



# Complicqué

discussions about Palestine are often met with discomfort, again considering our situation to be “complicated.” Take this example: One year ago, my son and his classmates, most of whom have north-African roots, wanted to raise their original countries’ flags for a group picture. His public school blocked that initiative, fearful that it may be seen as a case of “separatism,” a word used to

Solidarity groups exist. They do as much as they can with the very few resources they have. Even though they are small in number, they play a vital role in advocating for Palestinian rights in France. Their impact, however, is thwarted due to various factors.

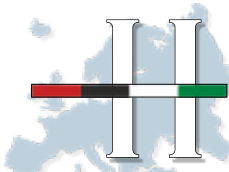
In France, Palestine is locked in an internal battle between different ideological actors. It’s a topic that



By Muzna  
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Palestinian-Lebanese border.



How does a French person react when you say that you are Palestinian? “Ah, c’est complicqué!” How does a French person react if you say that you’ve just arrived from Lebanon? With full compassion. Although the Lebanese crisis might be more “complicqué” than the Palestinian cause!

In Paris, when I told people we had just arrived from Lebanon, there was immediate and widespread recognition and support. Whether in Paris or moving south to Marseille, there is a strong commitment to stand with Lebanon that unites diverse voices from all walks of life and across the political spectrum. Even those who aren’t interested in politics remember the tragic day of the Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020. The warmth and empathy shown towards Lebanese immigrants didn’t surprise me. Lebanon’s struggles are widely acknowledged in the media, and it gave me a sense of belonging. However, it is different for me as a Palestinian.

I soon realized that most of French society is less receptive to the plight of Palestinians. Our narrative is either unwelcome, distorted, sometimes censored, or limited in public discussions. Why doesn’t our cause receive the same level of support? What is missing from our narrative? Whether in the media or in the public sphere, Palestinian voices are not as strong as in the US or the UK, and

delegitimize the French Muslim public assertion process. My son was told that the Palestinian flag could be misunderstood as support for Hamas. This is one personal experience. There are many others. But understanding the French view on Palestine needs to be considered on a larger scale. We need comprehensive and extensive research and analysis to better understand the complex system and societal views on Palestine.

generates polarization, as much as the recent pension reform, migration, or climate change. Leftists, especially communists, generally support the Palestinian cause and call for an end to the occupation or apartheid, while center-left parties, such as the socialists, and right-wing parties are often more inclined towards supporting Israel. This means that, unlike when it comes to Lebanon, there is no common agreement

**While there is no official census or precise data regarding the number of Palestinians residing in France, the estimates provided by the Embassy of Palestine in Paris suggest a population of around 4,000 individuals. They are individuals or families who have migrated for various reasons – to seek better opportunities, to study, or to find a home as refugees (coming from refugee camps in Syria or Lebanon). They strive to understand French culture and learn the language, which, in itself, is no mean task! They contribute to French society through their studies or professions in fields such as business, academia, and the arts, and participate in cultural events that celebrate their Palestinian identity. Like all Palestinians scattered around the world, this small community of Palestinians in France remains resilient and maintains strong ties with the homeland.**

on Palestinian rights. This disunity weakens our collective voice and impedes our ability to create meaningful change.

There is also some kind of competition among solidarity groups. Take the *Nakba* commemoration, for example. There are many courageous and much-needed manifestations of support, but each solidarity group sends its invitation separately. Here, I think there is room for us, Palestinians of France, to work together. We must unify these groups and speak with one voice.

The stark contrast I have witnessed between French empathy for Lebanon found among all sectors of society and a more reserved approach to Palestine has taught me a lot. It shows the impact of institutional narratives on citizens' minds and hearts. In the case of Lebanon, the empathy displayed by the media and public officials nurtures collective understanding and support. In contrast, the cautious approach towards Palestine shown by the French

media and politicians, who too often resort to "both-sidesism," leads to the usual phrase, "C'est compliqué."

Despite the difficulties in penetrating French hearts and minds, there is still hope. I've seen it myself. Through several conversations, I have tried to engage with individuals, sharing personal stories and shedding light on Palestinian sufferings. It is through these personal connections that I feel we can overcome the barriers of institutional censorship and challenge the wider misconceptions surrounding Palestine.

I noticed this with the tragic assassination of my dear friend, Shireen Abu Akleh. This event made me realize that there was a significant hollow in the representation of Palestinian stories in the French-speaking world. Fueled by a mix of anger, a heavy heart, and determination, I embarked on a journey of e-activism, using social media as a platform to share (in French) about Shireen as a person. Without thinking

of how effective this would be, I also began to use Twitter to share personal anecdotes, genuine reflections, and stories of resilience from my Palestinian family and friends. I soon discovered that my tweets resonated with many who had been yearning for an authentic understanding of the Palestinian narrative in French – including people not from the usual supportive leftist camp. The response was overwhelming: messages of support poured in, and individuals from diverse backgrounds reached out to learn more, to empathize, and to challenge the prevailing narrative of censorship.

With each tweet, I sought to shed light on the realities faced by Palestinians

and to dispel misconceptions. I shared stories of everyday life under occupation, of cultural heritage and resilience, and of the aspirations and dreams in our daily struggle for justice and freedom. Stories in 200-character captions that tell of people struggling and who they are. Such stories resonate well with typical Parisians who carry a baguette under their arm at the end of a long day. Why? Because they feel that they can relate to the story of Shireen, the mother of a martyr, or the little boy who lost his home.

E-activism has become my way of reclaiming agency and breaking the barriers of self-censorship that have plagued the discourse on Palestine



A press release by the prefect of Herault banning a demonstration organized by the collective "Against Israeli Apartheid" on Saturday, May 27, 2023 in the city of Montpellier, citing "risk of disturbances to public order."



At the Eiffel Tower in May 2023.

in French society. But there is still so much to do in this digital realm. I used it as a form of consolation when I lost our Shireen. But I now see it as a necessary platform for Palestinian public diplomacy action.

But e-activism is not enough. Education and awareness are crucial in fighting misunderstanding and empowering the existing solidarity groups. By investing in public diplomacy, like engaging with schools, universities, and community organizations, we can help foster a more informed and empathetic French society.

With little support at present, Palestine still needs sustained attention from the current sympathetic French allies. But it deserves to have a presence on larger platforms as well. French influencers can shape opinions in a two-minute video. We saw this when French actresses stood with Iranian women or when French gamers stood in solidarity with Lebanon.

This, along with amplified public diplomacy work, might offer some possibility to shape opinions and spark supportive actions for Palestine. We know that the challenges are immense. But one day, the French person on the street will stop saying “C’est compliqué” and will remember May 15 as our *Nakba* day just as they remember August 4 as the day of the Beirut explosion.

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