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Recommended Reading:

<https://forward.com/opinion/415250/from-the-river-to-the-sea-doesnt-mean-what-you-think-it-means/>

From the River to the Sea

What Do We Mean?

Controversy has surrounded the popular rallying slogan “From The River To The Sea Palestine Will Be Free.”¹ Let's look at the accusations, history, & what we can learn.

Claims

Some claim that Hamas, the Palestinian militia ruling Gaza, coined the slogan to incite genocide against all Jewish residents of historic Palestine, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

They also point to its use to call for the dismantling or replacement of Israel. These accusations miss what this phrase actually means for all Palestinians across the political spectrum. Palestine has consistently been seen as one, indivisible homeland. Early nationalists used the story of Solomon & the baby.² Like the mother in the story, who begged Solomon to not split her baby in half, Palestinians couldn't stand to see

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<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/marc-lamont-hill-fired-cnn-after-his-speech-israel-draws-n942151>

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https://www.freedomarchives.org/Documents/Finder/DOC12_scans/12.palestinian.view..pdf

their beloved country divided under the 1947 Partition Plan. The Nakba—Israel's ethnic cleansing of 850,000 Palestinians & conquest of 78% of Palestine³—tried to sever the native Palestinian ties to the land in 1948. Palestinian nationalism was brutally suppressed in the West Bank⁴ & Gaza Strip⁵ under Jordanian-Egyptian control. Basically, in the modern era, Palestinians have never been free in Palestine.

Struggle

In the shadow of fragmentation & oppression, secular Palestinian nationalism boomed in the 60s, calling for one democratic, secular state for all, led by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).⁶ Basically: A free Palestine, from the river to the sea. It's from this secular struggle, birthed in the 1960s, that the popular slogan spread. 20+ years before Hamas was even formed.

Equality

Despite what some allege⁷ & the extremist rhetoric of a minority of Palestinian figures, the PLO has never adopted the position of forcible removal of Jews from the land. In his U.N. 1974 speech, PLO President Yasser Arafat said: “When we speak of our common hopes for the Palestine of tomorrow we include in our perspective all Jews now living in Palestine who choose to live with us there in peace & without discrimination.”⁸

Hamas

In the 80s, the PLO switched to the 2-state solution. This was hugely unpopular among Palestinians. In Solomon's story, this was the splitting of the baby. With the PLO seen as a traitor, Hamas picked up “*from the river to the sea*,” trying to increase its popularity. Hamas's vision was initially characterized by hostility towards the Jewish people, but this position has since evolved dramatically.^{9 10} Only 13% of Palestinians support

³ <https://imeu.org/article/quick-facts-the-palestinian-nakba>

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https://www.amazon.com/Palestinian-Refugees-1948-1957-Routledge-Editions/dp/1138634751/ref=sr_1_5

[?ie=UTF8&qid=1543856727&sr=8-5&keywords=palestinians+in+jordan+history&tag=thefor03-20](https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=24757)

⁵ <https://www.sup.org/books/title/?id=24757>

⁶ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2537386?seq=1>

⁷ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30247797?seq=1>

⁸ <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/A238EC7A3E13EED18525624A007697EC>

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<https://web.archive.org/web/20080918090220/http://palestine-studies.org/journals.aspx?id=7087&jid=1&href=fulltext>

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https://www.amazon.com/Hamas-Beginners-Guide-Khaled-Hroub-ebook/dp/B00R6JTX8I/ref=sr_1_2?ie=

expelling Jews as a solution.¹¹ This shows that the call for a free Palestine "from the river to the sea" isn't tied to Jewish expulsion.

Liberation

To demonize calls for Palestinian liberation in our homeland implies that our liberation is necessarily harmful to Jews. That either we're free, or they're free. Never both. It's a false dilemma, and this toxic mindset—a legacy of colonial thinking—hurts everyone. The liberation of Palestine, from Gaza to Haifa, needs rethinking of the political structures that express our aspirations. The question is how can we express Palestinian-Jewish liberation in a way that is not only compatible, but mutually strengthens each cause. So far, no institution has succeeded in this: Not Israel, not the PA, nobody.

People, Not States

Those who say the slogan demands the dismantling of Israel implicitly accept what Palestinians have been saying since Day 1: That the state itself is incompatible with Palestinian liberation. This doesn't mean opposing Jewish liberation. The danger of conflating Israel with Jewish liberation is implying there's no other way. That Israel today—and the inherent oppression of Palestinians that comes with—is the only path for Jewish liberation. States are meant to serve us, but can fail to do so.

Conclusion

At its core, the slogan "From the River to the Sea, Palestine Will Be Free" demands Palestinian liberation in our undivided homeland. What does that look like? We're still figuring it out.

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¹¹ <http://pcpsr.org/en/node/731>