



The Last Word

Palestine at FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™

As I was driving home last night, I was searching for a radio channel to listen to. When I got to Monte Carlo Doualiya (a French public radio service that broadcasts across the Arab world) I heard someone saying: “The Palestinian cause...” I wish I kept searching because, as it turned out, I tuned in to what I thought was the most horrible talk show a Palestinian could listen to. The interlocutors were more like a choir singing in unison, while praising one another. Effectively, there were saying that the Arab world has moved on, regarding its support to the Palestinian cause. Actually, they spewed plenty of other toxic material, certainly not worth repeating and wasting the little space I have for this column! Well, I’m just glad that the Arab fans in Qatar proved those buffoons wrong. Dead wrong.

Even without a football team, Palestine has been quite present at the football World Cup in Qatar. Particularly in matches that include an Arab team, the Arab fans have not shied away from showing their support to Palestine, whether during the games or in the streets where Palestinian flags and *quffiehs* (the iconic black-and-white Palestinian scarves/headaddresses) are flaunted in pride. Chants in support of Palestine have filled the stadiums and often the streets of Doha. Such show of support has not been limited to a few incidents; it has actually been a phenomenon which should be included when the World Cup in Qatar is documented.

Furthermore, and much to the chagrin of the Israeli establishment, rather than being a celebration of the success of the normalization process with (some of) the Arab countries, the event in Qatar turned out to be its burial and obituary. The Qatari authorities have spared no effort to grant the Israeli media all the necessary facilities. Despite that, a catastrophic surprise has been awaiting the correspondents, who have been finding, on every corner and every street, people from Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Qatar itself, and even from the United Arab Emirates staunchly opposed to the normalization process, avoiding Israeli journalists as if any association with Israeli media could bring them shame. Not only have the Israeli media teams been unable to find an Arab who will accept to be included in a friendly photo with their members, but journalists are reporting humiliating and threatening incidents they have been subjected to, which at times have even caused panic. In fact, covering the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ has been an Israeli nightmare.

To those who took part in the Monte Carlo Doualiya talk show, I tell them, no: Maybe a few regimes have moved on, but the people have not. To journalist Jilan Jaber: It is not true that young Arabs don’t know about the Palestinian issue. Much to Ben Gurion’s dismay, the young did not forget. So, heed, lady.

Long live Palestine!

Sani Meo
Publisher

