

## The Battle of Narratives

On March 29, 2023, Aline Batarseh published an amazing article in *Mondoweiss* (an independent website devoted to informing readers about developments in Israel/Palestine) entitled “Major Media and the Systemic Silencing of Palestinians.” It’s amazing alright, but also scary as it describes a reality that makes us Palestinians very angry.

The article spells out how faint and marginalized Palestinian voices are, whether in Israeli courts, where the conviction rate for Palestinians is over 99 percent, or in international media, where Palestinian lives are mostly narrated by non-Palestinians. According to a study conducted by Maha Nassar in 2020, non-Palestinians wrote 99 percent of opinion pieces about Palestinians published by the *Washington Post* over a period of five decades, from 1970 to 2019. In the *New York Times*, it was close to 98 percent!

In addition to media coverage in general, the degree of anti-Palestinian bias and inaccuracy in portraying events pertaining to Palestinians is just unbelievable. When Shireen Abu Akleh was killed, the *New York Times* published an article with the title “Shireen Abu Akleh, Trailblazing Palestinian Journalist, Dies at 51.” Yes, Dies at 51! After the immediate outrage, the title was changed to “Trailblazing Palestinian Journalist Killed in West Bank.” Wow! In another article title, the opposite is on display. Readers are left with no ambiguity regarding cause and identity: “ Hamas Rocket Attack Kills Two Thai Workers in Israel.”

Palestinian media woes do not stop at mainstream Western media. When Palestinians turned to social media hoping for less censorship, they realized that social media companies also censor Palestinians, in large part in response to pressure by the Israeli government. With a larger margin to maneuver, however, Palestinians have been fighting back. Institutions such as *7amleh*, the Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media (pronounced Hamleh, with a guttural H), has managed to recover 30 percent of the deleted content from various platforms. *7amleh* reported 1,119 digital rights violations against Palestinians in 2021, and *TwIP* was among those affected. It was encouraging, though, to read *Vox News* reporting that “2021 is the year Palestinians proved they could compete with the Israeli government in the narrative battle.” That was mainly after the May 2021 Unity Intifada sparked by the attempt to confiscate tens of homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem.

The key term here is “the narrative battle.” Not over- or underestimating what we do, *This Week in Palestine* is essentially a Palestinian communication tool that has earned a certain measure of local and international credibility. Realizing fully the precarious situation we live in – including the continuous attacks on our identity – *TwIP* has been heavily engaged in the battle of narratives by presenting the Palestinian reality the best way it knows how. Focusing mainly on cultural issues, *TwIP* aims to strengthen Palestinian identity and culture, and prove to the world that we are not “an invented people” but rather a people with deep roots who has lived on this land from time immemorial. We are the people who never left this land; who have tilled it and fed every enemy. We call ourselves Palestinians because it is our prerogative.

In her article, Aline Batarseh writes, “Words matter. Words have the power to shape public opinion. Words have the power to challenge policies and policymakers, especially in powerful countries like the United States that provide unconditional military and financial support to Israel. Words have the power to move people into taking action to call for justice and influence policy decisions. Words are

tools for communities facing systemic discrimination to share their realities and lived experiences. Excluding Palestinian voices from major media makes the media complicit in Israel’s ‘system of silencing.’” As far as we are concerned, words are our tool to regain justice.

I would like to end my column with an urgent appeal to readers to help ensure that the word, our word, gets heard. In all candidness, I must admit that if the present situation continues, our voice – this word – will be silenced. Every single reader comment in this special issue of *This Week in Palestine* is cherished and has touched our hearts, but in this context, one comment by Sam Bahour hits the nail on the head: “Maybe, just maybe, it is time that *TwIP* be institutionally embraced by those who benefit from it the most.”

Long live Palestine!

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