When Publishers Pick Sides



SUSAN ABULHAWA SPEAKS AT A 2014 PALESTINE FESTIVAL OF LITERATURE EVENT AT QASR AL QASSEM ON JUNE 4, 2014, IN BEIT WAZAN, NEAR NABLUS, WEST BANK. (PHOTO BY ROB STOTHARD/GETTY IMAGES)

Simon & Schuster can publish whomever it likes, including Susan Abulhawa. But if it stands by her antisemitic views, I will sadly look for another publisher. I hope that others will do the same.

By Gerald Posner

This article is part of **Israel and the Jewish World**. Follow to get everything we publish on Israel, antisemitism, and Jewish life and identity across the globe.

Simon & Schuster published my last three books, *Miami Babylon*, *God's Bankers*, and *Pharma*. Tracing the Vatican's hidden finances and exposing the pharmaceutical industry's capture of American medicine were particularly large, expensive, yearslong investigative projects. Jonathan Karp, then Simon & Schuster's publisher, and my editor, Ben Loehnen, commissioned both without knowing where the reporting would land. That is no small thing in publishing, and I've said so publicly before. I say it again now because it's relevant to what follows: This is not a grudge piece from an author Simon & Schuster

wronged. It's the opposite. It's a piece from an author who has had the exact experience Simon & Schuster likes to say it offers about editorial risk-taking. But I am writing now about a case where I believe the company's stated principle broke down.

Washington Square Press, an imprint of Simon & Schuster's Atria Books, sent out a press release last week announcing it would republish two novels by the Palestinian writer Susan Abulhawa next month. Washington Square Press is not some obscure corner of the Simon & Schuster empire. It has published Jean-Paul Sartre, Pearl S. Buck, and Alice Walker over the decades, and Atria relaunched it recently as a curated imprint for serious literary fiction and nonfiction.

Simon & Schuster's decision to expand its relationship with Abulhawa is troubling to me, not because she is a Palestinian writer, but because of what she has said in her own voice. Atria originally signed her in 2020—long before the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack. By the time of the recent decision to reissue her novels, Abulhawa's inflammatory public record was not obscure. Five days after the attack, in a celebratory op-ed for *TheElectronic Intifada*, a radical pro-Palestinian online publication, she praised the attackers as "brave Palestinian fighters" and "freedom fighters" and never once mentioned the Israeli dead. Then, through the second half of 2025, she called Israelis "rootless, soulless ghouls"; described Israel as a "cultureless, rootless human aberration" run by "Jewish supremacist demons"; described a pro-Israel commentator as a "lying Jewish supremacist cockroach"; and referred to Israelis as "demonic parasite[s]." Most of it was on her X feed, under her own name, available to anyone who looked. Either Simon & Schuster never checked her public posts, which would be gross negligence, or it knew and did not care.

Over the last few weeks, Abulhawa's rhetoric has only escalated. On July 24 she wrote that "The way zios keep boasting about the extraordinary power they wield reminds me of how they also boasted and took credit for Germany's defeat" in World War I. That defeat, she added, "led to the rise of extreme anti-Jewish sentiment."

Here she is restating the stab-in-the-back myth that the Nazis used to justify the Holocaust in all but name. X's own Community Notes feature, which requires agreement across users who normally disagree, placed a note identifying it as exactly that.



TERRORIST KOZO OKAMOTO, MEMBER OF THE JAPANESE GUERRILLA GROUP RED ARMY, IS CARRIED ON THE SHOULDERS OF HIS PALESTINIAN FORMER JAILMATES AS THEY ARRIVE ON MAY 21, 1985, AT TRIPOLI AIRPORT. (PHILIPPE BOUCHON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES)

On July 25, she posted a eulogy for Kozo Okamoto, who had died two days earlier, calling him "Comrade," praising his "heroic life," and saying he was "an inspiration to all who knew you." Okamoto was the last surviving gunman in the 1972 massacre at Lod Airport, now Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion International, that killed 26 people, including 17 Christian pilgrims from Puerto Rico. At this point, Abulhawa was not simply firing off incendiary statements and ugly opinions about Jews in the abstract; she was paying tribute to a terrorist who had murdered civilians.

A week later, Abulhawa wrote that the Holocaust has "lost its meaning" and that "the whole world is sick of hearing about it," adding that there is "an extreme overrepresentation of Jews in every branch of government, media, and culture."

When *The Washington Free Beacon* put these Abulhawa posts to Simon & Schuster, Atria, and their parent company, the private equity firm KKR, none responded. No defense, not

even the boilerplate language I had expected—something like “we don’t endorse every view of every author we publish”—that the company has used in the past to justify controversial signings.

(In a statement sent to *The Free Press* after this article was published, the company said, “Simon & Schuster unequivocally opposes antisemitism, racism, and all forms of bigotry. While we remain committed to publishing a broad range of voices and viewpoints, we do not endorse dehumanizing or hateful rhetoric. Susan Abulhawa’s personal views are her own and are not reflective of Atria Books, Simon & Schuster, or its employees.”)

