

FREEDLAND IS NOT SUITABLE

Should Jonathan Freedland, the *Guardian's* Executive Editor, Opinion, take over the editor-in-chief's post from Alan Rusbridger? Freedland's instalment is rumoured to be a condition set by the *New York Times* if the two enlightened North Atlantic papers are to merge, but even without this his chances seem good.

A central topic for both papers, as for the world in general, is Palestine, Israel, the Middle East. The topic is said by Freedland himself to have been his specialty for some twenty years. I have read through 100 of his [writings](#) on the subject in the *Guardian*, the *Jewish Chronicle* and the *New York Review of Books* and conclude that their content should worry the *Guardian* staff, its readers and his employer The Scott Trust. His support for Israel is unbalanced, violates the *Guardian's* commitment to liberalism and is rooted in an ethnocentricity that enables him to alternatively ignore Palestinians and justify their forced transfer out of Palestine.

In order of decreasing importance:

1. He justifies the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.
2. His writing is Israel-centric and biased towards Israel.
3. His Mideast world is largely free of Palestinians.
4. He conflates criticism of Israel with 'anti-semitism'.
5. His narrative is largely that of Israeli *hasbara*.

1. Ethnic cleansing condoned

Freedland's friend and *Ha'aretz* journalist Ari Shavit made a stir in 2013 with his [portrayal](#) of Israel's ethnic cleansing, by murder and expulsion, of the Arab-Palestinian town of Lydda in July 1948. In [one](#) of his reviews of Shavit's story Freedland correctly writes that Shavit "meticulously reconstructs events in the mainly [sic] Arab town of Lydda in July 1948, when soldiers of the embryonic [sic] Israeli army emptied the place [sic] of its Palestinian inhabitants and... killed more than 300 civilians". He confirms Shavit's admission that "Zionism carried out a massacre"; it resolved that the Arabs of Lydda be "expelled quickly": "if a Jewish state was to exist in Palestine an Arab Lydda could not exist..."

In [another](#) review of Shavit his claim is incorrect, however, that Shavit only "*touches on the question of justification too*" and "avoids a direct answer". Shavit's 'shoot and

weep' approval is very clear. He writes that "the choice is stark: either reject Zionism because of Lydda or accept Zionism along with Lydda... I will not damn the brigade commander and the military governor and the 3rd Battalion soldiers. On the contrary, if need be, I'll stand by the damned, because I know that if not for them the State of Israel would not have been born... They did the dirty, filthy work that enables my people, myself, my daughter, and my sons to live." Shavit harbours righteous anger towards the "critics of later years who condemn what they did in Lydda but enjoy the fruits of their deed." His final solution is the status quo: "Do I wash my hands of Zionism? Do I turn my back on the Jewish national movement that carried out the destruction of Lydda? No."

Freedland concurs. As Ben White [shows](#), already in 2004 in a book chapter Freedland [wrote](#), "I have long believed Israel should be strong enough to admit the reality of 1948 – and to defend it all the same." White demonstrates that while Freedland has passionately condemned ethnic cleansing in Darfur and Kosovo, he not only does not condemn the Zionist actions of 1948 (and since) but, as in his book *Jacob's Gift* as well, he condones the ethnic cleansing; the "flight, expulsion and dispossession, the emptying of 400 villages and the creation of around 700,000 refugees" was all right because "the creation of a Jewish state was a moral necessity", the Jews had "the right... of the drowning man" to force the Palestinians off Palestinian land. As Shavit says, "If Zionism was to be, Lydda could not be. If Lydda was to be, Zionism could not be." Both Shavit and Freedland choose Zionism. In the same breath and in bad taste, Freedland exhibits his cleverness by joking that Shavit is "a Wasp, a White Ashkenazi Supporter of Peace".

Further hard evidence against Freedland is found in a 2008 *Guardian* 'Sounds Jewish' [podcast](#) wherein he says, "I'm of the view that says *admit* the price that was paid but then say to the world, tragically, it was *necessary*, given the place the Jews were in given the calamity of their own, the slaughter in the holocaust. So I think you have to, you can be cleared-eyed and honest about this. It doesn't actually compromise the *moral need* that Israel had 60 years ago, to admit that in order to implement that moral need there were terrible sufferings for other people involved." As he preaches in his August 2014 [review](#), while the blood of Operation Protective Edge was flowing, "the Jewish state had become a mortal [sic] need" and a "moral necessity".

To understand the endorsement of how Israel was 'born' by 'left Zionists' such as Shavit, Freedland and Benny Morris it is necessary to read Shavit's seminal 2004 *Ha'aretz* [interview](#) with Morris, reprinted in full in *Counterpunch*. In Freedland's own critical yet friendly 2009 *Guardian* [interview](#) of Morris, Freedland eschews any expression of his personal opinion on Morris' derogatory generalisations about Arabs, but instead uses rhetorical displacement to note merely that Morris' language will make "liberal Israelis, liberal Jews, just liberals... *squirm*"; "people would [say] that's... racism". Compare Shavit's relatively bold reply to Morris' approval of Ben Gurion's "purification" of Israel of gentiles: "I don't hear you condemning him."

