only history is white." Israel's actions, however, are believed to stem from the status of those Jews who arrived on the shores of Palestine after fleeing the Nazi regime and the holocaust, only to be confronted by another violence anti-Semitic campaign, this time by Palestinian Arabs and Arabs from neighboring countries intent on expelling them from their last and only haven. Thus, Israel's violence, regrettable as it may be, is in effect viewed as self-defensive in nature. In the same vein, Palestinian violence, which was/is in self-defense against foreign invaders, is also "explained" out of context as part of this anti-Semitic campaign against Jewish refugees. All discourse involving Palestinians and Israel has been and continues to be situated within the bounds of these hermeneutical axioms—whereby, among other qualifiers, Jews are always refugees fleeing the holocaust when, in fact, they need to be viewed in the context of two separate histories and discourses ("The Persistence of the Palestinian Question," *Cultural Critique*, Fall 2004, 98).

Unfortunately since Israel's triumph against "Third World upstart" General Abdel Nasser in the Six-Day War, the historical record has been so polluted by Holocaust propaganda, propaganda meant to highlight Jewish suffering to the exclusion of the suffering of other ethnic groups, that any critical discussion of Israel has been a near impossibility. Finkelstein lays the vital ground for a rational discussion about Israel, the U.S.-Israel special relationship, and Israel's thirty-eight years of oppression against the Palestinians. To these ends, Finkelstein turns his critical insights toward showing that there's nothing new about the "new anti-Semitism," highlighting that there is a clear correlation between when the anti-Semitism alarm is rung and the propaganda needs of Israel's U.S. apologists; who must deploy a continual stream of agitprop against anyone or anything seeking to present a clear-eyed understanding of what Noam Chomsky has called the "international consensus"—a reference to the fact that the United States and Israel have been actively blocking resolution of the conflict through military and diplomatic coercion. In polite circles, this is called the "peace process," an Orwellian term which distorts the very real techniques of domination and control through which the United States and Israel blocked serious attempts at obtaining peace in the Middle East, i.e., a not out-of-the-ordinary display of the power of the doctrinal system and the fanatic racism of articulate Western elites. In brief, the U.S government provides the ideological, military, and diplomatic cover for Israel's occupation and its steady stream of human rights violations in the occupied territories. That, in fact, according to Finkelstein is what the new anti-Semitism is all about—a desperate ploy to bury Israeli and U.S. war crimes.

The facts on the Israel-Palestine are fairly straightforward, all Holocaust Industry propaganda to the side. Once one understands that the founding of Israel had little to do with the holocaust, but instead that the holocaust was seized upon by Zionists to found a state ["As the suffering of DPs was used as a bargaining chip in the struggle against immigration quotas imposed by the British, who controlled Palestine until the state was established, a Jew immigrating to the West was one less suffering Jew knocking on Palestine's doors. The migration of Jews to places other than Palestine was thus discouraged, sometimes even blocked by force. Attempts to evacuate child survivors to

England and France immediately after Liberation in 1945 were thus thwarted, on Ben-Gurion's explicit instructions" (Grodzinsky 12)]; that the vast majority of holocaust survivors—who sought to come to the U.S. but were blocked from doing so by Zionists in Palestine—were coerced into immigrating to nowhere but Palestine, in Yosef Grodzinsky's words as "good human material" (footnote 6) ; that to describe Palestinian hatred of occupiers of Palestinian land as an expression of "anti-Semitic sentiment," because those occupiers are Jewish, is inexplicable; and that anti-Semitism is not an irrational, uniform, and ageless parasite that infects non-Jews but is instead a context-specific form of ethnic discrimination that has arisen throughout history just as other forms of ethnic discrimination have; then the typical Leon Uris *Exodus* history becomes quite untenable in light of the historical evidence. As Grodzinsky states, "migration to Palestine was highly encouraged, sometimes even achieved by coercion. The Zionists were able to force an agenda because they had a coherent plan, and they were organized" (12).

