

## Winnipeg Friends of Israel and David Matas

### Anti-Palestinian Racism

There have been submissions to the Committee to address, in the context of Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism. These submissions are problematic for a couple of reasons. One is that not all Palestinians are Muslim. Some are Christians. Some are secular. Islamophobes may attack persons who are not Muslims, but are perceived by their attackers to be Muslims. However, anti-Palestinian racism has a broader scope, encompassing those Palestinians who are neither Muslim nor perceived to be Muslim. Consequently, anti-Palestinian racism is a different subject matter from Islamophobia and not within the scope of the Committee inquiry on Islamophobia.

A second problem is the manner in which opponents of anti-Palestinian racism frame their opposition to that racism. Dania Majid, in a 2022 [publication](#) for the Arab Canadian Lawyers Association (ACLA) defines anti-Palestinian racism to include .. "excluding or pressuring others to exclude Palestinian perspectives." One of the Palestinian perspectives the Majid/ ACLA report identifies is that "Israel's treatment of Palestinians - both in the occupied territory and in Israel ... is racism - it is ideological and it permeates the Israeli state, its institutions, its society ..."

The Majid/ ACLA report states:

"The highly controversial IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) working definition of antisemitism, which describes criticisms of Israel as antisemitic, has been weaponized to suppress the speech and activities of Palestinians and advocates across North America and Europe."

Yet, the IHRA definition does the exact opposite, stating explicitly "criticism of Israel similar to that levelled against any other country cannot be regarded as antisemitic." There are racist incidents and statements one can point to everywhere. It is not antisemitic to point out that in Israel, as elsewhere, there is racism. It is quite different to say that Israel itself is racist.

The IHRA definition states as an example of antisemitism "Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavour." The reason this statement is given as an example of antisemitism is lived experience. Jews are attacked worldwide by people who make this claim, justifying their attacks with this claim.

Suppose something similar were said about anti-Palestinian racism, that it included "Denying the Palestinian people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of

Palestinian is a racist endeavour." Or suppose something similar was said about Islamic states, of which there are many, that Islamophobia included "Denying Muslims people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of any Islamic state is a racist endeavour." It is not credible to suggest that Majid or ACLA would object.

The Majid/ ACLA report states further:

"Anti-Palestinian racism is a form of anti-Arab racism that silences, excludes, erases, stereotypes, defames or dehumanizes Palestinians or their narratives. Anti-Palestinian racism takes various forms including: denying the Nakba and justifying violence against Palestinians; failing to acknowledge Palestinians as an Indigenous people with a collective identity, belonging and rights in relation to occupied and historic Palestine; ..."

Racism in other contexts victimizes people. The definition above claims racism can be inflicted against narratives, not just one narrative, but several.

Paul Scham, in [a work](#) posted on the website of the Jewish Virtual Library, compared traditional narratives of Israeli and Palestinian history. Scham set out the Israeli narrative corresponding to the Palestinian Nakba narrative in this way:

"Beginning soon after the adoption of the partition resolution in November 1947 the Zionists began to expel Palestinians from their homes, almost certainly according to a plan (Plan Dalet). Deir Yasin was a planned massacre that succeeded in stampeding Palestinians to leave. The Nakba was planned and carried out as ethnic cleansing. The Zionists recognized that a Jewish state could not exist until most Arabs were expelled, and history proves this was the plan that was carried out."

Scham stated the Israeli narrative corresponding to the Palestinian colonialism narrative this way: "Zionism was an authentic response to the persecution of Jews over millennia around the world. Jews did not come as colonizers, but rather as pioneers and redeemers of the land, and did not intend to disrupt the lives of the current inhabitants of the Land of Israel. All land for Jewish settlement was legally bought and paid for, often at inflated prices."

Scham wrote about the Israeli narrative corresponding to the Palestinian narrative of indigeneity this way: "The Arabs of Palestine were not a national group and never had been. They were largely undifferentiated from the inhabitants of much of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. They had no authentic tie to the Land of Israel. Many only came for economic opportunity after the Zionist movement began to make the land fruitful and

the economy thrive. In all the years of Arab and Muslim control from the 7th century, Palestine was never a separate state and Jerusalem was never a capital."

It is wrong to create equivalences in every case of contesting narratives. Simply because two narratives are opposed, it would be wrong to treat each equally. Facts matter. If one narrative is factually accurate and the other is inaccurate, the accurate should take precedence over the inaccurate.

The Canadian Criminal Code [prohibits](#) Holocaust denial as a form of antisemitism. The reason the prohibition takes that form is that, in fact, the Holocaust is so well documented that denying the Holocaust denies reality and, in reality, is the purview of bigots. Other forms of hate speech, particularly when they incorporate historical references, may not be so obvious, because the history is not so well documented or because there may be no consensus among historians. Yet, hate speech does not have to be immediately obvious to constitute hate speech.

The determination whether any discourse is hate speech often depends on context. Hate speech can occur not just through obvious slurs or historical falsehoods, but also through trigger words, metaphors, adumbrated slogans, and euphemisms. Frequently determining hate speech is a matter of decoding.

Blasphemous libel used to be an offence in the Criminal Code. It was widely considered to be a violation of the guarantee of freedom of expression in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and repealed in 2018. The notion that anti-Palestinian racism should incorporate Palestinian narratives looks to be an attempt to resurrect the prohibition against blasphemous libel in a specific context.

One would hope that a Palestinian narrative could be phrased in better terms than that used by Majid and ACLA. Even if there were that rephrasing, the suggestion that erasing Palestinian narratives is a form of anti-Palestinian racism is problematic. It would follow that erasing Israeli narratives is a form of antisemitism. If neither side in a historical debate can present its point of view without being guilty of racism against the other side, we are left with a situation where both silencing and speaking out are racist.

The way to extricate ourselves from this conundrum is to leave concerns about racism where they belong, as concerns about people and not narratives. Narratives become important in combatting racism only insofar as the narratives lead to attacks on people. Insofar as the Committee gets into the issue of anti-Palestinian racism, it should come to that conclusion.

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