

Palestinian Youth Voices Suppressed During Gaza War

August 7th, 2014



Since the beginning of Israel's war on Gaza on July 8th, Palestinians have been speaking out louder than ever before to voice their solidarity with Gaza. However, there is a dangerous and encroaching trend of incursions against freedom of speech to hush dissent against the war. This is occurring at all levels of society. Citizens are organizing to attack Palestinians, both verbally and physically. Institutions are complicit in hushing freedom of speech and contributing to censorship by firing employees and expelling students. Police are arresting activists for their speech and reacting with brutal force at protests. The government is not only complicit but in fact propagating this censorship through the very public suspension and criminal investigation of Knesset member, Haneen Zoabi, after a controversial comment she made. The structural racism of Israel makes freedom of expression and speech impossible and serves only to further discriminate and marginalize the Palestinian citizens of Israel, preserving the rights and opinion of the majority over the minority.

Social Media

Social media is integral to the protest movement and to youth culture. Due to its accessibility and reach, social media is the primary avenue of news distribution and organization. Protests can now be planned and shared with thousands of people within a matter of minutes. Protests, planned largely through social media, have resulted in large numbers of protesters, particularly youth. While families frequently attend, these protests are organized and primarily attended by young people between the ages of 15–30. While accessibility and reach are the reasons for social media's success, these elements when linked with dissent and monitoring by rightists and police has resulted in harassment, arrest, interrogation, and loss of livelihood.



Photos from protest in solidarity with Gaza in Nazareth 21.7.2014



Protests & Arrests

With this large and growing movement in solidarity with Gaza, the Israeli authorities are stepping up their efforts to smother dissent within the country. Police are reacting to the large crowds of protesters with increasing brutality; beating and arresting protesters and firing tear gas canisters, stun grenades and putrid smelling water on the large crowds. According to police records, 931 Palestinians have been arrested over the last three weeks in relation to protests: 295 in Jerusalem, and 636 inside Israel (i.e. Palestinians with Israeli citizenship)¹. Of the 295 arrested in Jerusalem, 71 have been charged². Almost 1000 Palestinians have been arrested including dozens of minors. As protests spread, these figures continue to rise. Israeli police are adopting the same methods used by the military in the occupied territories to deal with dissent, including preemptive arrests and abusive interrogations. This illustrates the position of the government on its Palestinian citizens: whether they are citizens or not, Palestinians are all equally viable targets for collective punishment.



Man assaulted and arrested in Nazareth

Freedom of Speech

There are also cases of arrests based entirely on speech. A 20 year old Palestinian citizen of Israel, Rafat Awaisha, was arrested and interrogated after sharing a Facebook invitation to a protest in solidarity with Gaza. He was arrested and removed from the Ben Gurion University dorms half an hour after sharing the invite. While in detention he was interrogated about the invitation and his profile picture, a picture of Mohammed Abu Khdeir who was brutally murdered by Israelis in Jerusalem. During interrogation he was verbally and physically assaulted, had no food and was not able to see a lawyer. Awaisha was released the next morning with no charges against him. Many Palestinians, like Awaisha, have been preemptively arrested and told their Facebook posts constitute 'incitement.' Due to lack of evidence, they are released 24 hours later after interrogation. These arrests are a fear tactic directly intended to scare activists into censoring themselves, particularly on social media.

Social media posts have also resulted personal consequences. There is a growing phenomenon of right wing Facebook pages, such as "Boycott Haters of Israel" and "Fifth Column Israel," that track personal profiles, primarily of Palestinian citizens who speak out against the war and Israel. When a profile is flagged, personal information of the attacked individual is distributed on these sites. Hundreds of profiles have been posted on these sites resulting in harassment, death threats and even termination of employment. Khaled³ was recently reported on the site, "Boycott Haters of Israel." The site posted personal pictures of him with screenshots of critical statuses he had posted. The post received around 100 'likes' and Khaled received threatening, racist and homophobic personal messages, including messages that he should be deported to Gaza and killed there. In response He said, "I didn't write anything racist or hateful just criticized what is happening, which is something legitimate in a democratic state, but you can't do that here."

