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Review Essay: Lyn Julius, *Uprooted: How 3000 Years of Jewish Civilization in the Arab World Vanished Overnight* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2018).

Other Books Discussed:

Martin Gilbert, *A History of Jews in Muslim Lands* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

Joshua Muravchik, *Making David into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014).

Israel has become a victim of its own success. Initially, Its 1948 founding was celebrated by much of the western world. Israel's modern realization represented a triumph of heroic tenacity as well as the advancement of the laudable political principles of freedom and self-determination. Even more important, Israel's newly won statehood proudly proclaimed the survival of a Judaism that had faced extinction from an unfathomable Nazi evil. The early flourishing of the Israeli political and economic experiment, especially after its first days when it fought and won a war of national survival against numerous Arab nations, proved as improbable as its founding. Despite a bevy of predictable social,

economic and political challenges, a fair-minded observer of Israel's early history and world standing would conclude that everything, or nearly everything crucial, had gone right.

Of course it was all too good to last. Seventy years later, Israel continues to prosper amidst serious obstacles in one of the world's toughest neighborhoods. But, in the meantime, its reputation has declined precipitously. Once almost universally admired, Israel today is routinely denounced and derided. How and why this happened is analyzed skillfully and successfully by Joshua Muravchik in *Making David Into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel*. According to Muravchik, much of Israel's reputation problem could be attributed to its very flourishing. Israel's robust democracy had produced an adversary culture, which from time to time challenged the very legitimacy of the Israeli state. Ever confident, Israel acted assertively and controversially. For example, Israel's widely criticized 1982 military campaign in Lebanon against the PLO constituted a leading example of such an act. But perhaps the most decisive turning point had been Israel's decisive victory in the 1967 Six Days War. Prior to the War, Israel was seen as inferior to the Arab states by any measure--population, territory, military, natural resources and national wealth. After Israel's decisive victory with its newly-won expanded borders, Israel would never again be uniformly seen as the sympathetic underdog. No longer would it be the powerful Arabs versus Israel, the beleaguered Jewish state. Now Middle East politics would be increasingly cast as the mighty Israeli versus the persecuted, oppressed, occupied and dispossessed Palestinians.

Muravchik points out that while all this was happening the left's progressive ideology was adapting to a post-cold war world. The evils of imperialism and colonialism--understood as the exploitation of weak, economically poor people by wealthy powerful western nations-- was reemphasized. Simultaneously, crude Marxist theory was expanded to include membership in oppressed victim classes based upon their minority identity and racial claims. The inchoate but oft repeated slogans that Zionism is racism or that Israel had become an apartheid nation-state are practical applications of this reformulated progressive ideology.

This Middle East reevaluation was one manifestation of a much larger postmodern understanding that challenged the value of western civilization at its core. Regarding Israel and the Palestinians specifically, its most influential spokesman of this viewpoint proved to be a Columbia literature Professor, Edward Said . Muravchik titled his chapter on this topic "Edward Said Conquers Academia for Palestine" and neither his title nor his discussion exaggerated Said's intellectual influence. The successful casting of Palestinians as the principle victim of Western viciousness and indifference

yielded immediate practical advantages. Victims are entitled to sympathy and compassion. Furthermore, it is sometimes (falsely) believed that victims-- traumatized by their suffering--bear no moral responsibility for their acts. In such a moral universe, terrorist acts against civilians and apocalyptic eliminationist rhetoric were justified as actions and voices of the desperate. Numerous NGOs, churches, socialist alliances, organizations and human rights organization were so persuaded as they increasingly offered rhetorical and financial support for the Palestinian cause. The European left initially led the way, but in time the popularity of this point of view became increasingly mainstream.

Although Israel's declining reputation can be traced to its successes seen through the lenses of its critics, some of the blame may also be attributed to Israel's inaction. Muravchik indirectly perceives this in a single sentence in his book. There he argues that the original displaced Palestinians and their descendants have maintained the status quo only to keep alive the Palestinian claim of right of return (which would effectively end Israel as we know it). Otherwise, he argues, the refugees could be easily absorbed by surrounding countries who share a similar language, religion and culture. Then there is that one pregnant sentence: " Resettlement would have been far easier, for example, than Israel's integration of an equivalent number of Jews fleeing or expelled from the Arab countries at the same time, whose language was not Hebrew but Arabic."

