

The Cost of Complicity.

How shameful, moral apathy in the face of atrocities in **Sudan**, and apartheid in **Palestine**, has exposed the hypocrisy of the self-proclaimed 'progressive, principled' regimes of the Global North, their commitment to human rights, and their value of Black and Brown life at home and abroad.

Why movements for racial and social justice must make them feel the cost of their complicity.



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ABOUT LOCALLY LED

Locally Led is the culmination of channeling frustration about broken systems into hope and action. A collective created by those who passionately believe in the power of community-driven movement and how it brings about a healthier, just, more communal society. Created by and for those who have led community-based non-profits, refugee-led organizations, and social movement in different parts of the world. A network of advocates who strongly believe that there is a more ethical, efficient, and relational way to finance, accompany, and support local and refugee-led change around the world...and, right here, in our backyard.

For information regarding Locally Led please visit www.locallyledinternational.org or email us at info@locallyledinternational.org

ABOUT OUR EDITORIALS

Locally Led Editorials is a space for members of Locally Led, its partners, and its extended network to provide uniquely informed opinion, critical perspective, and editorial on the events, issues, causes, and progress their communities experience.



Locally Led Editorials: The Cost of Complicity.

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November 16, 2023

As Israel unleashed an unrelenting, indiscriminate bombardment on Gaza, a 79-year-old Angela Davis passionately pleaded with her ‘self-proclaimed’ fellow scholar-activists in North America to recognize the link between black liberation, racial justice, the power of a militarized police-state in their countries, and the struggle for justice in Palestine.¹ The plea came after an unprecedented level of ‘progressive’ criticism of what they claimed to be ‘radical’ pro-Palestinian solidarity by fellow progressives. Ms. Davis, a living symbol of the global black liberation/feminist movement, verbally processed her reaction to the criticism, a reaction of bewilderment, in a recent interview:

“Palestine is a moral litmus test for the world. I can’t imagine those who claim to care about social justice...liberation...could not demand justice for Palestinians.”

Thousands of miles away, a Palestinian scholar and activist does not mince her words:

“For all my fellow academics who claim to be anti-colonial and anti-racist...I hear and feel your silence and I will never forget it.”²

Just a bit further south from there, Sudanese refugees in Chad, Egypt, and Jordan wait in heavy anticipation to hear from family members still in Sudan, family they haven’t heard from in three, or five, or maybe seven months.³ ⁴ Family caught in what some humanitarians have called the worst humanitarian catastrophe in modern memory.⁵ Those closely connected with Locally Led, and its network in the region, have wondered out loud why it seems the value of Black/African/Sudanese life, suffering, and displacement seem to be disproportionately valued, prioritized, and grieved over compared to others.

¹ Up Front with Marc Lamont Hill. Angela Davis: Palestine is a moral litmus test for the world. Al Jazeera. October 27, 2023.

² From the blog of an anonymous Palestinian academic.

³ Anonymous interview, October 1, 2023.

⁴ United Nations High Commission for Refugees. The forgotten war in Sudan: "I haven't heard from my family in five months". 2023.

⁵ Enna Ogao. Sudan now one of the 'worst humanitarian nightmares in recent history'. American Broadcasting Corporation. October 2023.

Over the past decade, social justice and liberation language have become mainstream in the Global North, especially in the self-proclaimed ‘progressive’ political establishment. Most recently, in North America and Europe, there has been a rude awakening (to some) to the systematic exclusion, misrepresentation, and blatant racism that still exists in the ‘West’ towards Black, Brown, Asian and members of other marginalized populations such as the LGBTQi communities. The murder of George Floyd fueled a global movement that brought awareness, recognition, and resistance to the archaic racism/discrimination that continued to exist within ‘self-proclaimed’ democratic societies.⁶ On the heels of this collective reckoning, in February of 2022, much of the Western world watched in horror as Russia began its brutal war and attempt to occupy Ukraine. American and Global North media platforms flooded news streams/programming of the war and our politicians, from both sides of the political spectrum, pleaded for action and defense of the sovereignty, dignity, and universal human rights of the Ukrainian people. As blatant war crimes and claims of genocide played out across global media, the phrase ‘never again’ was once again invoked by many political leaders⁷ and human rights advocates emphasizing that, as a global society, we must do anything we can to prevent a potential ‘genocide’ in Ukraine.

Many of us who had spent decades in the humanitarian and rights advocacy sector were taken back by just how many friends and family members, who prior to Ukraine had not taken much interest in global politics or humanitarian causes around the world, passionately grieved in solidarity with Ukraine, held fundraisers for humanitarian response in the country, and flew Ukrainian flags from their front porches. However, many long-time advocates, as well as members of Black, Arab, migrant, and refugee communities around the world, called out the global community for just how quickly the it had rallied solidarity and compassion to a country

⁶ Kristina Roth & Alli McCracken Jarrar. Justice for George Floyd: A Year of Global Activism for Black Lives and Against Police Violence. Amnesty International. 2021.

⁷ Mycahl Schnell. Zelensky: This year we say ‘Never again’ differently. The Hill. 2022.

of white-Europeans fleeing refuge...after spending much of the previous 20 years platforming politicians, producing policy, and mainstreaming rhetoric that demonized and racially profiled those fleeing war in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America---culminating in some of the most restrictive immigration policy, seen across the global spectrum, in modern history.