Readers who like to read between the lines will like Freedland's [review](#) of three biographies of Ariel Sharon, the 'Butcher of Beirut', Israel's main post-1947 purifier who "embodied [Zionism's] determined quest for land and its readiness to use brutal force." Notwithstanding some ambiguity, Freedland is an admirer. Sharon may be an "enigma" to Freedland – less so, one suspects, to Palestinians – and have left an "uncertain legacy" – a view that would induce bafflement amongst Palestinians and Lebanese – but he was a "warrior" whose life was "rich in the raw material from which myths are made", a "soldier... who... chased away enemies" and debriefed his own soldiers "even as a bullet remained freshly lodged in his leg", a "new breed of Jewish warrior" who was "ruthless in the pursuit of safe and generous borders for the Jewish state".

In an example of his amoral attitude towards Palestinian issues, Freedland judges Sharon's building of "the separation barrier", his decision that the Palestinians must be "bombed, harassed and intimidated" and his "pursuit of the settlement project" not on ethical grounds but rather on the grounds that these undermine Israel's true interests. Sharon is nothing worse than "a weak strategist" who failed to see "the problem" of the demographic threat to Israel's Jewish nature of equal numbers of Palestinians – in Freedland's words, the need to leave "fewer Palestinians on Israel's books, so to speak". In violation of a central liberal tenet, Zionism and Israel have always manipulated demographics for political ends.

Back to the present. In his [piece](#) last summer 'Liberal Zionism after Gaza' Freedland's writes, "Privately, people admit to growing tired of defending Israeli military action when it comes at such a heavy cost in civilian life, its futility confirmed

by the frequency with which it has to be repeated.” One reads and gasps: murder “has to be” done. Freedland is by the way neither emotionally nor intellectually able to regard Gazans’ firing of rockets using the same lifeboat ethics used by the “liberal Zionists” [sic] regarding Lydda: a question of survival, either you or me.

Freedland’s support for ethnic cleansing is by itself enough to disqualify him from not only the chief editorship but his present job. Condoning the *Nakba* is out of bounds. It is a moral failing to believe Palestinians should pay for crimes committed by Christians in Europe. The message that two wrongs make a right is beneath every standard for which the *Guardian* otherwise battles day in and day out.

2. Israel-centrism

Freedland is strongly and openly biased towards Zionism/Israel in this century-old conflict. He takes sides, is both personally and ideologically bound up with Israel, admittedly looking for its name in any list of countries, quickening at any sight of its flag. Outside of New York and London his time is spent in Israel, not Palestine or other Arab places. As he [wrote](#) in 2013, “My views [are] rooted in the firm desire to see Israel survive and thrive...” However, because Israel’s thriving is at the expense of the lives and dignity of the Palestinians his personal, understandable bias becomes relevant to one of the leading liberal newspapers of the world.

Freedland admits to following Israeli politics “obsessively”. What little he writes about Palestinian or Arab politics is superficial, and even columns about recent events in Syria or Egypt, or the Arab Spring, are [analysed](#) almost exclusively in their relation to Israel. “Where those watching from afar can afford to feel only hope for Arab democracy, it is understandable that Israelis feel mainly fear.” While noting that Zionism “was all about” a similar quest for “self-determination”, he “understands” Israel’s lack of joy at the prospect of the Arab spring and Arab democracy, cynically if circumspectly [endorsing](#) Moshe Aren’s dictum that “Peace you make with dictators.” Israel’s support for anti-democracy in its region is “understandable”. Freedland is using a double standard, and his allegiance to democracy less than full.

As with democracy, so with pluralism. Simultaneously downplaying and confirming the strength of the Israel lobby in the US, Freedland once [warns](#) AIPAC (the American Israel Public Affairs Committee) to be more tolerant of opposing views.

AIPAC's intolerance "is not just an offence against pluralism, it also hurts the very cause Aipac purports to serve: Israel." The bottom line is not ethics or liberalism, it is Israel.

When in May 2013 Stephen Hawking joined the academic boycott by cancelling a planned appearance in Israel, Freedland [directed](#) his concern not to the reasons why Hawking might adhere to the boycott call, and much less to the arguments of the Palestinian academics making the call, but to the frightful prospect that the boycott's endorsement by people of the calibre of Hawking might lead to Israel's being "shunned and vilified" as a "pariah state" by the "mainstream". As so often Freedland addresses "those who wish the best for Israel", evidencing no interest in the meaning *for Palestinians* of Hawking's employing this peaceful method of pressuring Israel. Similarly, at the height of the bloodshed in Gaza he used the Tricycle Theatre's refusal to host films financed by the Israeli government as a chance to once again [arrive](#) at his bottom line, namely Israel's "strategically calamitous situation", its "pariah status that is looming", and the damage to its "standing in the world".