To justify Israel's "ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinian population from the West Bank and Gaza, Israel's apologists have had to sustain an untenable ideological juggling act, keeping several balls in the air with a great deal of continual effort. Below, I identify those balls in the Holocaust Industry's juggling act through Finkelstein's *Beyond Chutzpah*:

- The Holocaust uniqueness thesis, which states that Nazi genocide and the death of six million Jews cannot be compared to other mass slaughters because Jews are unique, allows Israel to function as a "crazy state" (a term of art within the international relations literature that suggests how a country can blackmail the international community with promises of cataclysmic violence if crossed or denied military or diplomatic support) ;
- Anti-Semitism is irrational and eternal, consequently there can never be a justifiable expression of animus toward Zionist Jews, no matter how revolting and morally reprehensible Israeli actions (which are the actions of a state claiming it is "the national home of the Jewish people");
- Zionist Jews can not be condemned because everything Jews do, according to philosemitic doctrine, is beyond reproach;
- To reproach Zionist Jews in their support of Israel is to traffic in unsavory anti-Semitic stereotypes;
- According to Holocaust Industry dogma, Israel, as the homeland of the Jewish people, is always justified in what it does—no matter how horrific the consequences may be for another people;
- Israel is a democracy even though its right of return only applies to Jews and is governed by racist landholding laws;
- Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and until recently, Gaza, were justified by security measures against terrorism and apparent biblical warrant—despite being in contravention of international law, particularly U.N. Resolution 242, which requires Israel to withdraw to its June 1967 borders with minor territorial judgments;
- Despite the uniform judgments of the leading human rights organizations in the world that Israel employs torture against Palestinian detainees, uses illegal administrative detention, and the illegally demolishes Palestinian homes in occupied territory, Israel's apologists seek to undermine international law because it does not conform to Israel's or the United States' wishes for the Middle East region;
- Israel can be described as a model democracy because it maintains a respect for the rule of law which no other country in the world facing similar threats has.

Did the end of the Jewish Question only create the Question of Palestine? In its dogged exposure of corrupt cultural institutions and the elites who serve them, along with its in-depth analysis of Alan Dershowitz's blatant distortions in *The Case for Israel*, *Beyond Chutzpah* convincingly demonstrates—that when it comes to discussing, covering, and unashamedly misrepresenting the specific facts of the Israel-Palestine conflict—U.S. cultural elites are in a league of their own. As Finkelstein explains, *Beyond Chutzpah*'s "substantive aim is to use *The Case for Israel* as a peg to explore crucial aspects of the

Israel-Palestine conflict” (94).

If truth and justice are the most potent weapons in the arsenal of the oppressed, the manifold reports of these human rights organizations are the most underutilized resource for a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It appears that they are rarely read and almost never cited. And it is mainly because these uniquely authoritative publications lie around collecting dust that apologists can propagate so much mythology about Israel human rights record. Were their findings widely disseminated, Israel’s occupation would clearly be morally indefensible (94).

In this sense, *Beyond Chutzpah* goes where few have dared to go before: to the real source of the problem—pro-Zionist Jewish-American abuse of power in supporting Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. Finkelstein intrepidly asks: Do American Zionist Jews, *qua* Jews, use their ethnic privilege to advance Israel’s morally-bankrupt agenda toward increased militarization in its ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians and annexation of the West Bank? If the voting behavior of the U.S. Congress is any indication, the answer is obviously “yes”. However, Israel serves strategic interests for the United States in blocking the growth of Arab nationalism and the greatly feared Pan-Arab movement; it can’t obviously be described as just an object of pro-Zionist Jewish American devotion. Israel, in some sense, occupies a central place in the U.S. imagination in its aspirations to be a beacon of light in the wilderness. To push the point even further, Israel and the United States are one.

