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‘Truth, No Matter What’: Why Watering Down Palestinian Reality is a Crime



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On February 20, the United Nations Security Council approved a statement, described in the media as a ‘watered-down’ version of an earlier draft resolution which would have demanded that Israel “immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory.”

The intrigues that led to the scrapping of what was meant to be a binding resolution will be the subject of a future article. For now, however, I would like to reflect on the fact that the so-called international community's relationship with the Palestinian struggle has always attempted to 'water down' a horrific reality.

While we often rage against statements made by US politicians who, like former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, refuse to even acknowledge that Israel is occupying Palestine in the first place, we tend to forget that many of us are, somehow, involved in the watering down of the Palestinian reality, as well.

While reports by B'tselem, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, dubbing Israel an 'apartheid state', are welcome additions to a growing political discourse making similar claims, one must ask: why did it take decades for these conclusions to be drawn now? And what is the moral and legal justification for 'watering down' Israel's apartheid reality for all of these years, considering that Israel has, from the moment of its inception – and even before – been an apartheid entity?

The 'watering-down', however, goes much deeper than this, as if there is a conspiracy not to describe the reality of Palestine and the Palestinian people by its proper names: war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, apartheid and more.

I have spent half my life living in, and interacting with, western societies while lobbying for solidarity with Palestinians, and for holding Israel accountable for its ongoing crimes against the Palestinian people. Every step of the way, in every society, and on every platform, there has always been pushback, even by Palestine's own supporters.

Whether motivated by blind 'love' for Israel or by guilt over historical crimes against the Jewish people, or over the fear of 'rocking the boat', offending the sensibilities of western societies, or outright retaliation by pro-Israeli supporters, the outcome tends to be the same: if not unconditional support for Israel, then, certainly 'watered-down' statements on the tragic reality of the Palestinians.

Naturally, a watered-down version of the truth is not the truth at all. Worse, it is unlikely to lead to any resolute moral stances or meaningful political actions. If, indeed, watering down the truth was of any value, Palestine would have been freed a long time ago. Not only is this not the case, but there also remains a true deficit of knowledge regarding the root causes, nature and consequences of the daily Israeli crimes in Palestine.

Admittedly, the quisling Palestinian leadership exemplified in the Palestinian Authority, has played a significant role in watering down our understanding of Israel's ongoing crimes. In fact, the 'watered-down' statement at the UN would not have replaced the

binding resolution if it were not for the consent of the PA. However, in many Palestinian spaces in which the PA holds no political sway whatsoever, we continue to seek a watered-down understanding of Palestine.

Almost every day, somewhere in the world, a Palestinian or a pro-Palestinian speaker, author, artist or activist is being disinvited from a conference, a meeting, a workshop or an academic engagement for failing to water down his or her take on Palestine.

While fear of repercussions – the denial of funding, smear campaigns, or loss of position – often serves as the logic behind the constant watering down, sometimes pro-Palestine groups and media organizations walk into the ‘watered-down’ trap of their own accords.

To protect themselves from smear campaigns, government meddling or even legal action, some pro-Palestine organizations often seek affiliation with ‘reputable’ people from mainstream backgrounds, politicians or ex-politicians, well-known figures or celebrities to portray an image of moderation. Yet, knowingly or unwittingly, with time, they begin to moderate their own message so as not to lose the hard-earned support in mainstream society. In doing so, instead of speaking truth to power, these groups begin to develop a political discourse that only guarantees their own survival and nothing more.

In the “Prison Notebooks”, anti-Fascist Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci urged us to create a broad “cultural front” to establish our own version of cultural hegemony. However, Gramsci never advocated the watering down of radical discourse in the first place. He merely wanted to expand the power of the radical discourse to reach a much wider audience, as a starting point for a fundamental shift in society. In the case of Palestine, however, we tend to do the opposite: instead of maintaining the integrity of the truth, we tend to make it less truthful so that it may appear more palatable.

While creative in making their messages more relatable to a wider audience, the Zionists rarely water down their actual language. To the contrary, the Zionist discourse is uncompromising in its violent and racist nature which, ultimately, contributes to the erasure of Palestinians as a people with history, culture, real grievances and rights.

The same is true in the case of the pro-Ukraine and anti-Russian propaganda plaguing western media around the clock. In this case, there is rarely any deviation from the message, regarding who is the victim and who is the perpetrator.

Historically, anti-colonial movements, from Africa to everywhere else, hardly watered down their approach to colonialism, neither in the language nor in the forms of resistance. Palestinians, on the other hand, subsist in this watered-down duplicitous reality simply because the West’s allegiance to Israel makes the truthful depiction of the Palestinian

struggle too 'radical' to sustain. This approach is not only morally problematic but also ahistorical and impractical.

Ahistorical and impractical because half-truths, or watered-down truths, never lead to justice and never affect a lasting change. Perhaps a starting point of how we escape the 'watered-down' trap we find ourselves in, is to reflect on these words by one of the greatest engaged intellectuals in recent history, Malcolm X:

"I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against. I'm a human being, first and foremost, and as such I'm for whoever and whatever benefits humanity as a whole."

The truth, in its most simple and innate form, is the only objective we should continue to relentlessly pursue until Palestine and her people are finally free.

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