Even the funeral of Nelson Mandela [interests](#) Freedland only because Netanyahu and Peres did not attend. It cast shame on Israel to be absent "when the family of nations gathered"; Zionism, after all, had fulfilled the need for "the Jewish people to re-join the family of nations". He even cannot resist calling the funeral "a shambolic affair", and his blindness to Israel's apartheid-like characteristics prevents him from seeing that it might have been bad taste for it to show up at the ultimate honours for a man who spent 27 years in jail for fighting apartheid.

Even his support for Palestinian statehood stems from his support of Israel. In [arguing](#) for recognition of Palestine he writes that such recognition would "support the idea of 'Israel alongside a Palestinian state, thereby entrenching Israel's legitimacy and its permanence'. Having the general assembly... vote for such a resolution would amount to de facto recognition of Israel – and reassure those who fear the country's 'delegitimation'." He [praises](#) Peter Beinart for "distinguishing democratic [sic], pre-1967 Israel from the post-1967 territories" and for Beinart's "goal of simultaneously 'delegitimising the occupation and legitimising Israel' - all for the sake of securing Israel's own future." What matters is the well-being of Israel; the intrinsic rights of Palestinians are not even an afterthought.

Freedland's narrow focus becomes callous in a [column](#) about 'Operation Cast Lead' in January 2009 entitled 'Gaza after a Hamas rout will be an even greater threat to Israel'. His concern is much less with the fate of dead and wounded Palestinians than with the war's "damage to [Israel's] international reputation" and the "dangers" for Israel of weakening Fatah's position over against that of Hamas. He once similarly [wrote](#) that while the IRA always accepted Great Britain as such, Hamas doesn't accept Israel, and that "Israel could truthfully cite the Ulster precedent when it says it cannot sit down with Hamas until it renounces violence." He just cannot see that most Palestinians refuse to sit down with Israel until *it* renounces its decades of violence.

[Writing](#) "as the war in Gaza wound down" from his Greek holiday in summer 2014, Freedland reflects that although the Greek economy is in the doldrums Greece is not at war, but "Ashdod and Israel are not so lucky." Aha, it is all a matter of luck. Gaza City, Jabalia City and Rafah – with rubble and corpses not to be found in Ashdod – are not worth mentioning. For Freedland the [problem](#) with last year's Gaza war is that it is "self-defeating" – *for Israel*; it "will give Israel no security".

Throughout, Freedland elides Jewishness and Zionism, for instance routinely calling Israel "the Jewish state". One example is a [piece](#) in which he rejects the idea of one democratic state (supported he says only by "diehard Arab rejectionists" and "old-school student lefties from the 1980s") his paragraphs use the terms "Zionism", "Israel", "the Jewish state" and even "the Jews" interchangeably. It is therefore more accurate to describe his starting-point as 'Jewish-Israel-centric'.

Freedland's characterisation of Israel in ethno-religious terms could be ignored. We could see its conflict with the indigenous population as purely political, economic, military. Unless, as is Freedland's tendency, we want to let the twenty percent of Israel's citizens who are not Jewish disappear conceptually altogether, making their second-class status easier to ignore. Freedland overwhelmingly does neglect them, a consequence of his elision of Israel and Jewishness.

The conflation has the further consequence of enabling Freedland in his 2004 [book](#) chapter 'Is Anti-Zionism Anti-Semitism?' to regard it as "not an absurd claim" to say that "to attack Israel is to attack Jews". He argues for this by claiming that "Jewish affinity with Israel is now so widespread and entrenched, across the political and

religious spectrum, that it has indeed become a central part of Jewish identity.” This shows his sympathy for the (absurd) idea that Israel criticism is ‘anti-semitic’ (correctly: *judophobic*), and in co-opting all Jews for Zionism it is factually wrong: many Jews are anti-Zionists. But this group, with the exception of Norman Finkelstein, earns little of Freedland’s attention.

Perhaps the cruellest aspect of Freedland’s conflation is the conflation of Jewish suffering in Europe with the geographical and political area of the Middle East known as Palestine. Zionism always chose the Arab inhabitants of Palestine as those who must pay for the pogroms of Eastern Europe, the Dreyfus scandal, or the Holocaust, in wilful ignorance of the fact that the Palestinians had absolutely nothing – zero – to do with it.

His quasi-equation of Israel and “Jewish identity” led him to [intervene](#) as well in the controversy over London’s Tricycle Theatre’s attempt to not screen films sponsored by the Israeli regime: “The Tricycle’s insistence that the festival was only welcome if it cut all financial ties with the Israeli Embassy... seemed a realisation of long-held Jewish fears. Did this mean that Jewish participation in the cultural life of the country... would now be conditional on our first issuing a public disavowal of Israel?” Like a magician, Freedland in two sentences has changed the Theatre’s objection to “Israel” into opposition to “Jewish” participation – surely not the result of a reading difficulty. Similarly eliding gracefully between Israel, Jewish culture, the Israeli embassy in London, and ‘anti-semitism’ is an anonymous [piece](#) most likely written by Freedland which ends with *non-sequiturs* about attacks on French synagogues – but rhetorical analysis of this masterpiece is over my head.