According to Lyn Julius, in her newly published *Uprooted: How 3000 Years of Jewish Civilization in the Arab World Vanished Overnight*, it is this forced Jewish flight from Arab lands primarily in the twentieth century that constitutes one of the most consequential stories of religious persecution hardly ever told. Obviously, Arab states have not spoken of this phenomenon. But, as the author points out, there has also been relatively little discussion by the Israeli government or by the refugees and their families. The author wishes to remedy this omission. As the daughter of Jewish Iraqi refugees, she cares passionately about the topic. Julius is appalled by the general ignorance regarding the history of Jews and religious minorities in Arab lands and equally upset about the widespread acceptance of the progressive account of the Middle East that exclusively focuses upon Israel’s alleged Palestinian victims. Thus, *Uprooted* is an attempt to both inform the reader about Jewish history in Arab lands while arguing in favor of a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Northern Africa and Middle East history and politics that affected that relationship. The author is largely successful on both fronts.

Julius' tone is occasionally polemical as she explicates history in the service of refuting the reigning leftist narrative. She adopts the contemporary leftist language of political oppression, lest anyone miss her meaning or her irony. Jews were an indigenous people in what were to become Arab lands. They lived there for a millennium before those lands were conquered by Mohammed in the 7th century. Afterwards, Muslim colonialism became the political norm of Jewish-Arab relationships in Arab lands for approximately a thousand years. When Islamic states made life intolerable for Jews and forced their exile, Julius labels it the Jewish *Nakba*. Lest anyone miss the import of her words, she also persistently describes the involuntary exile of Jews from Arab lands as a notable instance of ethnic cleansing.

Obviously, Jewish life under a thousand years of Islamic rule in different lands varied widely. Murderous violence and forced slavery represented one extreme; extended periods of Islamic toleration toward Jews amidst their participation in the professions and in government were the high point. The constant was *dhimmi* status, a kind of second class citizenship that was accorded Jews (and Christians) by Muslim rulers in the name of toleration. Almost everything about this time period proves controversial and Julius cites a variety of interpretations by different authorities. But the author will have no part of the notion that the toleration extended to Jews constituted good or respectful treatment. Peaceful co-existence between the two religions is a myth. Her point-of-view is well captured by her opening quotation at the front of the book. Citing Thomas Paine in *The Rights of Man* , she writes that toleration "is not the opposite of Intoleration, but is the counterfeit of it" for both "are despotisms." Regarding those worst moments in Islamic-Jewish relations, Julius' observations are equally critical. Excepting Stalin, Hitler's and Pol Pot's 20th century genocides, she comments "a comparison between pogroms in the Christian and the Muslim worlds are not easy to make, but Albert Memmi claims that, if you put all the pogroms end to end, you finish up with a picture of violence little different to that perpetuated under Christendom."

European colonialism would replace Islamic colonialism beginning in the nineteenth century. It too would profoundly affect the lives of Jews living these Arab lands. Although colonialism has become a term of unqualified opprobrium, Julius supplies a rather different perspective. According to her, the European version somewhat improved the lives of Jews in Arab lands by weakening the *dhimmi* social structure within the Islamic states they governed. To be sure, the lives of Jews living under such circumstances varied over time from country to country but were always very short of idyllic. The safety and well-being of Jews, as well as Jewish -Arab relations, were simply one of many problems facing European colonial rulers that needed managing in so far as they could not be completely

ignored..

According to Julius, the most important factor defining Jewish-Arab relations through history is Islam's hostility toward other religions and peoples. "Muslim minorities can only be accepted in Arab Muslim society by surrendering their distinctive identity" asserts Julius. Accordingly, these peoples "must cease beings themselves." Generally, the effects of Islam's bigotry can be observed in its historical treatment of oppressed minorities including Berbers, Copts, Assyrians and Kurds. Specifically, in Julius' opinion, the animating cause of Arab-Jewish relations remains Islamic anti-Semitism (i. e. anti-Jewish prejudice). Its persistence holds the key to understanding past and present in the Middle East.

It is here where Europe--and particularly European ideas--adversely affected Middle East and North African Jews. In the 20th century, Islamic anti-Semitism became infected with, and ultimately conflated with, European anti-Semitism generally, and Nazi ideology specifically. "Traditionally, Jews were feminized in the Muslim imagination as being cowardly, submissive and unable to stand up for themselves." But Julius notes this attitudinal transformation had a disconcerting and dangerous effect: "as a result of saturation-levels of media and mosque anti-Semitic brainwashing, these stereotypes have been corrupted and replaced by the European concepts of the demonic, manipulative and all-powerful Jew."

Relying upon the scholarship of academics like Jeffrey Herf and especially Matthias Küntzel, Julius emphasizes the great extent and profound effect of the collaboration between Nazi and Arab leadership during World War II. Two individuals are highlighted. Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, was widely regarded as the leader of the Arab world. Rabidly anti-Jewish, the Grand Mufti spent World War II collaborating with the Nazis seeking to advance their genocidal agenda. Making common cause with the Nazis and the Grand Mufti also was Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. Al-Banna was another fanatical anti-Semite. During World War II, he helped create a substantial Arab army while glorifying martyrdom as a rationale for violence. According to Julius, both these individuals in numerous ways influenced Arab and Palestinian politics for decades.