When the historical record reveals that the PLO and the Arab states have overwhelmingly been in favor of peace in the meaningful sense, giving up nearly sixty percent of historic Palestine while repeatedly recognizing Israel’s legitimacy—and that Israel and the United States fear a resolution of the conflict according to the international consensus—one then gains some insight into the devastatingly true old bromide, “The strong write history.” One thinks of Chomsky’s comment after 9/11: “It is a serious analytical error to believe that terrorism is a weapon of the weak. It is overwhelmingly a weapon of the strong. The strong control the doctrinal systems and their terror doesn’t count as terror” (MIT talk, October 2001). As an example, consider the failure of the Camp David talks between Clinton, Arafat, and Barak in 2000. The media blamed Arafat for turning down a deal of a lifetime, when in fact he was presented with a deal no Palestinian leader could possibly have accepted. (described as “a Palestinian state consisting of 85% of the West Bank” The West Bank would have been divided up into three or four cantons subject to nearly complete Israeli control, with hundred of Israeli checkpoint—along with Jewish-only bypass roads crisscrossing through and containing the Palestinian population within a Bantustan, a throwback to the days of the South African ruling minority, who sought to enforce apartheid through remote control by recruiting a member of the indigenous population to police his brethren. In this sense, as Finkelstein pointed out a previous book (*Image and Reality in the Israel-Palestine Conflict*), Arafat was being recruited to become another Butalezi (xxvii).

Under the Camp David II agreement, the Palestinians would have exercised no control over West Bank or Gaza checkpoints or airspace, and would not have had access to the most precious resource in the area—water aquifers. If anything, the Camp David offer simply would have made Israeli control over the West Bank and Gaza more efficient, essentially placing the Palestinians within an Israeli matrix of control. Palestinian national symbols such as a flag, postage stamps, and national holidays would have meant little without genuine national autonomy. As Israeli ambassador to the United States, Dore Gold, once quipped “If the Palestinians want to call what we give them a state, fine; they can call it “chopped chicken” for all we care—as long as we control it.” The U.S. media’s presentation of what the Palestinians were actually offered at Camp David represents an astonishing example of how crucial information about the conflict is crafted, distorted, and packaged for public consumption. Given the level of manipulation involved, it is fair to say that the U.S. media and intellectual culture have foisted a troubling set of misunderstandings upon the general public, which will undoubtedly have far-reaching implications for the region in the months to come.

Nonetheless, one must wonder whether not Finkelstein—in this book of nearly three hundred and twenty pages—merely proves a truism: power politics determines the rules and the discourses through which to apprehend reality, even when those rules and

discourses defy elementary logic, downright commonsense, and the never-read findings of Amnesty International, B'Tselem, and Human Rights Watch. While there has been international condemnation of the Israeli government's illegal occupation and oppression of the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza for nearly thirty-eight years, this occupation and oppression has continued because Israel is militarily and diplomatically supported by its superpower patron, the United States. U.S. and Israeli elites have found it more than worthwhile to ignore the moral and legal prohibitions condemning the "ethnic cleansing" (there is no more accurate phrase) of the Palestinians, while cashing in on the benefits of a desperate and crippling *Realpolitick*.

Finkelstein's thorough descriptions of the all-out absurdity of the so-called "new anti-Semitism"—described in such books as Foxman's *Never Again?*, Chesler's *The New Anti-Semitism*, Schoenfeld's *The Return of Anti-Semitism*, and the vast majority of the contributions to Ron Rosenbaum's *Those Who Forget*—proves the seeming inanity of confronting the powerful in their desperation to avoid accountability and looking into the faces of their victims. Despite the international consensus on the illegality of Israel's occupation, and the widespread anti-Arab sentiment that exists worldwide, the likes of Foxman, Chesler, Schoenfeld, and most of the contributors to the Rosenbaum collection, attempt the more-than-slightly-difficult task of turning reality on its head: Jews are victims not perpetrators; Israel is vulnerable; the Arab world's resistance and anger toward Israel can only be blamed on an inexplicable anti-Semitism; anyone who disagrees with us is an anti-Semite; we'll devour our one-time close allies, such as Leon Wieseltier (*The New Republic* editor) for not adequately towing the party line—proving, as Finkelstein notes, how the revolution can indeed devour its children when the party and that party line are thrown into jeopardy (*Beyond Chutzpah* 40). It is probably fair to say that the likes of Foxman, Chesler, and Schoenfeld, and Dershowitz because they are so busy toadying for Israel while warning of the new anti-Semitism, would not have the intellectual honesty to deal with real anti-Semitism—primarily their own. The label "anti-Semite," if it is to remain coherent and remain true to its historical roots, should also apply to those who claim that Israel speaks on behalf of all Jews, particularly diaspora Jewry. Zionism clearly does not speak for world Jewry, and it never has. As Finkelstein notes,

