

Submission of Leah Ross and David Matas

Recommendation: The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights should identify the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" and its variations as antisemitic.

The phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" does not specify the river or the sea. Yet, it is meant to refer to the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. The phrase "Palestine will be free" implies that Palestine is not now free.

If one thinks of freedom in terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the slogan might appear to be meant to apply to the West Bank and Gaza but not Israel. In terms of fundamental freedoms, Israel is free but the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority is not. Gaza under Hamas before the current Gaza war was even less free than the West Bank has been.

Yet, that is not the intent of the slogan. Freedom in the slogan is not intended to refer to freedom of expression, freedom of association and so on. It is meant to refer to freedom from Israel, freedom from Jewish rule. It is a form of antisemitism.

If Israel were an Islamic Arab state, instead of being a Jewish state, the phrase would not exist. "Freedom" in the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." does not mean freedom for Palestinians. It means freedom from Jews. The phrase is a form of Jew hatred.

According to the [Oslo Accords](#), the West Bank is split into three areas, A, B and C. Area A falls under the control of the Palestinian Authority. Area C falls under the control of Israel. Area B is jointly controlled.

Israel evacuated Gaza in 2005. From 2005 to October 2023, Gaza was controlled by Hamas.

That control is now dissipating. The slogan "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." preceded the Israeli response to the Hamas attack, murders and kidnapping of October 7th 2023.

Even if one thinks of the word "freedom" in the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" as meaning "freedom from" rather than "freedom of", Gaza was free from Israeli control from 2005 until the Israeli response to the Hamas attack of October 7th. The partial control that Israel has in the West Bank exists with Palestinian agreement because of the Oslo Accords.

Hate speech takes a variety of forms. Sometimes it is explicit. Sometimes it is implicit, coded and euphemistic.

Antisemitism is the world's oldest hatred, having existed since pre-historic times. Because of its long history, the vocabulary of antisemitism is constantly shifting. There is a tendency to recognize older antisemitic statements but not newer ones.

Today, the phrase "The final solution to the Jewish problem" is easily recognized as antisemitic. Yet, it was not so easily recognized when first used. All the same, that phrase shares characteristics with the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

The phrase "The final solution to the Jewish problem" to those not familiar with its connotation might seem benign, a proposal to solve a problem. In theory, the phrase could even apply to the creation of the State of Israel. But that, of course, was not its intent.

Similarly, the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.", to those not familiar with its connotation, might seem benign, the advocacy of freedom. In theory the phrase could mean freedom of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Yet, here too that is not

its intent.

There are, of course, many people who utter indirect, euphemistic, coded hate speech without realizing what they are saying. Yet, that ignorance, while it may excuse the speaker, does not excuse the phrase.

When it comes to coded antisemitic discourse, we do not need linguistic analysis to see the problem. We can see the problem from the result.

Antisemitic hate speech leads to attacks on Jews and Jewish property. There has been globally a sharp spike in antisemitic incidents - physical attacks on Jews, on Jewish institutions and Jewish property, both sparked and justified by people who use the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

The phrase or its variations have been used by Hamas and its supporters. Khaled Meshal, in 2012, when he was leader of the political wing said in a [speech](#) "Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north". The Hamas murders, rapes and kidnapping of October 7th, 2023 were the largest mass atrocity inflicted on Jews since the Holocaust.

The phrase was [spray painted](#) in Spanish in April 2023 on Maimonides Synagogue, the largest synagogue in Barcelona. Whatever one thinks of the Israeli response to the Hamas October 7th attack, the worshippers of the Maimonides Synagogue had nothing to do with it.

What one does with a phrase tells us more about its meaning than just the words. When the phrase "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free." and its variations are used worldwide to incite and justify attacks on Jews and Jewish property, the claim that the

phrase is not antisemitic rings hollow.

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