As the Biden administration came to power, their administration daftly curated statements, speeches, and media hits that used the social justice language being commonly used at demonstrations and on social media. When it came to appointees, it was clear that a lot of thought went into how each team would ‘look’ and what that ‘look’ would represent. The administration promised to ‘reverse years of Trump-era disengagement on the international stage’ and ‘center racial justice and equality at home and abroad’.⁸ Biden claimed to put word into action when he signed an executive order⁹ aimed at achieving racial equity in the US. The president described systemic racism as “corrosive,” “destructive,” and “costly.” As the past three years have played out, the language and rhetoric the administration used to hype its commitment to racial justice and equity was not matched with the same level of sufficient, assertive action needed to achieve change at the local, tribal, state, and federal levels in order claim any sort of global leadership on racial justice. Human Rights Watch and the ACLU called out the Biden regime for:

“Intentionally exempting itself from human rights demands that it has pressed on other countries, while permitting structural racism and xenophobia to operate as pervasive, unbridled forces in American society.”¹⁰

For those of us who have lived, worked, started our life in, or have strong personal ties to Middle East and Africa, we were equally baffled to watch the Biden regime progress through its presidency with seemingly little to no acknowledgement of many of the issues that were most important and critical to those living across across these regions. There was a relief that the

⁸ Marwa Elessawy. UN Racial Justice Review Gives Biden Opportunity to Center International Human Rights. American Civil Liberties Union. 2022.

⁹ Executive Order No. 13985. Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government. January 21, 2021.

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch and American Civil Liberties Union. Joint ACLU-HRW Submission To The UN On Racial Discrimination In The US. July 22, 2022.

Trump administration would not continue to build on their ethnocentric, colonial approach to foreign policy in the region, but those of us who were deeply invested personally in this area of the world were taken back by just how little priority this new administration was making of some of the most pressing human rights issues and humanitarian emergencies in the MENA region, if not the world.¹¹ On top of it all, when the administration was forced to address issues coming out of the region, those genuinely invested in the fight for racial justice and equity for family, adopted family, or the marginalized throughout the MENA region were aghast to see administration refuse to take any sort of principled stand for the human rights of Arabs, Africans, and those fleeing war and persecution in the region. Just in this past year alone we've seen the administration cower to Saudi Arabia^{12 13}, adopt Trump-era immigration policies affecting those fleeing war in the region¹⁴, and be publicly called out and embarrassed by humanitarians, fellow UN member states, and rights advocates, on their slow, unassertive response to human rights atrocities and the humanitarian crisis happening in Sudan.^{15 16}

The stark difference in collective American + Global North response to Ukraine, compared to Sudan.

Coming on the heels of a year in which solidarity with Ukraine dominated news headlines, sporting events, celebrity pop culture, and most importantly, political discourse in our countries, watching how the Global North responded, prioritized, and spoke about what humanitarians were calling one of the worst humanitarian situations in modern history (Sudan)¹⁷, was jarring. Disturbing is probably the most accurate word to describe the feeling, actually.

¹¹ Brian Katulis. Treading Cautiously on Shifting Sands: An Assessment of Biden's Middle East Policy Approach, 2021-2023. Middle East Institute. September, 2023.

¹² Joey Shea. Biden Is Letting Saudi Arabia Get Away With Murder, Again. Human Rights Watch. 2023.

¹³ Robert Tait. Biden accused of betrayal of Khashoggi over push to deepen Saudi ties. The Guardian. October 7, 2023.

¹⁴ Issac Chotiner. Are Biden's Immigration Policies Stuck in the Trump Era? The New Yorker. March 2, 2023.

¹⁵ Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. The US and the Sudan Conflict: Motives and Ability to Influence Events. June 27, 2023.

¹⁶ Alex De Waal. The New Crisis in Darfur. Foreign Affairs Magazine. September 18, 2023.

¹⁷ Martin Griffiths. UN relief chief: Sudan is reeling after six months of war. United Nations Office For Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. October 15, 2023.

After a brutal power struggle, following the people's revolution in Sudan just two years earlier, two warring military warlords waged a full out war on not only each other, but on everything and everyone that stood in their way. The loss of life has been astounding and the level of human rights atrocities not only reported, but blatantly shown online for the world to see has been overwhelming. Within only a couple of weeks, millions of Sudanese fled Sudan to neighboring Egypt, Chad, Libya, and, if they could find way, to the Middle East.¹⁸ All of a sudden, we were watching new horrors, acts of genocide, with thousands upon thousands of innocent civilians being killed. Critical resources and living necessities were cut off. Millions of people fleeing for their lives. Once again, we saw Darfuri Sudanese and other minorities targeted, just like the world had continually witnessed over the past three-decades.^{19 20}

In the early 2000s the world was humbled and embarrassed by their silence during the atrocities in Darfur at the time. Coincidentally, it was in this very time period that the 'Never Again' motto became most re-popularized within American and European collective consciences.²¹ Actor Don Cheadle, who had just won an Oscar for Hotel Rwanda, even co-wrote a book about Darfur challenging the world to come to the aid of Darfur and Sudan.²² George Clooney got involved then too with the Save Darfur movement. The Bush administration, which had begun the attempt to rewrite its own legacy, for a time, allocated first of its kind resources to humanitarian response in Sudan.^{23 24} But this attention, as is with so many causes that intertwine with 'pop culture' or the vanity projects of the elite, was short lived. The world quickly moved on, and the atrocities and oppression of Darfuri and other Sudanese minorities, being orchestrated by the Turabi and Bashir regime, would continue for another two decades^{25 26}...but 2023 would be different right? After the decades of failing the people of Sudan and Darfur and witnessing what we all witnessed in Ukraine, this would be different, right?

