**Embracing Palestine**

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At a talk I delivered in Northern England in March 2018, I proposed that the best response to falsified accusations of antisemitism, which are often lobbed against pro-Palestinian communities and intellectuals everywhere, is to draw even closer to the Palestinian narrative.

In fact, my proposal was not meant to be a sentimental response in any way.“Reclaiming the Palestinian narrative’ has been the main theme in most of my public speeches and writings in recent years. All of my books and much of my academic studies and research have largely focused on positioning the Palestinian people – their rights, history, culture, and political aspirations – at the very core of any genuine understanding of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli colonialism and apartheid.

True, there was nothing particularly special about my talk in Northern England. I had already delivered a version of that speech in other parts of the UK, Europe and elsewhere. But what made that event memorable is a conversation I had with a passionate activist, who introduced himself as an advisor to the office of the head of the British Labour Party, Jeremy Corbyn.

Although the activist agreed with me regarding the need to embrace the Palestinian narrative, he insisted that the best way for Corbyn to deflect anti-Semitic accusations, which have dogged his leadership since day one, is for Labour to issue a sweeping and decisive condemnation of antisemitism, so that Corbyn may silence his critics and he is finally able to focus on the pressing subject of Palestinian rights.

I was doubtful. I explained to the animated and self-assured activist that Zionist manipulation and misuse of antisemitism is a phenomenon that has preceded Corbyn by many decades, and will always be there as long as the Israeli government finds the need to distract from its war crimes against Palestinians and to crush pro-Palestinian solidarity worldwide.

I explained to him that while anti-Jewish racism is a real phenomenon that must be confronted, “antisemitism”, as defined by Israel and its Zionist allies, is not a moral question that is meant to be solved by a press release, no matter how strongly-worded. Rather, it is a smokescreen, with the ultimate aim of distracting from the real conversation, that being the crimes of military occupation, racism, and apartheid in Palestine.

In other words, no amount of talking, debating or defending oneself can possibly convince the Zionists that demanding an end to the Israeli military occupation in Palestine or the dismantling of the Israeli apartheid regime, or any genuine criticism of the policies of Israel’s right-wing government are not, in fact, acts of antisemitism.

Alas, the activist insisted that a strong statement that would clarify Labour’s position on antisemitism would finally absolve Corbyn and protect his legacy against the undeserved smearing.

The rest is history. Labor went into a witch-hunt, to catch the “true” anti-Semites among its members. The unprecedented purge has reached many good people who have dedicated years to serving their communities and defending human rights in Palestine and elsewhere.

The statement to end all statements was followed by many others. Numerous articles and arguments were written and made in defense of Corbyn – to no avail. Only a few days before Labor lost the general election in December, the Simon Wiesenthal Center named Corbyn, one of Britain’s most sincere and well-intentioned leaders in the modern era, the “top anti-Semite of 2019”. So much for engaging the Zionists.

It doesn’t matter whether Corbyn’s party lost the elections in part because of Zionist smearing and unfounded anti-Semitic accusations. What truly matter for me as a Palestinian intellectual who has hoped that Corbyn’s leadership will constitute a paradigm shift regarding the country’s attitude towards Israel and Palestine, is the fact that the Zionists have indeed succeeded in keeping the conversation focused on Israeli priorities and Zionist sensibilities. It saddens me that while Palestine should have occupied the center stage, at least during Corbyn’s leadership years, it was still marginalized signifying once again that solidarity with Palestine has become a political liability to anyone hoping to win an election – in the UK and anywhere in the West as well.

I find it puzzling, indeed disturbing, that Israel, directly or otherwise, is able to determine the nature of any discussion on Palestine in the West, not only within typical mainstream platforms but within pro-Palestinian circles as well. For example, I have heard activists repeatedly questioning whether the one-state solution is at all possible because “Israel simply would never accept it”.

Excerpted from: ‘Embracing Palestine: How to Combat Israel’s Misuse of “Antisemitism’’. Courtesy: Counterpunch.org