

Trivializing and Banalizing Our Pain

Clearly ticked at seeing Bashar al-Assad being welcomed back into the Arab League, a barrister (who, as per his profile, founded Ha'ger V'shalom – whatever that is) posted a short article on LinkedIn entitled “The Real Nakba.” This young Spanish lawyer, Daniel Clarke-Serret, essentially compared the number of Syrians who were displaced because of the war on Syria to the number of Palestinians displaced because of *Al-Nakba*. He said that only 700,000 to 750,000 Palestinians were displaced around 1948 as compared to 11 million Syrians [according to his sources], and that only approximately 250,000 Palestinians became refugees in neighboring countries whereas 5.6 million Syrians fled Syria. He added that the number of Syrians who were killed exceeded the number of Palestinian refugees. Clarke-Serret ended his article with: “So explain to me why Israel (whose 1948 government’s offer to return 100,000 of these refugees was flatly rejected by the Arab States) is a pariah in the Middle East and the Muslim world, but Assad is now a fully normalised partner...?”

Of course, I couldn’t keep my mouth shut, and my initial comment was as follows: “And I suppose you never heard of the Western plan to oust Assad and impose a puppet regime that would allow Qatari gas into Europe and quite coincidentally hit Russia’s gas export to Europe. Over 200,000 terrorists were allowed into Syria through Turkey to achieve this goal. Going to bed with Al-Qaida was justified. Why don’t you blame the real culprits of the Syrian tragedy? Bush and Blair come to mind! Exonerating Israel for its ethnic cleansing of Palestine is vile. Just ask Ilan Pappé.”

Points for Daniel to ponder: The population of Palestine (including Jews) in 1948 was 1.37 million. The population of Syria in 2014 was 20.07 million. The 11 million figure is certainly larger than 750,000. However, if you exclude the Jews who were living in Palestine around 1948, the percentage of displaced Palestinians exceeds that of the displaced Syrians. Both are grave tragedies, nonetheless. More importantly, however, is that it’s not only terribly wrong to quantify the agony and pain, it leads to horrific conclusions. Following Daniel’s logic, the Syrian tragedy is trivialized if compared to the Congolese tragedy when King Leopold II of Belgium caused the death of 10 million Congolese. The Congolese tragedy itself is trivialized if compared to the tragedy of the Maya and the Incas, right? Let’s not mention the world wars, the American slaughter of the Indigenous peoples, and many more historical atrocities.

According to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, there are 5.9 million registered Palestinian refugees. Nearly one-third of them, more than 1.5 million individuals, live in 58 recognized Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As *Al-Nakba* persists for Palestinians, Daniel Clarke-Serret dares to ask why Israel is a pariah state. I’ve often referred to a quote by our previous ambassador in London, Afif Safieh, but it keeps proving itself to be very appropriate in political debates such as the one started by Daniel Clarke-Serret. “How often do we Palestinians have to hear our sufferings being trivialized and banalized?”

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