¹⁸ Sudan conflict displaces nearly four million: UN migration agency. UN News. Aug 2, 2023.

¹⁹ See note 11 above.

²⁰ Human Rights Watch. Sudan: Global Leaders Warn of Inaction in Face of Atrocities. September 12, 2023.

²¹ Frontline: On Our Watch. Public Broadcasting Services. 2007.

²² Prendergast and Cheadle. Not On Our Watch: The Mission to End Genocide In Darfur and Beyond. Hyperion. 2007.

²³ Human Rights First. Human Rights First Welcomes President Bush's Focus On Darfur. September 2006.

²⁴ Suzanne Goldenberg. Bush orders Darfur sanctions after grassroots pressure. The Guardian. May 29, 2007.

²⁵ Eric Reeves. Obama and Darfur: The Futility of Mere Hopefulness. Dissent Magazine. January 21, 2011.

²⁶ Richard Just. The Truth Will Not Set You Free. The New Republic. August 26, 2008.

Global media indeed covered Sudan as one of its lead stories for about a week before subtly moving it further and further away from the mainstream. Those who truly cared were left following the social media feeds of Sudanese activists, community leaders, and humanitarians that shared harrowing, eye-witness accounts, and updates, of what their communities and country were living through.^{27 28} Within a month, one of the largest mass displacements in over 50 years was being overshadowed by just about every other news story in the world, reduced to the far reaches of the news cycle.

That unified world pledging to move any amount of resource ‘in the name of humanity’ for Ukrainians? Would they show the same compassion and grief for Sudanese life? There were many public statements by our global leaders, humanitarians, and popular western activists expressing ‘grave concern’. Blinken’s State Department was slow to respond or even express any real clear political or humanitarian position. Europe’s response was much of the same, with many key international players not making their positioning clear until public outcry pushed them to do so. When they eventually did, their position usually didn’t extend past deeply vague, non-committal, diplomatic platitudes. Sudanese activists and those with close connection to communities on the ground expressed outrage with the Global North refusing to treat the crisis with the level of urgency it critically deserved. As defenders of ‘democracy and human dignity’ got cold feet in Brussels, London, and D.C., and debate on humanitarian principles and approach to Sudan were quarantined to social media platforms and academic conferences, the Sudanese people were asked to bear down and fend for themselves. As the lives of millions hung in balance, the same Global North that screeched to a halt for Ukraine, was telling Sudanese that there was indeed a humanitarian hierarchy, no matter how great the emergency.^{29 30} And, if you were paying attention, leaders of these nations were once again saying that Black lives do not have the same value as European, Caucasian ones.

²⁷ Human Rights Watch. Sudan: Darfur Town Destroyed: ICC Should Investigate Killings, Looting by Rapid Support Forces, Arab Militias. July 11, 2023.

²⁸ Hafez Haroun and Rick Noack. A new generation faces growing prospect of another genocide in Darfur. Washington Post. July 18, 2023.

²⁹ Howard LaFranchi. Two decades after Darfur, Sudan cries out again. Is anyone listening? Christian Science Monitor. October 3, 2023.

³⁰ In Sudan, a genocide unfolds — again — and the world does little. Washington Post. August 29, 2023.

Of course, when Sudanese, Africans, humanitarians, and advocates--like many associated or connected to Locally Led--made this claim, many of us were criticized for being ‘too extreme’ and ‘unreasonable’. Sudanese going through the horrors on the ground listened to world leaders lecture them about how the situation on the ground was ‘deeply complex’, complicated, and for Sudanese and their advocates to ‘stay patient’. Humanitarians and activists based in Egypt, Chad, Libya, and Europe spoke of limited organization, resources, or financing for proper response to the refugee influx coming into their countries.³¹ All gave astounding accounts of Sudanese refugees having to quickly organize and mobilize assistance, care, and protection for themselves, while, at the same, consolidating personal resources to reach the needs of fellow refugees.^{32 33}

The lack of legitimate commitment to assistance in the response to the crisis in Sudan has become exposed in the months that followed. Sudan has become an afterthought to many³⁴, including many of our former humanitarian colleagues. Frequently, those of us who have worked in Sudan or with Sudanese refugees, who have close personal connections or loved ones deeply affected by what’s happening there, have had colleagues ask us ‘So, what’s happening in Sudan, now? Is it still going on?’ Oh, and those folks who cared so much about Ukraine and could not believe how the world could sit and watch as innocent Ukrainians were killed? Their tone was now very different, a reaction reduced to a simple ‘Oh it’s a terrible situation. But, you know, it’s just how it is over there’ or ‘we can’t help everybody’.

This collective apathy, and lack of empathy, brought back the words of a senior UN rep, which was cited in Locally Led’s inaugural report *Is The Humanitarian Sector Practicing What It Preaches?*³⁵. Following a presentation at a working group in Jordan that pleaded for aid

³¹ Joint Statement of 50 Humanitarian Organizations: Urging More Aid, Solidarity and Attention to Sudan Crisis. Norwegian Refugee Council. September 13, 2023.

³² Amira Ahmed, Nada El Kouny, Elena Habersky, and Gerda Heck. How Egypt is taking on its Sudanese Neighbours in the Time of War. Disorient. July 9, 2023.

³³ Azza Guergues. Long hours and low budgets: Meet the refugee groups supporting Sudanese displaced in Egypt. The New Humanitarian. September 20, 2023.

³⁴ Kate Bartlett. Sudan's war passed 6 months, with much of the world consumed by other conflicts. National Public Radio. October 21, 2023.

