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Interview with writer Lina Meruane

"Any criticism of a policy of the State of Israel can be accused of anti-Semitic"



Sources: The Tide

Lina Meruane (Santiago de Chile, 1970) is considered one of the Great writers in Spanish and their work has been translated into twelve Languages. In the [Alberti Bookshop](#) in Madrid he feels his latest book, [Palestine in pieces](#), Fresh from the printing press, he is surprised by "how chubby" he was. His Great work about the place from which his paternal grandparents had to flee More than a century ago it has grown since in 2012 it decided to go there, where they had left a house that no one in their family could ever again inhabit. On his return, he published *Becoming Palestine*, a book that It had a great international impact for the finesse with which described and reflected on the consequences of the Israeli occupation from your country of paternal origin. He accompanied it with *Volvernó otros*, dedicated to the language created by the Zionist

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state to justify and legitimize its creation. This volume is now complemented by the unpublished *Faces in my face*, where he analyzes the meaning we give to the identities we carry on faces and tongues.

Palestine in pieces combines the rigorous essay that illuminates The most neglected questions about the recent history of this Territory, the autoethnographic chronicle that allows us to understand who and why writes it, and the memoirs that, being those of Meruane and His family, represent in many passages those of an entire fenced town and massacred by the State of Israel.



La idea del regreso a Palestina está en el origen del libro, aun cuando no era una idea con la que usted creciese. Un regreso que es también uno de los numerosos derechos que se les niega al pueblo palestino. ¿Qué significaba para usted la idea del regreso antes de escribirlo y ahora, tras varios viajes y tanto estudio y reflexión?

Very recently, an ultra-right minister of the Israeli state repeated what Golda Meyer and Theodor Herzl said: that Palestine and the Palestinians had never existed. It is very serious to deny the existence of the majority historical community in that area. But I hadn't thought in none of this before that first trip to Palestine. I am the granddaughter of

Palestinians from Beit Jala, a village near Bethlehem, but met in Chile. They didn't speak Arabic with their children, so the Family lost that language although, somehow, it is in the unconscious. But, except for specific cultural issues such as the twig of olive on Sundays, I had not thought of Palestine because when Identity is not questioned one does not think about it.

You don't think you're a woman until, suddenly, someone hits you. for being and then you realize that you are. The same goes for Palestine. I was living in New York when the Twin Towers fell. That's when I realized there was a little problem and it's that I have a Palestinian surname.

One time I consider going to Palestine, every time I tell someone I got the word back and I had to correct myself because I was going to travel, to visit, because I had never been there. There was something Operating at an unconscious level: it was the return of my grandfather, who never He was able to return, and that of my father, who never wanted to return.

In addition, return is a word that, in this sense, is loaded with meaning. In the 30s, Palestinians could not return because The British mandate imposed a regulation that said that people who I had gone I had no interest in being there. They thus denied a situation. Very complicated colonial for which many went to other places. The Idea that began to be sown is that total, they were Arabs, so they could settle in any neighboring country, as if the Arabs were all Equal.

Then, with the founding of the State of Israel, return is forbidden. of the Palestinians. In addition, many of their houses have been demolished and others do not allow you to visit them. The return is impossible and has a Resonance not only familiar, but historical and current.

And, on the other hand, the State of Israel is founded on the idea of return. That is why this book begins with *the Becoming Palestine*, because of the different implications that this word has depending on the mouths that enunciate it and the context.

In *Becoming Palestine* he describes that first journey in which he discovers the interwoven network of policies, actions and controls meticulously deployed by the State of Israel to end the Palestinian people through plunder, impoverishment, humiliation, imprisonment and, also, murder. How do you remember it?

I grew up in the Pinochet dictatorship and there was no possible comparison. at no level. See the militarization of cities like Jerusalem or Hebron, get on a bus and go surrounded by armed youths to the teeth, open to show the inside of the bag every time you enter or

You leave a place. One day, someone came up to me and I opened my wallet. as a reflex act because I had done it so many times in a week that it had become a habit. It impresses as one incorporates, almost physically, the claustrophobic sense of oppression. Also that of be constantly monitored.

Another formula that impressed him of how Israel tries Subjugating the Palestinians is the stripping of control of their time to through the multiple checkpoints and border crossings.

It's not just waiting for them to check the passport, but if you are about to give birth, at risk of death, on your way to a wedding or Anything important to anyone's life, you never know if they go to let you pass or to delay it. I find it hard to think about all this without remember what Nazism did, which also had ways of Implement these controls with shocking brutality. Nazism it was a systematic death machine, and in Palestine one feels that What there is is a slow drip machine that is undermining the will, the spirit, which is psychologically humiliating through violence brutal.