Although Freedland often brings his own Jewishness into his political columns about Palestine and ‘anti-semitism’, it is not relevant to the points just made showing that the conflation of Israel and Jewishness is necessarily disadvantageous to Palestinian citizens of Israel, critics of Israel, Jewish anti-Zionists and Palestinians in general. Scores of gentile journalists, commentators and politicians share his outlook putting Israel, Jewish Israelis and worldwide “Jewish identity” at the centre of the *Palestine* question.

Finally, there is a nice teapot-kettle irony in Freedland’s “singling out” of Israel for journalistic and literary attention, for he often [insinuates](#) that ‘anti-semitism’ motivates

those who “single out” Israel for criticism, as opposed for example to Syria or Darfur. He once feigns [bafflement](#) as to why people “single out” Israel; we who do so are even a “mob”. Whereby Freedland himself week in, week out singles out Israel for loving criticism, [naming](#) “the Israeli-Palestinian conflict” his journalistic specialty. Is he therefore guilty of the inverse racism of ‘philo-Semitism’? No.

Daphna Baram quotes Freedland in her 2004 [book](#) (pp 227-228) as follows: “Some Guardian people might wish it were otherwise, but it is a fact that the vast majority of Jews in the world today identify themselves with Israel, and see any attack on it as an attack on themselves. The result is that much of what we publish can and does offend our Jewish readers. My view is that if we are regularly offending most members of an ethnic minority, then that has to be a cause of concern.... [S]upport of Zionism is part of the *Guardian’s* own history. This is our heritage and we cannot break from it lightly.” That is, the *Guardian* should tailor its coverage of Israel to its Jewish, rather than its Arab or Palestinian, readership. And [anyway](#), pro-Zionism is in the *Guardian’s* DNA.

When the desire for the well-being of any group, whether Jews, Christians, Moslems or Hindus, leads to justification of political privilege, it is relevant both to those discriminated against and, I believe, to what the *Guardian* should be. But even without this ethno-religious aspect, hiring Freedland as editor-in-chief will strengthen the *Guardian’s* pro-Israel bias.

3. The unimportance of Palestinians

The other side of the coin is that in Freedland’s world Palestinians are nearly absent. After distilling 100 of his articles I claim that he sees Israelis at the expense of seeing Palestinians. Like previous Zionists who saw the solution to the European ‘Jewish problem’ in Palestine, a purportedly literally or culturally empty place, they are his Oriental Other. Only [once](#) did I find him putting himself in the Palestinians’ shoes for longer than a half sentence, conceding that “the Palestinians feel exactly the same way [as the Jews]. They too have nowhere else.”

In the one [column](#) where I found general sympathy for *Arab* self-determination – he compares it to that achieved for Jews by the Zionists – my joy was short-lived. Lo and behold, he was referring only to self-determination in the surrounding Arab

spring countries, excluding Palestine, that is, the group of Arabs in front of his nose, of which there is *no mention whatsoever*.

Palestinian refugees make up around 60% of the Palestinian population, but Freedland has devoted not more than perhaps three entire sentences to them. His moving [article](#) on Jewish refugee Otto Dov Kulka has never to my knowledge been balanced with more than a paragraph on any of the millions of ethnically cleansed Palestinians who lost their homeland 67 or 47 or 5 years ago or yesterday.

He does see Palestinians when they fire rockets. One [description](#) of the situation at the time of Cast Lead reveals his bias: “the Israelis of Sderot cowering in shelters from the Qassam rockets launched from Gaza; and the Palestinians, whose suffering only seems to deepen”. That is, Palestinians are the *agents* of Israeli suffering, while the Palestinians’ suffering simply happens, somehow, with no agent in sight.

[Baram](#) (p 197) mentions that Freedland characterised as “some of the most important on the topic...” the *Guardian’s* interviews in one year “with Ariel Sharon, the leftwing activist Uri Avneri, Rabbi Sacks, the refusnik Rami Kaplan, the Palestinian politician Sa’eb Arikat, Yossi Beilin,... and Shimon Peres.” Amongst these seven people exactly one is a Palestinian who, to boot, is a collaborator in the ‘Oslo process’ and the Zionist two-state-solution project supported by Freedland.

In the few columns in which Palestinians do appear, Freedland is advocating (in Israel’s self-interest of course) Israeli recognition of Palestinian suffering. But this “recognition” is all they get – no land, self-determination or permission to return. Freedland doesn’t even manage the word ‘apology’. He [once](#) hopes Israel will “acknowledge” that the Palestinians “suffer[ed] a *nakba*.” He asks: “If Israel could one day make such an admission, who knows what accommodation might follow?” Accommodation on the part of the Palestinians, that is.