³⁵ Aaron Williams. Is The Humanitarian Sector Practicing What It Preaches? What an examination of refugee response framework in Jordan tells us about the humanitarian sector’s real feelings on localization, impartial aid, and humanitarian principles. Locally Led International. 2023.

stakeholders to take a stand for African-origin refugees in the Middle East, that had been largely ignored for well over a decade, a UN rep coldly replied to the activist who had presented:

“It’s a heartbreaking situation but it’s not worth the political capital. Our member organizations will not be willing to risk the political capital it would take to ensure rights of African-refugees here. It’s just not worth the political capital.”

Political capital and worth and value of certain human life over another. That’s what was determining which of the marginalized, oppressed, which refugee was worth protecting. Not the principles of non-discrimination or impartiality. Not the Human Rights or Refugee Conventions.

Which brings us to Gaza.

Continued silence in the face of ethnic cleansing and atrocity in Gaza and Palestine.

Over the past two weeks we watched the self-proclaimed ‘most liberal administration in American history’, a week after condemning the attack on Israeli youth at a festival, sit-back and watch a televised genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The Biden administration then announced full support of the Israeli regime’s actions in Gaza, approved a substantial package of military resources to facilitate the blatant brutality and violation of international humanitarian, human rights conventions and rules of war the rest of the world was watching play out in front of their eyes.³⁶ After multiple Israeli officials gave public interviews stating that their goal was to ‘flatten Gaza’ and ‘that no Palestinian life was safe’, there was silence from American officials.³⁷ There were no calls in the days that followed for Israel to condemn disgusting, racist, inhumane rhetoric from a general, multiple ministers, and other high-ranking members of their government. When hospitals were targeted and mass civilian casualties ensued, U.S. media and prominent entertainment platforms in film, music, and sport called on universal support/grief for the loss of Israeli life...yet, did not ask for ‘prayers’ ‘moments of silence’ or solidarity in defense of Arab,

³⁶ Haidar Eid. In dehumanising the Palestinians, Biden has surpassed Trump. Al Jazeera. October 29, 2023.

³⁷ Bel Trew, Namita Singh, Tom Watling and Tara Cobham. Gaza to be ‘razed to the ground’ as IDF mass at border and Palestinians run out of fuel. The Independent. October 11, 2023.

Palestinian life.³⁸ After global outcry pleaded for Israel to make a ceasefire and allow for critical humanitarian assistance to be delivered to the people of Gaza, a White House spokesperson emotionally proclaimed that Israel should not have to explain its actions to anyone and, somehow, without flinching, compared those speaking out in solidarity with Palestinians with members of the Klu Klux Klan in Charlottesville.³⁹ In the midst of such outrageous comments the US administration then assertively blocked a move for a ceasefire/emergency humanitarian intervention in Gaza at the UN.⁴⁰ After the loss of civilian life became almost impossible for the White House to ignore, the President of the United States said he doubted the credibility of Palestinian claims, reporting, and narrative when it came to what was going on in Gaza.⁴¹ Finally, as everyday citizens and activists (including multitudes of Jewish activists)⁴² rallied in support of Palestinians across the Global North⁴³, many of our own political leaders (including democrats and progressives), friends, and family called us ‘antisemitic’.⁴⁴

Just like with Sudan, the disproportionate level of empathy and solidarity with the suffering, and loss of civilian life, in Palestine compared to Ukraine, was heart wrenching to watch play out. The collective ill-informed, ethnocentric, racist analysis and response to what’s happening in Gaza by those who a year before ‘stood in defense of human rights and dignity’ has been disgusting. It’s been especially heart wrenching for those of us who have family and loved ones that have fallen victim to this dualistic worldview.

The ‘mask is off’ says Wesam Ahmad, a Palestinian human rights advocate in Ramallah. If the global community was blinded by its own self-righteousness before, ‘Gaza shows us that

³⁸ Jack Mirkinson. A Reminder to the Media: Palestinian Lives Matter Too. The Nation. October 13, 2023.

³⁹ The White House. Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby. October 31, 2023.

⁴⁰ US vetoes UN Security Council action on Israel, Gaza. Reuters. October 18, 2023.

⁴¹ Ali Harb. Why does Biden doubt the Palestinian death count in the Israel-Gaza war? Al Jazeera. October 26, 2023.

⁴² Jewish Voice For Peace. We shut down Grand Central station to demand a ceasefire. October 30, 2023.

⁴³ Umar A Farooq. Israel-Palestine war: Washington sees largest pro-Palestine protest in US history. Middle East Eye. November 5, 2023.

⁴⁴ Wilfred Chan. ‘The Palestine exception’: why pro-Palestinian voices are suppressed in the US. The Guardian. Nov 1, 2023.

international law can no longer be claimed to be supreme or that it applies equally to everyone.⁴⁵

If you've been paying attention for the past 70 years, none of this should surprise you.

Once again, if you've been following along closely, none of this should have surprised you. Western silence in the face of Palestinian suffering and the racist, illogical arguments they use to excuse it, have been the constant for over a century.⁴⁶ Most this is the bi-product of a collective refusal by those in the Global North to acknowledge the 'cost' of the formation of modern Israel and their own role in the systematic erasure of Palestinian history.⁴⁷

All land that the global community calls Palestinian land today has been occupied for over 70 years. For this piece we will not dive into an entire breakdown of Palestinian history but would direct readers to take into account that many of the most respected human rights organizations, scholars, and rights advocates around the world have called what has taken place in Palestine over the past century to be 'apartheid'.^{48 49 50} Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and even the usually painfully diplomatic UN Commission For Human Rights, have all commissioned reports finding Israel's occupation to be that of apartheid. Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory, concluded in his 2022 report to the commission that:

⁴⁵ Wesam Ahmad, The mask is off: Gaza has exposed the hypocrisy of international law. Al Jazeera. October 17, 2023.