[t]his is a direct throwback to the darkest days of Stalinism, when those criticizing the Soviet regime were, by virtue of this fact alone, branded "objective" abettors of fascism, and dealt with accordingly.. One day it's the uniqueness and universality of theological absolutism; the next day it's the uniqueness and universality of the Holocaust. The constant is the totalitarian cast of mind, and attendant stigmatizing of dissent as a disease that must be wiped out by the state (*Beyond Chutzpah* 49).

Sadly, Finkelstein's historical analogy is deadly in its accuracy, providing a refreshing glimpse into the standards governing U.S. intellectual life. In his most recent book, *The Case for Peace*, Dershowitz claims that he seeks to expose those extremists who are more Israeli than the Israelis and more Palestinian than the Palestinians. That Alan Dershowitz has posed as an objective party, employing the discourse of reason, factuality, and legitimacy to foist a extremely problematic and troubling text such as *The Case for Israel* upon the public requires extended reflection among those claiming to inhabit a moral universe. As Finkelstein points out in the *Beyond Chutzpah*'s conclusion, Alan Dershowitz doesn't make the case for Israel; he in fact lays the ground for its destruction with his advocacy for torture against Palestinians, condemnation of the Israeli peace movement, the International Solidarity Movement, and those fighting to broaden civil liberties in Israel.

**Notes:**

1. Dershowitz writes: "American Jews need more *chutzpah*. Notwithstanding the stereotype we are not pushy or assertive enough for our own good and for the good of our more vulnerable brothers and sisters in other parts of the world" (*Chutzpah* 1).
2. See Ze'ev Shiff's *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) and *A History of the Israeli Army: 1874 to the Present*. (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Benny Morris's *The Birth of the*

*Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1987) and *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2003).

3. One of the most intriguing of Dershowitz's gaffes, the Felix Frankfurter Professor's reference to George Orwell's "turnspeak" in two separate instances in *The Case for Israel*, has yet to be properly explained. Orwell coined the phrase "Newspeak"; "turnspeak"—"the cynical inverting of facts"—was coined by Peters in *From Time Immemorial*. In a letter to New Press editor, Colin Robinson, Dershowitz admitted that he attributed the phrase "turnspeak" to Huxley. How did Huxley get introduced into this melee?

4. My postmodernist friends will have to excuse me for using this phrase, "the historical record," in this context. As it turns out, it is an a useful phrase, one repeatedly employed by historians and serious political analysts.

5. Consider Noam Chomsky's powerful reflection in *Towards a New Cold War*: To put it in the simplest terms, a talented young journalist or a student aiming for a scholarly career can choose to play the game by the rules, with the prospect of advancement to a position of prestige and privilege and sometimes even a degree of power; or to pursue an independent path, with the likelihood of a minor post as a police reporter or in a community college, exclusion from major journals, vilification and abuse, or driving a taxi cab. Given such choices, the end result is not very surprising. Few options are open to isolated individuals in a basically depoliticized society lacking popular organizations that question the legitimacy of existing structures of domination and control, state or private (14-15).

6. See Yosef Grodsinky's *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Struggle between Jews and Zionists*. Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2004.

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