In another [piece](#) he fantasises a similarly biased deal of “Israelis finally acknowledging the plight of the refugees created by the birth of the state of Israel, and Palestinians finally deciding whether they can accept a Jewish state.” Again, in return for “acknowledgement” the Palestinians give 80% of Palestine to the Zionists. He then sweetens the deal by reassuring the Palestinians that they will not be “asked... to reject the entire narrative of their recent history.” This is magnanimous:

they can evidently retain half their narrative of the recent part of their millennia of history.

Similarly, his [take](#) on the “liberal Zionist” [sic] two-state solution is that “Jews could have a state of their own, without depriving Palestinians of their legitimate national aspirations.” [Some] Jews get a state, while Palestinians get “aspirations” – moreover only their “legitimate” ones, not their ‘illegitimate’ ones.

In his 2004 [book](#) chapter he goes farther when saying that “Israel should make amends [for the *Nakba*] – through compensation, restitution, and commemoration. Let those four hundred villages that were emptied be named and marked, and let Palestinians remember what they see as the *naqba*, the catastrophe, their way.” The generosity of the vague offer of “restitution” notwithstanding, what the Palestinians get is naming, marking, commemoration and memories – no return to present Israeli territory, which is the elephant in this paragraph’s room – while Israel keeps Palestine. And as Ben White [adds](#), “It is unclear why Palestinians need this permission.”

Standing over against and of course outweighing these “aspirations” are what Freedland dozens of times calls the Jewish “need” for a state (in Palestine), or [even](#) “the craving for a place the Jews could call their own... Whatever view you ultimately take on the Israel-Palestine question, you cannot hope to understand that conflict unless you also understand this need.” Martin Buber might have given equal time to the needs of the Palestinians, but not Jonathan Freedland.

This theme of a state of their own – which Freedland also deceptively calls a “homeland” – [recurs](#) starkly combined with the theme of the Nazi Holocaust: The Israelis “are a nation formed by those who had no other place to live. The Holocaust, inevitably, looms large in this: the establishment of a Jewish state just three years after the liberation of Auschwitz was no coincidence” because “the world” saw it as a “basic right” for Jews to have “a place of their own”. In his description [elsewhere](#) of Holocaust survivors he writes that “it’s useful to know the harrowing past of loss and violent bereavement – often but not only in the Holocaust – that shaped so many of them, the fear that transformed itself into a desperate longing to survive.”

But Freedland is making a very large and visible logical mistake: The Palestinians had nothing to do with the Holocaust. Neither could they take part in pre-Holocaust pogroms in Europe, since they didn't live in Europe. The leap from persecution in Europe to Jewish 'self-determination' in Palestine is not only an obvious misuse of the term 'self-determination' but takes the corpses of the indigenous and the ruins of their houses in stride.

Even granting the legitimacy of the desire of many Jews (not "the Jews", as Freedland repeatedly has it) for a Jewish state, the practical question facing the Zionists ever since the turn of the twentieth century has been *where*. It is embarrassing to have to mention, much less belabour, this point – which Freedland only briefly touches upon in his 2004 essay, but never in his columns. But if no empty land is found (or desired), the question of *where?* turns into the question of *on whose land?* The practical issue becomes a moral one. The beef the world has with Zionism is that two wrongs don't make a right. Freedland [sees](#) this only hazily, because he does not really see Palestinians, because he identifies with Israel.

4. Is criticism of Israel 'anti-semitic'?

In a 2012 column entitled 'We condemn Israel. So why the silence on Syria?' Freedland [claims](#) that focussing on Israeli crimes more than on those of Bashar al-Assad is judophobic. After accusing Caryl Churchill of *not* writing a play called 'Seven Syrian Children' and Lindsey German of Stop the War Coalition of *not* organising a demonstration against Assad, he states: "It's not simply a bias against Jews that regards an Arab or Muslim death as only deserving condemnation when Israel is responsible." That is, the positions of Churchill and German do stem from "bias against Jews", but *not only* therefrom.

He loathes the Stop the War NGO German leads, [writing](#) recently, tastelessly and perhaps libellously of the "comforting hope that what we are up against [in the Charlie Hebdo case] is not a fanatic death cult but rather the armed wing of the Stop the War Coalition". Sweeping more broadly and with X-ray insight into the hearts of his leftist enemies, he elsewhere [emits](#) the proclamation that "the suffering of... hundreds of millions of Arabs... has [not] stirred the compassion of left-leaning liberal types...", and of "activists who can barely stir themselves to deplore the slaughter in

Congo, Darfur or Sri Lanka.” Hopefully such slurs, leftist-bashing and impugning of motives, without evidence or rational argument, contradicts the job profile of a *Guardian* chief editor.

In 2013 he [repeated](#) the theme. After playing the numbers game showing that in a certain period of time Assad had killed more Syrians than Israel had Palestinians – perhaps the murderer of two people must be jailed, while the murderer of one person can walk – he writes, “I’m especially tired that so many otherwise smart, sophisticated people apparently struggle to talk about Israel-Palestine without reaching, even unwittingly, for the dog-eared lexicon of anti-Jewish cliché...” Apparently [reference](#) to “Israel/US ‘global domination’” was enough for Freedland to hang his case on. In any event “Israel’s shift to the right” will alienate “those it needs most” – and oh yes, perhaps also some Palestinians.