⁴⁶ Rashid Khalidi. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017*. Macmillan Publishers. January 28, 2020.

⁴⁷ Steven Salaita. *Uncivil rites: Palestine and the limits of academic freedom*. Haymarket Books, 2015.

⁴⁸ Amnesty International. Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: a cruel system of domination and a crime against humanity. February 1, 2022.

⁴⁹ Human Rights Watch. A Threshold Crossed Israeli Authorities and the Crimes of Apartheid and Persecution. April 27, 2021.

⁵⁰ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner For Human Rights. Israel's 55-year occupation of Palestinian Territory is apartheid – UN human rights expert. March 25, 2022.

“Living in the same geographic space, but separated by walls, checkpoints, roads and an entrenched military presence, are more than three million Palestinians, who are without rights, living under an oppressive rule of institutional discrimination and without a path to a genuine Palestinian state that the world has long promised is their right. Another two million Palestinians live in Gaza, described regularly as an ‘open-air prison’, without adequate access to power, water or health, with a collapsing economy and with no ability to freely travel to the rest of Palestine or the outside world...Apartheid is not, sadly, a phenomenon confined to the history books on southern Africa,” he said in his report to the Human Rights Council...The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court came into law after the collapse of the old South Africa. It is a forward-looking legal instrument which prohibits apartheid as a crime against humanity today and into the future, wherever it may exist...The Council and the Assembly have repeatedly criticized Israel for defying their resolutions. They have threatened consequences. But no accountability has ever followed.”⁵¹

This past August, over 700 academics at recognized research institutions around the world (including a number of Israeli academics) signed an open letter equating Israel’s occupation of Palestine with apartheid.⁵² Even the former head of the Mossad (Israel’s intelligence agency), Tamir Pardo, has admitted that his country is enforcing an apartheid system in Palestine.⁵³ Most importantly, and most credible, are the narratives, reporting, and depictions of what it’s like to live in Palestine, by Palestinian scholars, activists, journalists, artists and documentarians that condemn the State of Israel guilty of seven decades of cruel, brutal oppression and a systematic, pre-meditated ethnic cleansing of the people and culture of Palestine.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See above note 44.

⁵² Middle East Eye. ‘Watershed moment’: Over 700 academics equate Israeli occupation with apartheid. August 8, 2023.

⁵³ Tia Goldenberg. A former Mossad chief says Israel is enforcing an apartheid system in the West Bank. Associated Press. September 6, 2023.

⁵⁴ Though there are thousands upon thousands of credible Palestinian activists, scholars, journalists, and storytellers to follow some names recommended by those in Locally Led’s network include, but are not limited to: Aya Alghazzawi, Fares Akram, Yousef Mema, Maha Hussaini, Amjad Iraqi, Diana Buttu, Issam Adwan, Mustafa Barghouti, Mariam Barghouti, Mohammed El Kurd, Yara Hawari.

Prior to 1948, the land Israel calls 'Israel' today, was owned, farmed, and developed by Palestinians for generations prior to the creation of modern Israel in 1948.⁵⁵ In order to create this new Zionist state of Israel, those leading the new state (who were European Jews) established armed Jewish militias for the sole purpose of forcing the inhabitants of Palestine to flee to neighboring Arab countries, to make way for what they envisioned to be a purely, Jewish state.⁵⁶ What ensued can only be compared to the modern American occupation, explosion, and ethnic cleansing of the First Nations of North America. These militias killed thousands of Palestinians and forced millions of Palestinians from their land and homes. Many of these Palestinians would find refuge in neighboring Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and beyond---though 'refuge' would likely be too kind of a word to describe it. This period of time is known to Palestinians as the 'Nakba'.⁵⁷ Many families forced to flee still have the keys to the homes, farms, and businesses they left behind. As the years went on, while claiming to seek peace with their Palestinian neighbors, Israel routinely forced more and more Palestinians from their home and lands and financed Orthodox fundamentalists to build 'settlements' on Palestinian land. With the little that is now left of traditional Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) the Israeli government systematically dictates the movement, critical resources, human rights, and basic dignity Palestinians get to have.⁵⁸ Israel routinely cuts off power, internet and water and routinely has celebrated political and military leaders that have openly called for the ethnic cleansing of Arabs. It has incarcerated thousands without trial, and has rarely held it's own military, police, or civilians accountable for killing, assault, or abuse of innocent Palestinians.⁵⁹

As the Global North has commonly passionately supported a peaceful, two-state solution, it has disproportionately financed and politically supported Israel⁶⁰, censured and demonized social

⁵⁵ See note 40.

⁵⁶ Ben White. *Israeli Apartheid: A Beginner's Guide*. Second Edition. Pluto Press. February 2014.

⁵⁷ Ilan Pappé. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Simon & Schuster. September 1, 2007.

⁵⁸ See note 50.

⁵⁹ See note 45.

⁶⁰ See note 40.

movement and reporting that shared Palestinian narrative^{61 62 63 64}, and routinely blocked international acts of solidarity to sanction Israel for violating universally recognized human rights.⁶⁵

Palestinian voice, culture, and history has been misrepresented, silenced, and demonized in Global North media, film, and political narrative for centuries. Today, the North's social media platforms silence Palestinian voice and censor documentation of genocide.

