

Relentless attempts to suppress the truth about Israeli crimes: Conflict at New York's 92NY and, in the face of attacks, the Emmy victory of Palestinian journalist Bisan Owda

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The relentless character of the homicidal Israeli-US war on the Palestinians, and now the Lebanese, is accompanied by an equally relentless campaign to deny the reality of the genocide in Gaza and shield the perpetrators.

At New York City's 92NY, the cultural venue known for decades as the 92nd Street Y, attempts by staff to indicate support for the beleaguered Gazan population have been met with censorship and disciplinary measures.

The online magazine *Hyperallergic* reports that

A staffer of Manhattan's 92NY ... lost her job and at least five other workers resigned after the institution implemented a policy prohibiting patron-facing employees from "expressing any personal views about politics or social issues." Some workers say the policy disproportionately cracks down on pro-Palestinian sentiment.

Siena, the former program manager of the 92NY's Art Center, was effectively terminated after refusing to remove a watermelon sticker (the colors of the Palestinian flag) from her ID badge and a poster reading "Ceasefire Now, End the Genocide" from her workspace.

Siena said she explained to leadership that she found the policy discriminatory, given that 92NY has issued public support for Israel since Hamas's October 7 attack and Israel's escalating violence in Gaza. An Israeli flag still hangs in the lobby, and a donation link for Friends of the IDF disappeared from the organization's website earlier this month. Siena also said she raised concerns to leadership that the policy only targeted employees with pro-Palestinian politics. (*Hyperallergic*)

On August 19, Siena was asked "to sign an agreement stipulating the cessation of her employment."

A 92NY spokesperson issued a hypocritical statement claiming that over the summer the venue had

crafted a neutral and wide-ranging policy asking employees in patron-facing roles to refrain from expressing any personal views

about politics or social issues. ... This policy is not about Israel or Palestine, it is a broad policy meant to address political advocacy of any kind in a highly polarized environment.

This is dishonest nonsense, as the policy has only been directed at opponents of the Gaza genocide. In any event, what will history say about a "community center" serving "a very diverse patron base" that determines its "primary responsibility" is to "ensure that people from all backgrounds feel comfortable and welcomed," including apparently those who support the liquidation of the Palestinian people?

Along these lines, Will Hogue, a former program coordinator at 92NY who resigned on August 14, told *Hyperallergic* about an incident that occurred in May 2024 when

a visitor approached Hogue at his desk while he was wearing a Palestinian flag pin and a watermelon T-shirt, according to an incident report Hogue said he sent to 92NY's lawyers.

The patron, according to the document, accused Hogue of calling for the "annihilation of all Jews," would not leave Hogue's desk, used profanity, and demanded he not pick up his work phone, which was ringing, while the patron was speaking to him. The visitor also told him it was "probably [his] last day" at the 92NY.

Hogue said he reported the verbal altercation to Human Resources as harassment, and he was immediately put on paid leave for seven weeks while lawyers investigated.

This is the deeply reactionary, pro-Zionist element that put pressure on the 92NY and brought about a change in policy and the various actions forcing employees out.

Hazel Elsbach, a 92NY jewelry design teaching artist, also resigned in August.

Elsbach, who is Jewish, said that when she began working at 92NY she thought it was a "really open-minded place for progressive Jewish thought." But after October 7, the work culture changed, Elsbach said.

The current conflict at 92NY does not come out of the blue. Last

October, as the mass killings in Gaza were only getting under way, the venue canceled an appearance by Vietnamese-American Pulitzer Prize winning writer Viet Thanh Nguyen. The writer was scheduled to discuss his memoir, but the event was called off because Nguyen, as the WWSW reported,

along with hundreds of other artists and writers, signed a statement, “An Open Letter on the Situation in Palestine,” published in the *London Review of Books* on October 16, which condemned Israel’s attack on Gaza.

92NY featured Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a speaker last year.

The reactionary action against Nguyen was condemned by a variety of writers and artists. The 92NY was forced to “pause” its 2024 series of readings because writers withdrew in protest over the censorship. Authors Christina Sharpe and Saidiya Hartman and poet and novelist Dionne Brand, for example, declined to appear at an event entitled “Writing, Form and Black Life.” They explained in a statement in X/Twitter: “As writers of conscience, as anti-imperialist, anti-racist and anti-colonial thinkers, we have cancelled our appearance.”