These sites also attack people by reporting their profiles to employers. Kav LaOved, the Workers Hotline, has reported dozens of cases of Arab workers who were fired for stating their political opinion online⁴. Many employees have reportedly received ‘warnings’ from managers or employers threatening to fire them if their political activity continues. Censorship attempts of this nature generally go under reported or unreported. Therefore, it is difficult to track exact numbers of people affected by this discrimination in the workplace, but it appears to be in the hundreds.



“Hating Arabs isn’t Racism, it’s values” via Facebook

The same trend appears to be extending to academic environments. A student at Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem was expelled and her scholarship was revoked because of an online post. College president, Friedland, wrote to her: “We read your post with shock and disgust... the college management has decided to prohibit you from entering the campus for any reason, academic or other.” (see letter below) These personal attacks against Palestinians who express their political opinions send a clear message that dissent is not tolerable, especially not for citizens of the state.

Israeli Right

These concerning trends of government, police and civilian racism are connected with the growth of the extreme right in Israel. These extremists openly advocate the killing of Palestinians as a legitimate political option. Deputy speaker in the Knesset, Moshe Feiglin from Likud, laid out a genocidal 6-step-plan for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza claiming that “This is our country – our country exclusively... including Gaza.”⁵ According to Haaretz, extreme right Rabbi, Dov Lior, issued a religious ruling that it is permissible to entirely destroy Gaza if necessary. There have also been a number of op-eds calling for the destruction of Gaza, including Yochanan Gordon’s ‘When Genocide is Permissible’. The extreme right is now more highly organized than before, particularly on social media. Sites calling for the death of Arabs receive thousands of ‘likes’ in a matter of hours. Mobs of rightists have attacked protesters in Tel Aviv and Haifa with

slogans such as, “Death to Arabs,” “There are no more children in Gaza,” and “No Arabs, No terror attacks.” These mobs have been met with little interference from the police despite their violent nature; meanwhile predominantly Palestinian protests are dispersed with horses, bullets and tear gas. A horrifying example of the danger of this racism is the lynching of the Palestinian teen, Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who was kidnapped and burned alive. There have been many subsequent attempts to kidnap young Palestinians across the country, as well as, vicious racially driven violence against Palestinians in protests and in mixed neighborhoods. These deeply concerning events contextualize the current situation of the dominance of the right and the impunity they act with, in the government and as private citizens.

¹ Arabs 48, July 23 2014. <http://arabs48.com/?mod=articles&ID=111513>

² Ibid.

³ Original name changed to preserve privacy.

⁴ Kav LaOved. August 3 2014. <http://www.kavlaoved.org.il/en/human-rights-ngos-call-action-dismissal-arab-workers/>

⁵ Abduiman, Ali. Electronic Intifada. August 3 2014. <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/concentrate-and-exterminate-israel-parliament-deputy-speakers-gaza-genocide-plan>

21.7.2014

לכבוד
רנ"א אל עמורי, דה
ירושלים

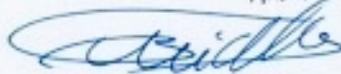
הנדון: איסור כניסה לקמפוס המכללה האקדמית הדסה

קראנו בזעזוע ובשאיט נפש את הפוסט שהעלית בתאריך 19.7.2014 ובו הבעת תקווה לפגיעה בחיילי צה"ל, בשיחת טלפון שנוהלה עמך מטעם הנהלת המכללה לאחר הפרסום לא הכחשת את הדברים והודעת כי הפרסום אכן היה מטעמך וכי את מתייצבת מאחורי הדברים.

אנו מגנים ומוקיעים בחריפות התבטאויות שאלה ובדקים בימים אלו את ההשלכות החוקיות והמשמעתיות המבעות מהתנהגותך.

להווי ידוע כי הוגשה נגדך תלונה במשטרה בגין עבירה של הסתה והמרדה.

לאור האמור, ועד לאחר תום הברורים וטיפול המשטרה, החליטה הנהלת המכללה לאסור עלייך להיכנס לקמפוס המכללה לכל מטרה, אקדמית או אחרת.

לידיעתך,

פרופ' ברטולד פרידלנדר,
נשיא המכללה האקדמית הדסה ירושלים

העתק:
ד"ר צחי מילגרם, סגן נשיא וראש המינהל האקדמי
תיק אישי

Letter of Expulsion of Hadassah student due to Facebook post