The question this raises isn’t whether publishers should defend a controversial author. They should and often do. It’s whether the principle they’re invoking shows up only for certain kinds of controversy. The Overton window, which describes the range of ideas a society treats as respectable at any given moment, shifts over time; publishers help move it by deciding which views they’ll platform, defend against pushback, or quietly drop. My argument is not that Simon & Schuster has no right to publish Abulhawa; it is that it should not. Otherwise, the window will have moved to embrace hate speech at a moment when antisemitic violence against Jews is at record levels worldwide.

Over the years, Simon & Schuster has published such right-wing authors as Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, Laura Ingraham, and Donald Trump, defending its decision each time with a version of the same principle: Publishing a range of views isn’t endorsing them. In the case of Abulhawa, faced with blunt questions about an author praising a terrorist and reviving a Nazi-era blood libel weeks after it announced the reissues, the company that a decade ago prided itself on standing behind unpopular authors had nothing to say.

My argument is not that Simon & Schuster has no right to publish Abulhawa; it is that it should not.

Which ideas get a defense and which get a shrug in 2026? Around the same time that Simon & Schuster fell silent about Abulhawa, a Nashville bookstore, Bell Bird Books, canceled the launch event for Alyssa Rosenheck’s memoir *White. Blonde. Jew.* Bell Bird has been the

object of an online pressure campaign that accused the store of "promoting Zionism." The bookstore's owner blamed the cancellation on concerns about whether she could safely host the book reading and signing. Rosenheck's book isn't polemical—it's a memoir about growing up Jewish. She didn't call anyone a demon. She simply is who she is, and that alone was enough to get an event pulled.

Separately, author Meg Keene has spent the last two years telling a version of the same story from inside traditional publishing. She's said that when she tried to sell a romance novel with Israeli characters, one agent told her that her visibly Jewish online identity might make the book unsellable, while a Jewish agent advised her to strip out anything Jewish that didn't drive the plot. No publisher signed her book. Keene now runs a new imprint, Meg Keene Books. Her stated goal is to publish Jewish fiction across genres, and she has said she has no interest in ideological novels.

A PEN America report, "A Silent Moratorium," released last month, documented the broader pattern of Jewish and Israeli writers being frozen out of traditional publishing. It was based on interviews with more than 30 writers and publishing insiders. The stories it tells—agents dropping clients, events being canceled, and authors being told to strip Israeli references from their own books—make it impossible to describe what's happening to Jewish and Israeli writers as isolated grievances. It's a powerful trend. Notably, the report's release prompted PEN America president Dinaw Mengestu to resign because he thought the report unfairly maligned the speech rights of boycott, divestment, sanction (BDS) advocates, not because he disputed the findings.

The very different treatment of Rosenheck and Keene on the one hand and Abulhawa on the other is just one example of the double standard plaguing publishing. These three cases demonstrate there is no single "acceptable range of opinion" in the publishing industry right now.

In fairness, Simon & Schuster has not always applied its own principle with perfect consistency even when it comes to the conservative right—it took just one day to cancel Senator Josh Hawley's book after the Capitol riot on January 6, 2021. Agree with that decision or not, it demonstrated then that it was very quick to draw a line at what it considered real provocation.

Which is exactly why Abulhawa is such a distressing example. Her public, repeated, documented record of dehumanizing an entire ethnic and religious group isn't ambiguous, and it isn't buried. How can her posts not be considered a provocation?

Would Simon & Schuster sign the British political activist Tommy Robinson to expand on his oft-repeated thesis that Muslim immigrants are invaders? Would it have signed the late French far-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen so he could minimize the Holocaust? Most people in publishing would say no without hesitation, in the belief that platforming that kind of rhetoric would be normalizing hate, not promoting "diversity of thought." Why, then, doesn't the same reasoning apply to a writer whose own words about Jews use the oldest antisemitic trope there is?

There is no doubt that Simon & Schuster would never sign any celebrated novelist who had posted publicly that Muslims were parasites, vampires, demons, and ghouls. But either the industry has a real, content-neutral principle about where legitimate controversy ends and hate begins, or it has a principle that activates depending on who is spewing the hate.

I raised two book ideas with my editor at Simon & Schuster in recent years that went nowhere. One examined the financial pipeline behind the multibillion-dollar pediatric gender-medicine industry. The other traced how stolen Nazi plunder helped fund and arm Palestinian resistance groups in the late 1960s and '70s. My editor had no interest in either.

He never said why, and I'm well aware there are many reasons for a "no thanks" from an acquiring editor. I understand the current climate. In an era when anti-Israel protesters routinely invoke Holocaust inversion and call Israelis Nazis, a history showing that stolen Third Reich money helped bankroll the origins of Palestinian armed resistance is not a book most mainstream houses want. I don't think this reflects any individual's malice. What I think it reflects is something bigger than any one editor: an institutional reflex, inside a company far larger than the people running it, about which risks are worth taking.

Authors always want to be published. I pay my bills by writing so the last thing I want to do is close the door forever on a company that has published me in the past. However, I also believe that double standards flourish and become more ingrained as more people fall silent. In a post on X about Simon & Schuster's decision to publish Abulhawa, I said that "sometimes you must stand for your own integrity. This is too far for me."

Simon & Schuster can publish whomever it likes. It doesn't mean its authors have to reflexively support that decision. If it stands by Abulhawa's noxious views, I will sadly look for another publisher. And I hope that other authors might do the same.

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