In a final slur in late 2013 he [asserts](#), again with X-ray vision, that “the loss of [Syrian] lives failed to touch the activists who so rapidly organised the demos and student sit-ins against Israel.” I infer that Freedland’s license to haughtiness derives from his organisation of anti-Assad demonstrations.

In his [chapter](#) ‘Is Anti-Zionism Anti-Semitism?’ Freedland concludes that it isn’t necessarily, but usually is. He places the burden of proof (of innocence of ‘anti-semitism’) on those who reject Israel or Zionism. His main argument for the Yes answer to the essay’s question is however not defended “intellectually” but by feeling, by listening to “tones of voices”, to “how” rather than “what” is said. Even worse: evidence of ‘anti-semitism’ lies not so much in the “singling out” of Israel but rather in the “fervor” with which this is done. To avoid even this vague, emotional charge of ‘anti-semitism’ critics should I suppose tone things down, observe persecution of Palestinians with appropriate coolness. By this criterion the present critique of Freedland stems from my ‘anti-semitism’, done as it is with considerable effort, dedication, perhaps “fervor” – even if I have shown that exactly the same criticism could be made of the views of anybody applying for this *Guardian* job.

He thus concedes that much of the argument that anti-Zionism is ‘anti-semitic’ has no basis “intellectually”. For instance in a *Jewish Chronicle* [round table](#) he asks regarding some Israel-critical points “made in any of the plays we have talked about... why [it is] we feel somehow this is about us, rather than just about this

country and the Middle East?” The judophobia is felt “somehow”. He also explicitly [judges](#) Israel criticism on the basis not of what is said, but who levels it. If it is Peter Beinart or Howard Jacobson, writing “from within, not without, the Jewish family”, it is OK. Coming from the likes of Norman Finkelstein – a Jewish “outsider” – it is “wicked”. He even throws the “self-hating Jew” epithet at Finkelstein before seamlessly connecting him to David Irving and claiming he “is closer to the people who created the Holocaust than to those who suffered in it”.

Not only should this provide work for the *Guardian*’s libel lawyers, but while it is good enough for the odd column, it is not good enough for editorial decisions affecting the entire paper. Remember that gentiles make identical arguments and that obviously for most *Guardian* readers and staff, conflating issues of human, civil and political rights with any ethnic and religious belonging is contrary to the *Guardian*’s liberalism.

After the *Daily Mail*’s attack on Ralph Miliband as a disloyal communist, Freedland [squeezed](#) five paragraphs of ‘anti-semitism’ out of single clause of a single sentence in which the paper denies its intent – unlike “the jealous God of Deuteronomy” – to hold David and Ed Miliband responsible for their father’s purported sins.

His [take](#) on the Charlie Hebdo murders dismisses as motives pride in Islam, piety towards Allah and the Prophet, French and Western foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and Israel’s decades of subjugation of Palestinians in favour of the single explanatory variable ‘anti-semitism’.

Freedland’s stance on this issue is relevant to the near future due to the present government’s intention of passing its Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill which regards criticism of Israel as *prima facie* evidence of ‘anti-semitism’. In a 2011 *JC* [column](#) he makes the hyperbolic claim that the academic boycott of Israeli institutions complicit in Israeli violations of Palestinian rights is “anti-semitic”. Furthermore, he has found it necessary to [deny](#) that fear of the charge of ‘anti-semitism’ sometimes silences criticism of Israel before it is uttered, or waters it down.

In the coming debate the interests of neither the Palestinians nor the *Guardian* are served by a chief editor who does not look at criticism of Zionism on its merits and without a presumption of guilt. And in the interests of fighting real ‘anti-semitism’ the *Guardian* editor in chief should not see it behind every bush. One wishes a *Guardian*

editorial stance that instead *starts with* universal human rights, equal rights, indigenous rights and refugee rights and places the Palestinian and Israel perspectives on equal footing. Freedland starts with Israel.

5. Tropes of the Israel-Palestine discourse

Two myths of the dominant [discourse](#) about the Zionist-Palestinian conflict are (1) there are two morally and militarily equivalent sides and (2) Israel will permit a Palestinian state. Two of the discourse's 'silences' are that Israel liquidates and ethnically cleanses Palestinians and that it wants maximum territory. Jonathan Cook [adds](#) to these Israel's claims for its robust democracy [and](#) the need for a safe haven for Jewish people (in Palestine). Freedland follows this narrative in spades.