After that first trip to Palestine, he realizes that It needs to continue delving into its reality and that for this it has to "Return to the approaches on which the idea of Israel and the vicissitudes of the language that served to assemble this history." To do this, it studies in detail the authors' discourse. Zionists considered left-wing, such as Amos Oz or David Grossman. What idea of Palestine had they built?

One of the issues that surprised me reading these assumptions The champions of peace is that neither Oz's speech was so pacifist nor the of Grossman so fair in terms of language accuracy. I felt that They too were co-opted by official Israeli language. I asked Israeli friends who confirmed that they were not read there. as in the United States or from the vision of a radical Zionism that Tacha of lukewarm. You see how they and other authors of their line use the concept of Jewish neighbors to talk about the settlers, or the fence of Security instead of the wall of shame, and other words complicated ones like Holocaust or anti-Semitic.

This study allowed me to understand that a colonial policy needs Using and manipulating language to change the course of one's own history. Anthropologist Julie Peteet explains how during the first years after the founding of Israel, institutions dedicated to change the names of places, to rethink the use of words and to generate linguistic propaganda.

For example, the prohibition of using the word [Nakba](#), which means Disaster and which refers to the forced exodus that It led to the war of 1948. More than 700,000 Palestinians were expelled or They had to flee their homes. Israel commemorates it

as the date of His foundation, which he calls independence. When you write about All this includes in his reflections the awareness that this Analysis and historical review can be accused of anti-Semitism. How is it lives with that threat that any criticism of the policies of the State of Can Israel be [branded as anti-Semitism](#)?

I have to confess that many times I have entered class with the feeling like you're being watched. The Anti-Defamation League makes Be so careful that you can make situations of great importance invisible. violence because you feel that the Zionist Big Brother is on you Watching. Any criticism of a policy of the State of Israel can [be accused of being anti-Semitic](#).

I am well aware of the problems of racism, of anti-Semitism. that exists, of Islamophobia. And yet, in Germany they boycotted me. A couple of presentations because there you are absolutely aware that everything you do, think or say can be anti-Semitism. That It has implications that can be very worrying for the Public conversation.

In fact, Germany continues to fund the State of Israel in reparation for the Holocaust without making that aid conditional on its cessation of commit crimes against the Palestinian population. Another concept which he analyzes is that of *apartheid* and cites Chomsky, who, being son of a right-wing Zionist couple, he leads the United States criticism of Israeli policy towards Palestine. In fact, it has written that the *apartheid* practiced by Israel against Palestine it is worse than South Africa because there "the white population needed the black population as a labor force. But the Zionists simply They want to do without the Palestinians because they don't need them, they want expel and imprison them." And here opens a paradox that you He collects in his book: that black Jews from Africans are discriminated against in Israel, but they are accepted because they "perform the jobs that the Palestinians used to do." There are many authors who have warned of the risk of it being an ethnic democracy, but Now we find that it is going further, towards becoming a theocratic regime. How would you describe the role that racism plays? in the State of Israel?

Black Jews who have claimed their return to Israel have been instrumentalized to have them instead of the Palestinians. In that sense, Chomsky makes a very important qualification because this is how The relationship with the Palestinians ends and their dehumanization begins. There are Israelis who say they have never seen or been with a Palestinian. When you do not know a community and the only thing you have internalized

is that they are terrorists is much easier than you want to go against them and justify all kinds of abuse.

When you declare an exclusively Jewish state you interpose a border with non-Jews. But inside there are also first-class Jews, second- and third-rate Palestinians, in addition to Palestinians living in Israel and that, practically, they have no rights. Israel is a State internally racist and externally racist, but which asks not to be treated in a racist manner through anti-Semitism.

In the third part of the book, *Faces in My Face*, It analyzes what meanings are given to the traits, to the color of the skin, to be Palestinian. Also how in territories such as airports or facial identification controls by Artificial Intelligence on Racism is especially violent. Why is it so important in the case of Palestine?

This book is based on personal experiences. I travel a lot and in the Waiting times at airports There are often people who want Guess where I'm from, they want to detect it in my face as if it were a game. I have been told that if I am French, Peruvian, but also Israeli or Hebrew. The latter happened to me in Germany and left me baffled because I have done a lot of work to become Palestinian. I started wondering Where does this obsession with the face come from, what does it contain so that the People think they can guess where you come from and what your story is.

And this is related to Palestine and the situation with Israel because Nazism had a theory based on social Darwinism according to which, through the shape of the skull, the features and the body it could be diagnosed if a person has criminal behaviors, psychological problems or what they considered sexual deviations. The Holocaust causes those ideas to be rejected in the second half of the twentieth century and now, in the twenty-first we see that we are obsessed with Artificial Intelligence to detect people who, supposedly, by their appearance can have dangerous behaviors.

Source: <https://www.lamarea.com/2023/05/05/lina-meruane-cualquier-critica-a-una-politica-del-estado-de-israel-puede-ser-acusada-de-antisemita/>

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