Opposition to the genocide continues to grow, however, despite all the efforts to conceal and whitewash it. It is not entirely possible, even in the US, to prevent the outrage from finding expression.

In the face of vicious attacks by the Israeli lobby, “It’s Bisan From Gaza and I’m Still Alive,” the AJ+ news story from Palestinian journalist Bisan Owda, won an award, for Outstanding Hard News Feature Story: Short Form, during the two-day 45th Annual News & Documentary Emmys held this week by the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (NATAS).

In her online video series, Owda documents the destruction of Gaza by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). By May 2024, she had accumulated some 4.1 million followers.

As we reported in August,

Owda, in her various videos, provides images of the mass devastation in Gaza and the severe hardships suffered by its population—the constant evacuations, the long marches, the food shortage, the sanitation and hygiene calamity. She was also an eyewitness to the Al-Shifa Hospital bombing and massacre, lyingly blamed by the Israelis and the US media on the Palestinians themselves. The videos also reveal, despite everything, the resilience of the Palestinian people and their determination to resist the bloody Zionist-imperialist oppression.

A group of pro-Israeli reactionaries, banding together for the sole purpose of defending massive crimes against humanity, denounced the Emmy nomination in August and demanded it be rescinded. The dreadfully misnamed “Creative Community For Peace” (CCFP) managed to obtain 150 signatures of Hollywood professionals on an open letter smearing Owda, without providing the slightest evidence, as someone who has a “history of promoting dangerous falsehoods, spreading antisemitism, and condoning violence.”

The CCFP asserted that Owda’s alleged affiliation with the left-nationalist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), “a United States designated terrorist organization, raises serious ethical concerns that cannot and should not be ignored. Honoring someone linked to an organization that has caused so much pain and suffering is not just

irresponsible; it is a direct affront to the values we hold dear in the entertainment industry.”

As we noted in August,

one has to rub one’s eyes. These people are defending the slaughter of as many as 186,000 people, most of them defenseless civilians, including tens of thousands of women and children, by the Israeli military. The Nazi-like crimes identify the IDF, armed and encouraged by Washington, as a leading force of terror and violence on the planet.

To its credit, the NATAS stood its ground and rejected the demand from the Zionist outfit. Its CEO President Adam Sharp noted that Owda’s video series had been reviewed

by two successive panels of independent judges, including senior editorial leadership from each significant U.S. broadcast news network. It was selected for nomination from among more than 50 submissions in one of the year’s most competitive categories.

The piece was also recognized for journalistic achievement by the Peabody Awards and the Edward R. Murrow Awards, each administered by processes and organizations wholly separate from and independent of NATAS and the News & Documentary Emmys.

The ability of the NATAS to stick with Owda’s nomination, as well as her eventual victory, reflect, in fact, the widespread support for the Palestinians in the entertainment field and the relative isolation of the Israeli attack dog element.

The CCFP, of course, continued to defend its McCarthyite witch-hunting, according to *Variety*:

“The NATAS decision to honor Owda effectively celebrates PFLP propaganda and condones terrorism,” executive director Ari Engel said in a statement. “Instead of recognizing one of the respectable [!] journalistic pieces documenting the war in Gaza, they chose to applaud a political activist affiliated with the PFLP. There is clearly a significant blind spot within the journalistic community—if you support terrorism against Israelis, NATAS will happily recognize your content as award-worthy. This is a sad day for journalism. And a troubling omen for the future of the industry.”

Every single, thick-headed sentence a lie.

In accepting the Emmy September 25, “It’s Bisan from Gaza and I’m Still Alive” senior executive producer Jon Laurence told the audience, to considerable applause,

This award is testimony to one woman, armed only with an iPhone, who has survived almost a year of bombardment. Over 100 Palestinian journalists have been killed in Gaza, including several of our Al Jazeera colleagues. Our bureau in the occupied West Bank was shut down at gunpoint just last week. We thank you, our journalistic community, for this recognition ... and we urge you to join us in saying that journalism is not a crime.



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