Julius's discussion of the changing face of Islamic anti-Semitism serves to undergird an important conclusion: Zionism was not the cause of Islamic hostility toward Jews in Arab lands. Anti-Semitism, in various forms, preceded Zionist sentiment in those countries. So did adverse living conditions. Nonetheless, Mideast Jews' alleged support of the Zionist cause became another name for traitor as well as an excuse for their persecution in Arab nations, particularly after the 1948 war. Then, as Julius

notes, "Jews in Arab lands were victimized purely for sharing the same religion and ethnicity as the Israelis."

The 1948 war displaced approximately 700,000 Arab residents. Arab states responded ruthlessly to the lost war and to the newly displaced Arab refugees by undertaking systematic and bold oppressive measures against their Jewish citizens. Their citizenship was stripped, arrests and detentions took place, religious restrictions were imposed, freedom of movement was curtailed, assets were frozen and property seized, employment opportunities were closed off and Zionism was criminalized. Jews, who had left their nations in far smaller numbers before, now fled in astounding numbers. Approximately 850,000 were driven out of their homes. Generally, the more affluent went to Europe and the United States. The other 650,000 or so went to Israel. Today, these Mideast and North African Jews constitute just over half of Israel's Jewish population. Conversely, many Arab nations at the same time became Judenfrei. In 1948, Algeria had 140,000 Jews; by 2016 there were none. During that same time, Egypt's Jewish population declined from 75,000 to less than 15. Similar figures for Iraq show a reduction from 150,000 Jews to 5. Libya had 38,000 Jews in 1946; today there are no Jews at all there. Syria's Jewish population shrank from 30,000 to less than 15. Tunisia went from 105,000 Jews to 1,000 while Yemen's Jewish population dwindled to 50. Symbolic of all that happened is this fact: in Cairo today, the Swiss, German, Canadian, Dutch, South Korean and Pakistani embassies all occupy the homes of wealthy expelled Jews.

Julius simultaneously emphasizes the heroic efforts undertaken by the newly created Jewish state on behalf of its new refugees as well as the formidable cultural and economic challenges the refugees immediately faced. The early days were characterized by remarkable Israeli airlifts and the creation of numerous transit camps consisting of fabric tents and wooden or tin huts. Chaos, poverty and illness in the camps were the norm. Furthermore, the integration of this immigrant population into the Israeli mainstream proved far from seamless. Cultural and class differences were pronounced between the European Jews who had founded Israel and the Jewish refugees who had fled their Arab dominated homelands and brought with them utterly different customs and traditions. Julius quotes one refugee who accurately reflects this mindset: "We left Iraq as Jews and entered Israel as Iraqis."

These refugees are Julius' people and her cause. They are a victimized group who have been mostly ignored, if not forgotten, by history. No United Nations resolutions have been passed on their behalf. Nor has a right of return or reparations been championed on their behalf. Having become successfully integrated into a thriving Israeli society, the world has deemed their past suffering

irrelevant, while Palestinians Arab refugees (and their descendants) are still held to be victims of oppression. Interestingly, Israel gets no credit for its successful social policy success while receiving constant world condemnation for the continued suffering of Palestinian refugees. This inconsistency proves particularly troubling in light of the origin of the area's refugee problem. To that end, Julius writes that two victim populations "arose out of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Arab leadership bears responsibility for needlessly causing both *Nakbas* -- the Jewish and the Arab." Why? Had the Arab leadership accepted the 1947 United Nations Partition Resolution rather than resorting to war then neither Jewish nor Arab refugees would have existed.

Julius' *Uprooted* reads like a historical brief dedicated to vindicating the memory of Jewish refugees in Arab lands. She informs or reminds her readers of the importance of her subject while demonstrating that the reigning leftist narrative of unending Israeli persecution of Palestinian refugees is simplistic if not utterly misleading. In this respect, her book performs a valuable educative service. When evaluating Julius's work, the vast chronological and geographical scale of her undertaking should be kept in mind. The author's attempt to supply a comprehensible historical account of Jewish life under Islamic rule as background to Jewish refugee problem proves to be a formidable task. This challenge helps explain most of the small annoyances that even a sympathetic reader may feel. *Uprooted* is organized historically, with each chronological period defined by a specific idea or motif. Still, these two organizational principles do not always neatly fit together, making the book a bit of an uneven read. For example, the myth that grassroots efforts today are able to bring Jews and Palestinians together is criticized early in a chapter dealing largely with the e myth of peaceful and even wholesome coexistence between Jews and Muslims that historically existed in Arab lands. Almost 200 pages later, the subject is revisited with different examples in the book's final chapter, "Myths, Lies and Omissions." More generally, Julius' chapter discussions encompass wide swaths of time and place and it is not always obvious which of these are specifically encompassed by a number of her broad generalizations. Numbers she provides also can be conflicting. In most (but not all) cases, the author acknowledges this by making reference to the different sources from which they derive. Unfortunately she usually makes no effort to explain more fully or reconcile such differences. An additional concern is that sourcing in places proves shallow or not authoritative. Finally, there is an occasional confusion or two. For, example, consider Julius' claim that the "theories of Jean-Francois Revel, Michael Foucault and Edward Said hover in the background of many a 'progressive' Westerners' view of the Middle East." Equating Said and Revel appears to be hopelessly mistaken on its face. The only way to rescue this quotation would be If the author is relying on some little known