To compound the heavy biases in policy, our media, film, and news industries in the Global North have long been criticized for its long history of perpetuating ethnocentric, racist stereotypes of Palestinians---and Arabs and Muslims in general—as sub-human, religious fundamentals, and hateful terrorists⁶⁶, in favor of the rich histories, culture, art, intellectual thought and vibrant, welcoming, relational sense of community those of us who have grown up in or those who have traveled/worked in Palestine/throughout the region, have intimately come to know about the region.

The late Dr. Jack Shaheen spent decades investigating the history of Western media's depiction of the Arab in film, reporting, and storytelling and how these depictions produced deeply dangerous public opinions on Arabs, Muslims, their cultures and histories, and their value as citizens/humans in society.⁶⁷ Many other colleagues of ours don't need Shaheen's research to convince them. They lived through the years that followed 9/11 throughout the Global North. Years that provided us all with an ugly reality check of just how mainstreamed our racism,

⁶¹ The New Humanitarian. What's Unsaid | The media's silencing of Palestinians with Guest Mariam Barghouti. October 24, 2023.

⁶² Omar Zahzah. Digital apartheid: Palestinians being silenced on social media. May 13, 2021.

⁶³ Rafeef Adel Ziadah. Outside the multicultural: solidarity and the silencing of Palestinian narratives. York University. 2013.

⁶⁴ Rebecca Ruth Gould. Erasing Palestine: Free Speech and Palestinian Freedom. July 18, 2023.

⁶⁵ Creede Newton. A history of the US blocking UN resolutions against Israel. Al Jazeera. May 19, 2021.

⁶⁶ Jack Shaheen. Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People. The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. 2003.

⁶⁷ See note 60.

prejudice towards Arabs, Muslims, and people of color had become, regardless of your political persuasion.^{68 69}

Even many of the social media platforms who have touted themselves as society's last defenders of free speech, have either unapologetically admitted or been exposed for consistently silencing, de-platforming, censoring narratives/content by Palestinians, documentary/academic content that tells the story of Palestinian history, or content that depicts the Israeli occupation in a negative light.⁷⁰ In the past decade, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Zoom, and Instagram have all been exposed of modifying algorithms to either silence or significantly reduce the exposure of Palestinian narrative on their platforms.⁷¹ Over the past month, those sharing first-hand video of atrocities taking place inside of Gaza or Gazan point of view of the desperate need in their city, reported their content being blocked or it's reach being abnormally low.⁷² Solidarity movements and activists in the Global North attempting to spread advocacy about what was happening in Gaza also reported having content blocked or engagement on all posts regarding Palestine being far below those who didn't associate words or content relating to Palestine. The shameful act of blocking free speech of the oppressed, who are documenting blatant violations to international human rights and humanitarian laws, not to mention the ethnic cleansing of their own people, is an accusation that, shocking to some, is not an exaggerated one. Verification of these claims can be simply achieved by reading one of the numerous accounts described by whistleblowers who have reported how, for years, both users and employees trying to rein in toxicity, raise awareness about injustice, or prevent genocide in numerous cases around the world have, time and time again, been promptly shutdown, fired, or their accounts/groups dissolved.⁷³

The complicity of the modern American, European Church.

⁶⁸ Liz Mineo. Muslim Americans who endured post-9/11 bias see solutions in education, political involvement. The Harvard Gazette. September 9, 2021.

⁶⁹ Anisa Noora. The nightmare of growing up as a Muslim American after 9/11. September 11, 2020.

⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch. Israel/Palestine: Facebook Censors Discussion of Rights Issues. October 8, 2021.

⁷¹ See note 61.

⁷² Lila Hassan. Palestinians Claim Social Media 'Censorship' Is Endangering Lives. Wired. October 21, 2023.

⁷³ Brian Merchant. Social media promised us democracy — but gave us dictatorships. Los Angeles Time. July 10, 2023

Another deeply influential Western voice has found itself complicit in promoting dehumanizing, historically inaccurate, and prejudice depictions of Palestine. Over the period of the past seventy years the American and European church has fell victim to Christian-Zionist theologies, that do away with hundreds of thousands of years of theology study⁷⁴ and scholarship and promote Western Christian support of political Israel. Unsurprisingly, the philosophy and justifications many of these religious leaders have used to justify almost irreproachable of Israel seem to be the same theological worldview that has also been used to defend racism in the Americas, white saviorism in its service and missionary projects overseas, and to demonize Churches and inter-faith movements in solidarity with social justice movements such as Black Lives Matter, BDS for Palestine, human rights and racial justice campaigns. Tremendous intellectual Christian, Jewish, and academic arguments have been made to dispel the illogical case for Christian-Zionism, though, still, the European and American church is still deeply influenced by almost over a century of the theology's deeply imbedded influence.⁷⁵

Policy and narrative creation around Palestine has rarely, if ever, been informed by Palestinians themselves.

Throughout it all, both American and collective Global North foreign policy and narrative creation around the Middle East or Palestine have rarely, if ever, been informed by the lived experience of the Arab, Palestinian local...rather informed by archaic, racial stereotype and a colonial, white saviorism highly influenced by a ethnocentric, fundamentalist Zionist worldview of the region. When their future is debated and determined by the world's powers, even their own leaders have to be moderated, baby sat, or co-signed by American, Jordanian, European authorities as 'peace-talks' or 'negotiations' take place with Israel. The Global North often chastises Palestinians for not recognizing their occupier's right to the land they occupy, even though one would find it shocking if American or European officials were expected to recognize the right to land of a nation that suddenly took and occupied over 80% of American, European

⁷⁴ Paul Pomerville. The New Testament Case Against Christian Zionism: A Christian View of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. February 3, 2015.