The false picture of symmetry imbues Freedland's [report](#) of his participation in a role-playing event between 'Israelis' and 'Palestinians' where "the two [equally angry] sides" are negotiating – two teams out on the pitch. The goal is to find out where "the midpoint between the two sides lies." The successful outcome, in his view, was agreement on two "states" or "nations". The conflict is moreover reduced to one between two equally strong *perceptions*: the Israelis [he means of course Jewish Israelis] are only "cast as" the stronger party. Israelis "have a narrative involving dispossession and suffering too, but it tends to relate to the past, even if it is the relatively recent past." In addition to ignoring the reality of Palestinian military and diplomatic inferiority Freedland here again misses the brightly illuminated sign announcing that the Jewish suffering was in Europe, not at the hands of the Palestinians.

In the same vein he argues for an "honourable draw" between the two teams, who are "fated to fight". That is, Zionism did not throw the first stone; it was fate wot done it. "Two peoples" are in a sort of marriage needing a "divorce". From this false premise of symmetry Freedland [derives](#) the shabby two-state solution, twice arrogantly and incorrectly asserting that "everyone knows" this is the only answer. Conveniently, this mythical 'solution' leaves his beloved Israel permanently in control of eighty percent of Palestine, treating its Palestinian citizens as second-class and locking the refugees out for good. The "two sides" narrative has served its purpose.

Somewhat improbably, Freedland evidences ignorance of the fact that Israel will never stop short of ruling all of Palestine from the river to the sea, romantically but falsely [claiming](#), contrary to the empirical record of a whole century, that “two states is the destiny Israel envisages for their shared future.” He does not comprehend the meaning of the Israeli regime’s rule of always calling the West Bank ‘Judea and Samaria’. The myth of Israeli acceptance of a Palestinian statelet continues to serve the oppressive status quo.

Another baffling [departure](#) from reality is Freedland’s fantasy about “an Israeli peace with the Egyptian people [rather than Egypt’s dictators], one underpinned by their genuine consent” Who else among us does not grasp that the consent of Arab *people* is conditional upon Palestinian sovereignty over Palestine?

Regarding democracy, Freedland [supports](#) Israel’s party line that it is both democratic and Jewish, stating for instance that “the two-state solution [is] the only guarantor of an Israel that is both Jewish and democratic.” He [repeatedly upholds](#) this mainstay of the Israeli narrative, once [speaking](#) of “the Israel we love [which] is the Jewish, democratic state established in the Declaration of Independence.” The jury has long been in with the verdict that the ‘Jewish, democratic’ state is an oxymoron – as are conceptions of ‘Christian’, ‘Moslem’, or ‘Hindu’ democracies. Again, a worrying inability to approach issues logically.

The corollary is his often [expressed](#) outright rejection, in favour of two (ethnically-defined) states, of a bog-standard democracy in Palestine. That vision of a single state, a proportional, multi-ethnic democracy as we know it in Europe, is a “sobering vision”. Why? The answer is creepy. Because therein “Jews will fast become a minority”. This implicit endorsement of Israel’s racist policy of maintaining at all costs the majority status of one ethno-religious group appears as well in the [pages](#) of the *Guardian*: Prevention of “a Palestinian Arab population that would one day be its numeric equal” is a necessary precondition of the dominant ethno-religious group of the Israel he so believes in.

Elsewhere as well Freedland’s democratic credentials fall short of *Guardian* standards. He for instance [writes](#), “The success of Hamas in Palestinian elections in January apparently confirmed the notion on which unilateralism was predicated: that there is no partner on the Palestinian side.” Fact is that in January 2006 Hamas

achieved a majority, but because Hamas rejects Zionism more than Fatah, the government fairly elected by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza is illegitimate and can be rejected as a “partner”. For both Tony Blair’s Quartet and Freedland, Palestinian self-determination is worth nothing.

In a 2007 history [lesson](#) Freedland wrote that in 1948 “Israel had done something remarkable, defeating the armies of three nations that had vowed its destruction.” This is official, debunked Israeli history, unenlightened by either Palestinian or Jewish-Israeli ‘new historians’. Freedland and Israel thereby blank out the Mandate, US support, collusion with the ruler of Jordan, land confiscation, murder of Palestinians returning to their fields, and crucially early 1948’s Plan Dalet, which, to my knowledge, Freedland has [never](#) mentioned. Even an opinion editor should read up on the history of his region of specialisation.

Freedland even makes an original contribution to *hasbara*. Like all winners, he [argues](#) that the victims must sometimes forget the past; that is, forget the injustice done to them. Resourcefully mobilising the example of Northern Ireland IRA victims’ need for truth, justice and peace of mind, he first sympathises. But then he has news for them, paternalistically whispered: “It is this. In places torn by war, there is all too often a choice to be made between justice and peace... But the bleak truth is, we cannot have both.”

Moving on to the actual subject of the piece, “the battle of Israelis and Palestinians”, he is urging Palestinians to let bygones be bygones, to give up on justice in order to gain peace. This lets Israel off the hook, although even he must know that in Israel there is no Adams, no McGuinness, no de Klerk willing even to apologise. He even cynically throws in the observation that South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission omits the word ‘justice’. Truth will however within twenty years be demanded of Zionism and its Western apologists such as Freedland.