work of Revel. If so, at a minimum, the author owes us at least a citation, if not an explanation.

Julius acknowledges the academic elephant in the room in a single sentence: "Only a handful of Western historians specialize in the Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, and their work rarely penetrates the mainstream, with the possible exception of Sir Martin Gilbert's *In Ishmael's House*, published in 2010." But Gilbert's work, whose subtitle is *"A History of Jews in Muslim Lands*" is foundational and I have no doubt Julius relies upon it a great deal, even if that reliance is implicit. Of the two books, Gilbert's is more judicious generally and less condemning of Islam and Islamic anti-Judaism specifically (although it is important to point out that he makes no effort to whitewash it either). On this matter, there is a simple difference of emphasis between the two authors. However, it is fair to say that Gilbert's *In Ishmael's House* is much less polemical than is Julius' *Uprooted*. Furthermore, Gilbert's geographical scope is larger. He discusses a greater number of countries than does Julius (for example, he references Afghanistan and Iran). The development of Gilbert's book tracks historically and therefore is straightforward. He does a masterful job of presenting his ideas clearly and contextually. As might be expected from such a distinguished historian, Gilbert's use of academic sources is exemplary.

Anyone interested in the problem of Jewish refugees from Arab lands ought to read both these books. Most readers will learn a great deal from them. On the theory that life is short, and many of the readers of this article are not wanting for things to do, it must be said that Julius' *Uprooted* does not replace Martin Gilbert's *In Ishmael's House* as the standard work on this subject.

Still, Lyn Julius' book serves an important purpose at a time when history has become a routine propaganda tool of ideological movements, particularly on the left. Julius demonstrates that the oft-repeated tale of Arab Palestinian suffering at the hands of a racist Israel proves utterly misleading as a comprehensive account of Middle East politics in general, or of Israel in particular. Race was not a factor in the Arab persecution of their Middle East Jewish population. This largely ignored Jewish refugee population had deep ancestral roots in the area and were racially indistinguishable from the Arab governments that dispossessed them. Conversely, Jews of all skin colors were welcomed into Israel. And while their integration into Israeli life was full of stumbles and missteps, that nation's effort often was also heroic and inspiring. It turns out that by describing the plight of Jewish refugees at a time when the Middle East was inundated by refugees caused by unnecessary warfare, she has also helped rescue Israel from oft-repeated but utterly irresponsible accusations of colonialism, racism and systematic evil-doing.

Here is one more thing to consider. If the debate over the status of Palestinian and Jewish refugees (not to mention the status of Israel's Arab citizens) ultimately points to the merit and worth of Israel as a political experiment, It is no accident that current animus toward Israel unites enthusiasts of political Islam and radical western progressive thought even though they share radically different and fundamentally incompatible notions of what constitutes the good life. What unites them, as has often been pointed out, is a passionate loathing of the West. This is the sense behind the oft quoted Iranian mantra that the United States is the big Satan and Israel is the little Satan. The slogan recognizes that Israel, in many ways is the prototypical western country. It stands as a proxy for western civilization. Israel's foundational political ideas are derived from enlightenment ideas and encompasses a respect for majority rule, individual rights and the rule of law. Additionally, Israel embodies the outward directed modern western mindset of what V. S. Naipaul called the West's "universal society". This state of mind alone seeks to understand and engage the world while exercising "idea of individual responsibility, choice, the life of the intellect, the idea of vocation and perfectibility and achievement." Simultaneously, Jerusalem today also endures as the West's continuing symbol of religion and revelation. Like Athens, its memory and presence continue to form, inform and energize Western civilization. Little wonder that Israel is so often singled out for condemnation by a postmodern political ideology that rejects the worth of Western Civilization as well as its underlying understanding of reason and revelation as central to human life. This ideological perspective would substitute in their place the primacy of emotion--particularly the emotion of a moral revulsion rooted in the application of identity politics to so-called oppressed peoples. Lyn Julius demonstrates that one possible object of this revulsion--Israel's Middle Eastern Jews--should be understood as a sympathetic people rather than condemned as a blameworthy part of a morally reprehensible state. For that reason alone, she deserves our gratitude.