⁷⁵ Dr. Gary Burdge's 2019 article *Why I'm Not a Christian Zionist* in The Banner. Mimi Kirk's 2019 article *Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump* in the Middle East Research and Information Project. Porter Speakman Jr.'s 2010 documentary *With God On Our Side*. Daniel G. Hummel's article 2023 article *Israel's Current Crisis Exposes Christian Zionism's Contradictory Ideals* in New Lines Magazine.

sovereign land. During periods when Palestinian leadership has agreed to peace agreements with their Israeli counterparts, Israel continues its full control over the small swath of land that Palestine exists in, including controlling all critical resources coming in and out of the country. During ‘peace agreements’ Israel has routinely violated the terms of those agreements, including a continuation of Israeli expansion onto Palestinian land. The nation that has full control over the land of Palestinians enters dialogue about Palestine’s future as the lead partner of Europe and the United States, knowing full well that its stance, perspective, and worldview will be favored over that of its Palestinian counterparts. Global Northern narrative and policy creation around Palestine is setup, from even before it starts, to discredit and delegitimize the experience, suffering, and political aspirations of the people of Palestine.

In addition to this, many Palestinians say that popular, community-led political and social movements within Palestine, that represent majority opinions and aspirations of everyday Palestinians, are rarely included in discussions determining the political future of a Palestinian state at the regional or global political arenas. Palestinians believe these movements are sidelined because they do not fall in line with the Israeli and American worldview of what a Palestinian state should look like and what reparations should be paid for the 70-year occupation of their homeland, state-sponsored theft of Palestinian land and business, and the multitudes of innocent Palestinians that have been incarcerated without investigation or trial, or killed by Israeli police/military without investigation, trial, or justice brought to the families who have lost innocent loved ones.

Though there has been an improvement in coverage, reporting, and academic research on Palestine in the past two decades, the most prominent voices and writing on the region usually come from individuals based outside of the region. Journalists, documentarians, and academics from Palestine have been vocal, challenging their allies in the Global North to show them that they truly prescribe to the de-colonial approaches to research and knowledge creation that they so often demand publicly. Palestinian researchers, journalists, and storytellers Locally Led has built relationships over the years have often said they hear the Global North using ‘decolonial language’ but don’t see words manifested into any real action by providing Palestinian papers, reports, and stories with the same level of credit, platform, resourcing, and academic freedom

often provided to Northern ‘experts’ based in cozy academic compounds around Europe and the Americas.⁷⁶

Rather poetically, as we write this today, 22 American ‘progressives’ just sided with over 234 of their Republican counterparts to censure the only Palestinian-American representative in Congress, Rep. Rashida Talib of Michigan.⁷⁷ An overwhelming vote by representatives of the American people, 22 Democrats, voting to silence and discredit yet another Palestinian voice. A censure of a democratically elected Palestinian American voice just days after over 300,000 Americans filled the streets of Washington demanding justice in Palestine; an end of apartheid in Palestine; and an end to the ongoing atrocities in Gaza. Shortly after the vote, anonymous Biden officials penned a letter criticizing the administration’s approach to Gaza, its silence in the face of atrocities, and its disproportionate support/solidarity with Israel over the people of Palestine.⁷⁸ The letter was quickly publicly criticized and discredited by Biden’s team and countered with an anonymous letter of former Biden and Obama officials who claimed to support the administration’s stance.⁷⁹

There must be accountability for the complicit. There must be commitment to the action of dismantling oppressive systems and power structures...over the co-opting of ‘social change’ language for self-serving pursuits.

What we have seen in front of our faces and seen reported by Palestinian and Sudanese civilians on the ground, by humanitarian agencies and human rights groups, has been brutally horrific.

⁷⁶ There are many open-letters, papers, and books that dive into this topic. To start, Locally Led recommends following many of the activists/researchers previously mentioned in the footnotes above. In addition to this, the South/South Movement and the Palestinian Feminist Collective are tremendous resources. Recommended books include the written works of the previously aforementioned Khalidi; *Decolonizing The Study of Palestine* by Ahmad Sa’di and Nur Masalha; *The Palestinian Exception to Academic Freedom* by Malaka Shwaikh and Rebecca Ruth Gould.

⁷⁷ Moira Warburton. US House censures lone Palestinian-American lawmaker over Israel comments. Reuters. November 8, 2023.

⁷⁸ Julian Borger. White House seeks to restrain Israel in Gaza amid growing internal dissent. The Guardian. November 14th, 2023.

⁷⁹ Betsy Klein. Former Biden and Obama officials give president a boost over his Israel support amid party divide. CNN. November 14, 2023.

Watching the silence and excuses our leaders of the progressive, democratic, free 'Global North' has Locally Led, and communities we work alongside of, completely appalled and boiling with anger. Though, as activists trying to do the most that we can to spread awareness and mobilize resistance against the misinformation and political forces that be, this should be a reality check for some of us...and a stark reminder for others. This should condemn many of us, progressive, anti-racist, 'de-colonialists' of the complacency, and excuses, many of us have made for our own political idols and 'leaders'. Excuses we've made for generations. We know of the systems we live in and the powers that be. We know of the disproportionate positionalities that exist within the United States and Europe. Most of all, if we were paying attention, we are most definitely aware of the hypocrisy of the principles our countries preach to the world (projecting themselves as the models for free, just, fully inclusive, morally upright society) and the actual reality within our communities. We have born witness, over generations, of how our political parties, systems, and the powers that upheld them, have valued certain lives... over others. We should be rightly horrified, express our outrage, and mobilize to resist these gross, barbaric acts against humanity. Most importantly though, this should be a gut check in regard to what we value and what we want to remain complicit in.

