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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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12.12.2023

## The New McCarthyism on US Campuses



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

In a post on the California Public Agency Labor and Employment Blog, David Urban explained in 2018 how:

At a public college or university, students and employees can assert First Amendment claims against the institution if it tries to discipline or censor them for speech activities.

However, students, faculty and staff at a private institution, according to Urban, “do not have that option, because the institution is not bound by the First Amendment” because private universities are not government entities.

This explains why the most extreme clampdowns on vocal critics of the Israeli genocide unfolding in Gaza since Oct 8, have occurred on campuses of elite private colleges and universities, among them Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, Brandeis, Columbia. When members of these campus communities who support justice for Palestinians point out in rallies and social media posts and during teach-ins and in classes, the inhuman disproportionality of Israeli attacks on the civilian population of Gaza, which have claimed 15,000 lives to date, over 6,000 of these being children, contrasted with 1200 lives and 250 hostages taken by Hamas during their Oct 7th attack, which precipitated what can only be termed as Israel's ethnic cleansing campaign—well, these supporters of Palestinian human rights are quick to be branded by many including university authorities as anti-semites.

The chants by student, staff and faculty protestors to “free Palestine from the river to the sea” are weaponized by Israeli supporters as damning evidence calling for the annihilation of the Jewish citizens of Israel, the use of words like “intifada” (which literally means to rise up)—depicted as a call to arms to commit genocide on Israeli Jews. Clearly, such tactics are designed to obfuscate the actual genocide of Palestinian children, women and men unfolding before the world's eyes in real-time on a daily basis over these past eight weeks.

In several cases, these virulent campaigns to tarnish Palestinian human rights advocates have led to calls for the firing of tenured distinguished scholars (a prominent case in point being Joseph Massad of Columbia University)—whilst many faculty without the protection of tenure have been fired, student activists have been doxxed by pro-Israeli donors and their acolytes and hired thugs (in several cases leading to a withdrawal of job offers) and some elite universities have banned Palestinian student organizations such as SJP (Brandeis was the first to do so)—as well as progressive Jewish organizations like Jewish Voices for Peace who also have been chanting “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free.” This ubiquitous chant for freedom indicates the true meaning of this phrase. Rather than calling for genocide or removal of the Jewish population of Israel, it is calling, quite simply, for the creation of one indivisible secular and democratic state where ALL of its inhabitants can enjoy the same rights and privileges, and live in peace and dignity, together.

The belief that, at public universities such as the one where I am employed, faculty are comparatively secure in our ability to exercise our First Amendment rights, so that we may

educate and debate civilly on contentious issues such as those triggered by this latest chapter on the Palestine/Israel conflict (an extension of the war on Palestine that started 100 years ago, according to Columbia University's preeminent historian of Palestine, Rashid Khalidi), was punctured last week.

A respected colleague, who along with myself and a couple of others, has been unflinching in his attempts to get pro-Zionist faculty on our campus Discuss listserv to confront their complicity in the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza (an overwhelming number of whom are children), has been publicly silenced.

I woke Thursday morning to an email from this colleague informing me that he had been charged with violating the university's Title IX code in a complaint filed against him by someone on the campus listserv. As a result, while the complaint winds its way through the system, he is not permitted to post or participate in any further discussions on this forum.

Title IX is a federal law that was passed in 1972 to ensure that male and female students and employees in educational settings are treated equally and fairly. It protects against discrimination based on sex (including sexual harassment). It also protects employees and students from discrimination on the basis of religion, race, disability or sexual orientation. On the face of it, the allegation of any such harassment by my colleague against anyone on our campus faculty listserv is so absurd as to be laughable and one hopes, easily dismissed.

My colleague after all, is not the employer harassing an employee! All views expressed in this public forum are exchanged voluntarily between faculty colleagues who are all equal participants on a level playing field (despite differences in professorial rank.)

If anything, it is we who have been critiquing the apartheid Israeli state's actions that have unleashed a murderous assault on thousands of innocent Palestinian civilians, who are being harassed on this listserv, as we are accused of antisemitism by several of our pro-Zionist colleagues.

Yet, I suspect that one of the latter who is unable to defend her views in any coherent or rational way in response to my colleague's repeated questions about her moral stance on the genocide of Palestinians, has decided that because she can't hide from the ethical implications of his arguments which she has failed to challenge— well, then, the next best thing is to find a way to remove campus-wide access to his voice of reason and humanity.

Orwell would have understood our current landscape only too well. The Zionist propaganda machine is in overdrive creating all manner of diversions, false narratives, and

attempts to convince the world that up is down and wrong is right. While indeed these are scary times for any and everyone trying to speak truth to power, the irrefutable fact is: the court of public opinion has already ruled in favor of justice and liberation for Palestine from the chokehold of zionist imperialism backed by the US and former colonial western powers.

My colleague and scores of others like us are the vanguard of a new day; our voices can not be silenced. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

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CounterPunch 11.12.2023