

## **Anonymous:**

### **Contemplating Ongoing Dialogue**

Presently, there is a prevalent perception that the German stance toward Palestinian discourse is exclusionary. In response to this, the necessity for alternative platforms and spaces becomes increasingly evident.

Imagine four speakers and keep in mind that they are random. They just share that they know each other and that they are identified as “Arabs”, with a relationship to Palestine. Two of them never possessed a passport and you can presume that they are Palestinian. An informal discussion unfolds, and a number of themes emerge.

#### **1) Private Spaces versus Public Sphere**

##### **Speaker 1:**

“In private conversations, I have always been candid about my reservations about Hamas. After the 7th of October, that didn’t change; if anything, the war has reinforced my belief that Hamas prioritizes its agenda over the well-being of Gaza's people. However, in Western public forums, it often feels like any dialogue with Palestinians or on Palestine is conditional, in the sense that, as a Palestinian, I will not be heard unless I condemn. I find that problematic. First, that condition equates being pro-Palestinian with supporting Hamas by association. Second, it carries with it a suspicion that all Palestinians are somehow criminals and complicit in what happened on the 7th of October, and condemnation becomes the only way to plead innocent.

On another note, it is crucial to emphasize that my pro-Palestinian stance stems from thoughtful consideration, not a default identity. Framing me solely as a Middle Eastern Arab who should naturally be pro-Palestinian overlooks the depth of my engagement with the topic.”

##### **Speaker 2:**

“I encountered a similar challenge when critiquing biases in German media coverage. Not only was the condemnation of Hamas a prerequisite for any discussion, but there was also an expectation that I should first address biases in Arabic media – a form of ‘whataboutism’ and a distraction from the topic at hand. While I used to perceive the German media as neutral, now I notice that they are confused and do not know how to deal with questions of Palestine/Israel adequately.”

##### **Speaker 3:**

“The ‘whataboutism’ tactic reminds me of Russian deflection at the UN. Rather than engaging with the issues, opponents divert attention by pointing fingers elsewhere. This

tactic reflects a double-standard world where certain narratives dominate at the expense of genuine dialogue. It's frustrating to feel that you are the only side that is compelled to adhere to a checklist of condemnations to be taken seriously.”

**Speaker 4:**

“As someone navigating feminist and Arab identities, I've long grappled with the balance between critique and avoiding stereotype reinforcement. Public discourse demands careful navigation, ensuring my critiques of patriarchy don't contribute to harmful stereotypes about Arab men or the East or to the orientalist lens through which the region is seen. Similarly, I have to go through the same careful decision-making in terms of what to share in public about Palestine.”

## **2) The Muting of Palestinian Voices**

**Speaker 4:**

“From my perspective, the Palestinian cause is a core value in Syria or the Arab world, in stark contrast to the indifference I have encountered in Germany. It wasn't until after October 7th that the topic began to surface in public conversations here. However, there is an alarming level of censorship affecting especially social justice workers and artists here in Berlin. Previously, there was a noticeable void in discussions about Palestine, and I struggled to bring this issue to light. It had been challenging to find a space for this deep-seated pain within the public dialogue. Now, the conversation has been forced open. Even if the discourse is negative or aims to silence pro-Palestinian voices—equating them with support for Hamas—I feel that Palestine has finally been acknowledged in public discourses. However, it is still a horrific tragedy that recognition of a cause requires such loss of life.

On another note, the risks associated with speaking out about Palestine were apparent even before October 7th. I recall hesitating to publish an essay on the silencing of Palestinian narratives due to warnings from acquaintances. A professor advised against focusing my thesis on Palestine, citing potential strategic disadvantages for future academic pursuits. Another example of the suppression of Palestinian narratives is evident in places like museums dedicated to displaced populations, where Palestinian representation is conspicuously absent. When inquiring about this at one such museum, I was told that the Palestinian refugees were deliberately excluded from the narrative due to the political sensitivity of the topic—a decision that even the tour guide admitted feeling ashamed of.

I want to also add that the expectation for Palestinians to vocally affirm the value of all lives, particularly when they are the ones enduring violence, is unjust. The ‘all lives matter’ narrative fails to include Palestinian lives, which are systematically overlooked. Expecting Palestinians to champion this inclusive statement under such circumstances is inequitable. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a level playing field; there's an inherent power imbalance that must be acknowledged when discussing violence and its perpetrators.”

### **Speaker 3:**

“In Germany, a pervasive sense of alienation looms over us, and the atmosphere of censorship has intensified to the point where safety in discourse is a concern. Some of my friends have resorted to silence or whispers, even on private calls. This fear has seeped into our daily lives. It is a disheartening reality for us as researchers committed to media freedom—we believe in the unfettered right to examine and debate all subjects. Yet, here we are, succumbing to hushed tones out of fear, trapped in a world that seems to shrink around us—a world far removed from the ideals we cherish.”

## **3) The Palestinian Experience**

### **Speaker 1:**

“While I talk about the lack of diversity in Palestinian discourse, I usually refer to the narratives, not the individual experiences of Palestinians. The latter is diverse and significant, given the dispersion of Palestinians around the globe. People of Palestinian heritage grow up in various parts of the world, each with their own unique upbringing. Thus, the Palestinian community exists more as an imaginary one that encompasses the entire Palestinian population in and outside Palestine, something that is absolutely remarkable.

Personally, I have never developed a nationalistic attachment to any place. Syria and Lebanon are pleasant to me, and while I grew up with Palestinian influences, I don't consider any of these countries my homeland. This does not mean I am not supportive of Palestine; it is just that my connection is something other than nationalistic. Despite this, my documents label me as Palestinian, which brings legal challenges depending on a country's recognition of Palestine. In some places, I'm stateless; in others, I am a Palestinian.”

### **Speaker 4:**

“Being of Palestinian-Syrian heritage and growing up without ever visiting Palestine presents unique challenges. Identifying as Palestinian without the lived experience of Palestine creates a distinct dynamic. During my time in Germany, I have sought ways to connect with my Palestinian roots without being overwhelmed by the associated struggles. With the current events, I recognize that my connection to Gaza is not as profound as that of those who are from there or have family there. Many Palestinians who I know at my university have direct ties to Gaza, and their pain is acute. I often step back in conversations to focus on those in Gaza, acknowledging that while the situation is painful, it is not about my personal story as much as the people of Gaza.”

## **Concluding Thoughts**

Imagine that the conversation was able to liberate and give a momentary echo to the voices of Arab and Palestinian experiences that are so often hushed by the heavy hand of censorship. Imagine that the speakers, each a beacon of their own truth, could momentarily illuminate the path for a discourse that transcends the barriers of the private and the public spheres.

We are reminded of the enduring struggle for platforms where our expression is acknowledged—where narratives of Palestine are not silenced by the cacophony of prevailing clamour but find their rightful place in the symphony of discourses in this one world. We hear a clarion call to reexamine the spaces we inhabit and to create and nurture new environments where Palestinian experiences, and indeed all marginalised and suppressed experiences, can be shared and celebrated. The dialogue has only just begun.