The title of one tenderly critical [piece](#) is “This is Israel? Not the one I love.” Freedland loves Israel, and again and again appeals to the “true friends of Israel” or “those who care about Israel” to adopt this, that, or the other viewpoint. The *Guardian* arguably needs a Middle East expert, but Freedland is not in a position to fulfil this role: he is party to the Zionism-Palestinian conflict. An Israel loyalist, he would make a

competent successor or assistant to the man he says is “a frequent visitor to the *Guardian* offices”, Mark Regev.

Summary

In 2009, two weeks after the momentarily last Gazan child had been killed during Operation Cast Lead by an Israeli rocket, or bomb, or gun, Freedland wrote an [article](#) in which he describes that three-week long Israeli attack simply as “mayhem in Gaza”. Mayhem: a disorder, chaos, without named cause. That is, Freedland cannot even name Israel as the destroyer.

A novelist who researches well, there are few errors in Freedland’s columns: a wrong [depiction](#) of the sequence of events in a pro-Israel animated cartoon; wrongly [saying](#) Israel’s jocular phrase ‘mowing the lawn’ refers to the West Bank rather than Gaza; a slight misquote here and there. A polemicist to be sure, he [has](#) activists getting “feverishly... excited” when Israel commits a crime; he has his opponents “lazily brand” Israel a colonial project (he [denies](#) any resemblance of Israel to a “western imperialist”, British/Ashkenazi colony). A liberal, he gets some basics right, opposing for instance the oath of allegiance by non-Jews to the Jewish state, outlawing mention of the *Nakba* and bans on Jews’ renting rooms to non-Jews.

However, my objections are mainly ethical. One can perhaps understand Freedland’s [admiration](#) for Holocaust survivors seeking “justice and revenge” for Nazi crimes, avengers he celebrates in his Sam Bourne novel *The Final Reckoning*. Nazi crimes against Jews were monumental. But again, Freedland first of all morally fails to concede that the crimes had nothing to do with the Palestinians: as the novel’s Jewish-resistance hero says, in 1945 after the work in Europe “we were to put down our guns and grenades and head off to the next front in the war for Jewish survival: Palestine.” But two wrongs don’t make a right. Furthermore it is factually untrue that all European Holocaust survivors desired or needed to emigrate to Palestine, as Freedland implies.

In any case, his novel and his column on the avengers, together with his [love of *Passover*](#), celebrating Jews not only as “victims” but as “victors” and ending in the death of masses of Egyptians, reveal his attraction to a certain kind of bloodiness. In this there is irony anew, for the same columnist who revels in vengeance and extra-

legal assassinations feels it incumbent upon himself to [advise](#) the Palestinians not to throw stones but choose the path of non-violence.

Freedland shows little ability to apply principles universally. He for instance knows that George Habash as a twenty-one-year-old witnessed death and destruction in his home town of... Lydda, but he is oblivious to the possibility that Habash might have sought vengeance. Or another instance: if he embraces lifeboat ethics he must at least condone rockets from Gaza as an attempt by Palestinians to survive.

By coincidence Freedland would be chief editor on the hundredth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration on 2 November 2017. Finally, in isolated [columns](#), like Shavit and Morris he has seen that the story did not begin in 1967 but goes back to 1948. His insight to be sure is mainly theoretical. Still stuck in '1967' is for instance his offer to the vanquished of a West Bank/Gaza 'Bantustine', with six million refugees wiped from consciousness, and as recently as last summer he [relapsed](#) into the narrative that it is mainly the *second occupation* of 1967 that has to be solved. But the racist, ersatz-settler-colonial episode of Mandatory Britain, which will soon be debated in the UK in connection with the Balfour Declaration's anniversary, took up the three decades before 1948. Like Freedland it was both Zionist and British, and Freedland may not be able to deal with it with any objectivity.

After averaging one column on Israel/Palestine every 2 months for the last ten years, since last summer Freedland has gone strangely silent. Since 26 July 2014 there is only one *Guardian* [piece](#) (on new president Reuven Rivlin) and only two in the *Jewish Chronicle*. Whether this has to do with an internal announcement of Rusbridger's resignation, I don't know.

Again, today's apologists for Zionism – the Freedlands, Remnicks, Frasers, Beinarts, Jacobsons, whose self-depiction as 'liberals' is of zero interest to Zionism's victims, the Palestinians – will eventually be forced to apologise. As so often in history, they will have to retrospectively 'explain' their support for an ethnocracy. The *Guardian* can now avoid this fate by correcting its century-long pro-Zionism, by applying basic ethical and political standards to Mr Freedland's job application.

Freedland's refusal to honour the right of self-determination to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine is undemocratic and thus inconsistent with the liberal

[principles](#) of the *Guardian's* owner, the Scott Trust Limited. And to my mind his justification of ethnic cleansing is sufficient reason for the *Guardian* to reject him. To maintain this position Freedland cannot afford to pay much attention to, or develop empathy for, one of the "sides" in the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, the conflict that has so vexed the world and the *Guardian* for a century.