

Anti-Palestinian Racism and the Palestine Exception to Free Speech

A reflection on the power imbalances skewing public discourse, sowing division, and threatening safety and justice

Opening remarks

- Violence has not been confined to the Israel-Palestine. A particular form of violence has been ramping up in Canada as well: anti-Palestinian racism

WHAT IS ANTI-PALESTINIAN RACISM?

Anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including: denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; erasing the human rights and equal dignity and worth of Palestinians; excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives, Palestinians and their allies; defaming Palestinians and their allies with slander such as being inherently antisemitic, a terrorist threat/sympathizer or opposed to democratic values.

Opening remarks (2/2)

- Palestine supporters want to see an expanded discussion that includes accountability for Israel's historical and ongoing war crimes and international law violations
- Mere display of this sentiment has resulted in
 - threats of violence, and physical and verbal assaults,
 - threats to and actual losses of people's livelihoods,
 - a general sense of Palestinian dehumanization at the workplace
- Skewed media coverage & political leaders further feed into this dehumanization
- Not new: Palestine Legal began documenting such attacks on speech starting in 2014:
 - Censorship, punishment, other burdening of advocacy for Palestinian rights (152) and proactive requests for legal assistance (68).
 - From Jan-June 2015, these numbers were 140 and 33.

Violent threats

- A rise in Islamophobic, anti-Arab, and anti-Semitic hate crimes across major Canadian cities recorded between October 7-25. ~ CBC (November 3)
- Toronto: anti-semitic hate crimes (7 LY -> 15 TY), Islamophobic (0 LY -> 5 TY)
- Montreal: anti-Semitic (38 TY), Anti-Arab+Muslim (14 TY), versus total anti-religious (50 LY for whole year)
- Ottawa: 29 hate-motivated incidents TY (No data for LY)

* Note: LY = Last Year, TY = This Year

Violent threats (2/2)

- Jaffari community centre in Vaughn was evacuated due to a bomb threat on Thursday, Nov 14
- Individual charged for hate-motivated incidents on Saturday, Nov 18
 - Muslim taxi driver and hijab-wearing woman sprayed in the eyes
 - Worshippers at Toronto mosque attacked with a rock and chain
- Agitators seeking to create incidents, e.g. man wears Israeli flag to a mosque on Monday, Nov 11

Workplace neglect and dehumanization

- Statements made by many workplaces acknowledge Israeli suffering, but ignore Palestinian suffering. This dehumanizes Palestinians.
 - RBC Oct 12 public statement: victims of attacks by Hamas are acknowledged, victims of Israeli attacks are not
 - Scotiabank Oct 13 public statement: same problem, only Israeli civilians acknowledged as innocent
 - CIBC Oct 12 public statement: no mention of Palestinian victims, only Israelis
 - BMO internal email only expresses thoughts with Israeli victims.
 - CitiBank internal, same problem
- Similar statements made in other workplaces e.g. healthcare

Workplace abuse and intimidation

- David Mastracci (The Maple): public cases where people have been investigated (4), suspended (3), or fired (6) by employer for Palestine posts
- Documented 13 different public cases including
 - Aarij Anwar, Muslim chaplain, Western University, fired
 - Sabreina Dahab, school board trustee, Hamilton-Wentworth DSB, investigation
 - Javier Davila, student equity advisor, TDSB, investigation
 - Ben Thomson, nephrologist, Mackenzie Richmond Hill Hospital, suspended
- Tips received from human rights organizations and lawyers, suggest that these known cases are just a fraction of the true total

Workplace abuse and intimidation (2/2)

Stop spreading lies of beheading babies or rape of little girls. It's been debunked.

No one is celebrating the murder of Israeli babies. Palestinians are mourning the death of their babies.

It's incredible how Israel sympathizers simultaneously are the oppressor and the victim.

— Aarij Anwer (@AarijAnwer) October 25, 2023

75 years of violent occupation and apartheid and the expectation is that Palestinians will be passive observers in their genocide?

A liberated Palestine in our lifetime is possible, in Shaa Allah

— Sabreina Dahab (@sabreina_dahab) October 8, 2023

Despite being publicly attacked by Canada's largest pro-Israel lobby group which made false claims about students at Marc Garneau CI, calling them antisemitic & hateful, students took to the streets demanding a #CeasefireNOW & to protest #TDSB's & #CIJA's anti-Palestinian racism. pic.twitter.com/W2rPiLICB6
— Javier Dávila #FreePalestine #NoOneIsDisposable (@XjusticeXpeace) November 14, 2023

No babies were beheaded , there have been no confirmed reports of rapes. You repeat this nonsense out of racism. In the meantime, Palestinians are experiencing genocide and war crimes and you are silent. History will judge you very badly
— Ben Thomson 🇪🇬 (@BenNephrology) October 10, 2023

Skewed media and political dehumanization

- Canadian media is biased against Palestinians (The Breach, Nov 11)
 - 62 percent more Israeli voices aired than Palestinian ones
 - Racial stereotypes about Arabs
 - Israeli officials allowed to make false claims with no pushback
 - Majority of Israeli speakers are named while 41% of Palestinian speakers are not



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It's wild to me how so many in Canadian media are terrified of saying something lacking in nuance — and that some newsrooms are also watching them closely — yet some columnists are comfortably tweeting weirdo [redacted] like this:



Tristin Hopper @TristinHopper · 2023-11-03

I had a weird dream that everywhere these pro-terror Palestine-flag-waving psychos tried to stage a rally, they were blocked by exponentially larger crowds waving the Maple Leaf.

12:15 PM · 2023-11-03 from Earth · **98.9K** Views

Skewed media and political dehumanization (2/2)

- Doug Ford at Spirit of Hope, Nov 2nd (Friends of Simon Wiesenthal) declares the following:
 - Pro-Palestinian rallies are hate rallies that aim to intimidate the Jewish community
 - The Palestinian flag a Hamas flag
 - Pro-Palestinian rallies as hate speech



My asks

- I want to echo the requests of my colleagues:
 - Demand a ceasefire
 - End funding weapons and support for Israeli war crimes
 - Enforce international law using sanctions, don't just talk about it
- I also want to add:
 - Safeguard our rights to have this discussion
 - Use your voices responsibly, and condemn divisive statements