As activists and advocates claiming to be a part of the global anti-racist, decolonial, anti-apartheid movements, we must ensure that leaders of our countries that finance, facilitate, and empower occupation and genocide in Palestine and sustain archaic, colonial worldviews to humanitarian aid and the value and worth of Black lives in Sudan, are held accountable for their actions. What is critical for us to understand though--as activists, advocates, and progressives—is that until we practice what we preach, we all collectively remain complicit in supporting systematic injustice and atrocity both at home and abroad. Of course not all the systems within our countries that produce injustice were produced during our lifetimes, but progressives throughout the Global North, regardless of how radical, have routinely been coaxed into voting for local representatives, administrations, and regimes who staunchly, enthusiastically produce or sustain the policies, worldviews, and systems that have propped up Israel's 70 year illegal occupation and apartheid of Palestine and have created the colonial, corrupt, system of humanitarian hierarchy that has produced the inaction and complete, utter disregard of the loss of Black, African life in Sudan.

The outrage at the blatant loss of life and human atrocity in Sudan and Palestine should translate into concrete, clear actions that make those complicit pay the cost for what they've facilitated and defended. The self proclaimed 'most progressive administration in U.S. history' should suffer the consequences for their continued defense of apartheid in Palestine and their perpetuation of humanitarian hierarchy that values certain life over others in Sudan. American progressives should unite behind candidates in their communities, states, and national elections that truly demonstrate clear commitment to human rights, humanitarian principles, and are 'all in' on partnering with their constituents to reconstruct our political and social systems to reflect a decolonial, anti-racist, abolitionist view of progressive movement. In turn, Democratic candidates who co-op social justice/transformation language as means to acquire power and uphold systematic oppression, ethnocentric foreign policy, and colonial hierarchy should be exposed for who they are, boycotted, and voted out. The same can be said for self-proclaimed progressive, human rights-centered political regimes throughout the Global North. Some of the same progressive 'icons' that celebrated the people-driven Sudanese revolution in 2019, are silent in the face of Sudanese suffering today. Some of the same publicly celebrated feminist voices who celebrated the strength and resilience of Sudanese women in the Sudanese revolution, are the same feminists calling for Rashida Talib, and other prominent Palestinian voices to be censured, to apologize for their advocacy, and to 'fall in line'. The same US and European administrations claiming that they couldn't treat the humanitarian catastrophe in Sudan with the same level of priority as Ukraine, expedites the approvals of multi-trillion-dollar military packages facilitating the atrocities happening in Gaza today.

Again, activism should not end in just holding those accountable for the crimes and disproportionate coverage we see in Sudan and Palestine but, keeping in mind the systems that have cultivated the injustice we are seeing, our activism should continue to push forward for the upheaval of systematic racist, hierarchical, colonial systems of oppression in our own countries that continue to replicate oppression at home and abroad. In order to do so, though, those of us 'progressives' in the United States, and throughout the Global North, have to take responsibility first for our own failures. Many of us are so in love with the language, intellectual discussions, and sub-culture that surrounds the activism and causes we claim to care so much about, that we

ignore the responsibility, accountability, and action that comes with the language, principles, and statements we use. The reoccurring, systematic devaluing of Palestinian, Sudanese, Arab, Black, and African life within both the Global North's political and transnational humanitarian system, should also call the positionality of many of us in the humanitarian, foreign policy, rights advocacy, and research sectors into question. If the expertise and consultation that informs our activism, foreign policy, and 'expertise' in the region is not directly from the people and region in question then we are perpetuating the colonial, hierarchical, ethnocentric approach to policy formation, humanitarian response, and scholarly research that have produced the very perspective, response, and approach that we protest and condemn today. May we passionately pursue accountability and justice for the marginalized, but more importantly, may the marginalized, oppressed, and persecuted lead the pursuit, and their voices be amplified, platformed, and prioritized above all else.

"None are free, until all are free" is a phrase commonly repeated at marches and in campaigns demanding an end to racism, occupation, or oppressive/authoritarian rule. None are free, until all are free indeed. What has played out in Sudan and Palestine over the past six months though loudly demands that words and revolutionary, social justice-forward language is not enough. National demonstrations are not enough. Instead, it is revolutionary, focused, sustained action to dismantle these systems and stakeholders who unrelentingly hold onto the power, policy, and supremacy that oppress and dismantle human life, that these moments desperately call for.

What does that require of us though? What that requires for some is to ask themselves how committed they are to the anti-racist, anti-colonial beliefs and principles of social justice and human rights they so often preach and promote. To others it will require them to truly consider the positionality they hold within some of those same systems they are fighting against, the power it may require them to cede, and who it requires them to cede power to. Justice and restoration in Palestine and Sudan will demand that Palestinians and Sudanese assume power over the policies and political solutions of their future. In order for Palestinians and Sudanese to assume this level of ownership it will not only require radical activism and reform in political, humanitarian, and foreign policy but radical cession of power, positionality, and influence by modern colonial powers and well-meaning activists, scholars, and humanitarians to the people of

Palestine and Sudan and their extended diaspora. For as we hold those complicit in the orchestration of the colonial, supremacist systems that oppress the marginalized, we must also hold ourselves accountable for the inequitable power and positionality those systems have bestowed on many of us in the Global North.



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