

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Web edition headline:

She was fired for being publicly pro-Palestine. One year later, no one is hiring her.

What the Inquirer labels as "Pro-Palestine" are actually anti-Jewish/anti-Zionist/anti-Israel posts. Some of her posts declare that Israel should not exist.

Meanwhile, the Inquirer declares that there is a place called "Palestine" even though there isn't.



Natalie Abulhawa was terminated by the Agnes Irwin School over concerns raised about pro-Palestine social media posts that were characterized as antisemitic. She contends she has been targeted by a "shadowy online blacklist."

BY MASSARAH MIKATI (STAFF WRITER)

Note: In 2021, the reporter signed a letter committing to be biased in favor of "Palestinians." See last page for details.

Since she was 15, Natalie Abulhawa knew she wanted to have a career in athletics.

She dedicated her high school and college years to gaining accolades and becoming a highly sought-after candidate - there wasn't a single offer she didn't get after interviewing for a job.

But over the past year, Abulhawa has received nothing but rejections.

Last November, Abulhawa was terminated from her position as an athletic trainer at the Agnes Irwin School after members of the school's community raised concerns over her years-old, pro-Palestine social media posts that were characterized as antisemitic. The termination decimated Abulhawa's career, leaving the now 25-year-old Palestinian American to wonder whether she would have to give up on her dream so soon after starting

Notice that the Inquirer is trying to solicit sympathy for this activist, and trying to pin her problems on the Jewish community. The social media posts that the reporter refers to are blatantly anti-Jewish by any objective observer. The fact that those posts are "years old" is irrelevant — Abulhawa has not renounced them nor the sentiment that inspired them.

THE MEDIA JUMBLE

The Philadelphia Inquirer's and Philly.com's
one-sided narrative:
Anti-Jewish bias before your very eyes

Print edition headline:

Blacklisted

The Philadelphia Inquirer | TUESDAY, AUG. 23, 2022 | INQUIRER.COM | C | CITY & SUBURBS

THE REGION

CITY
SUBURBS
SOUTH JERSEY

it. And scholars say it is emblematic of a larger trend of advocates for Palestinian rights being silenced and retaliated against for their views, particularly because support for Israel is dominant in American discourse and politics.

What "scholars"? How many? What is their expertise and agenda? Only one "scholar" is quoted — a scholar whose anti-Israel bias is on display throughout her Twitter feed.

"This particular case is going to the heart of the American fundamental right to politically dissent, to express your beliefs," said Sahar Aziz, a Rutgers Law professor and author of *The Racial Muslim: When Racism Quashes Religious Freedom*. "And when you belong to a group that's not afforded those beliefs at equal levels as everyone else, that's evidence of discrimination against that group - but also a threat to those American values."

'A shadowy, online blacklist'

Abulhawa was in love with her job at Agnes Irwin.

But at the beginning of her second week at the Main Line private school, Abulhawa said she was called into a meeting with the school's athletic director and head of human resources and was told concerns were raised over her social media posts.

Abulhawa's first thought was Canary Mission, a website that creates profiles of college students - including Abulhawa - and professors and organizations that advocate for Palestinian rights, detailing every event, social media post, and activity relevant to their activism.

The article as it appeared on the front of the Inquirer's Metro section



"Canary Mission" is a legitimate, valuable website that helps Jews. "The Forward" is hardly a reliable source when it comes to Israel-related items.

The website bills itself as documenting "individuals and organizations that promote hatred of the USA, Israel and Jews on North American college campuses." However, referred to by the Forward - a Jewish publication - as a "shadowy online blacklist," Canary Mission often inaccurately conflates pro-Palestinian activism with antisemitism,

accuses advocates of supporting terrorism, and discriminately targets Palestinians.

It is also commonly known in the pro-Palestine community to have detrimental impacts on careers once someone is listed on the site, as in Abulhawa's case - it is often one of the first sites that pop up when googling someone's name.

Notice that rather than admitting to anti-Jewish activity, she blames a monitoring website for pointing out what she wrote and did.

"I explained the nature of Canary Mission, that they target Palestinians who are vocal about what is going on, and they try to paint them in a way that makes them seem like horrible people," Abulhawa said. "They twist words, they twist protests you've been to, they take pictures out of context, and they create this false narrative about your whole life."

Abulhawa's meeting with the athletic trainer and HR was on the Monday of her second week. By Friday, she was fired from her new job.

A rush of emotions came over her: anger at the unfairness of the situation, and fear for her future career and finances. She went through depressive

stages as the months dragged on, unsure what to do at this point in her life. Anxiety filled her every time she applied and interviewed for jobs, and there was a stretch of time where she would throw out applications after starting them.

Note: No mention of or concern for the Jewish people that she intimidated, and their anxiety. Note also there is no comment included from a representative of Canary Mission or any Jewish group

"I was so scared they were going to google me and find the Canary Mission profile," Abulhawa said.

The intimidation and anxiety that Abulhawa felt in the aftermath of her termination is the goal of groups like Canary Mission, Aziz said: using accusations of antisemitism as a weapon to stifle criticism of the Israeli state's policies and practices.

For example, defenders of Israel often use the line, "Israel has the right to exist." Canary Mission listed a 2016 tweet from Abulhawa that said, "Israel doesn't have the right to exist." In another tweet they listed, Abulhawa lamented about the daily realities of the occupation, writing,

"there's nothing human about crossing through cages and being strip searched to get into another city. I f-ing hate Israel."

Obviously there is plenty of criticism and condemnation of Israel. It is hardly stifled.

Some supporters of Israel interpret statements criticizing Israel as an attack on whether Jews have the right to live in the Middle East.

There were far worse tweets — that the reporter opted to conceal.

And the backlash against criticism of Israel doesn't only affect Palestinians.

Just last year, English teacher Jesse Schwartz was fired from his job at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy after posting a tweet critical of Zionism, the national

ideology of Israel. The school at the time said Schwartz, who is Jewish, violated their social media policy by criticizing the institution.

Zionism is a vital component of Judaism that at its core means Jews settling the Land of Israel.

However, Aziz emphasized that conflating criticism of Israel with antisemitism does an injustice to the real, pervasive threat of antisemitism locally, nationally, and globally. For example, in 2019, a man burst into the home of a rabbi in a suburb of New York during Hanukkah, stabbing five people with a machete. The rabbi, Josef Neumann, died of his injuries three months later.

Aziz said groups such as Canary Mission use accusations of antisemitism to silence critics of Israel's policies and practices in two ways.

"One is to prevent or eliminate anyone with views they disagree with from being in positions of influence at the micro or macro level," she said. "Second is to kill any kind of debate or disagreement about Israeli state policies or practices among the public, among college students, among media, among politicians."

Abulhawa's inability to find a new job was unusual.

Her certifications made her qualified for college and professional-level jobs as an athletic trainer - not only does she have a standard certification and license, but also is a certified strength and conditioning specialist, one of the highest coaching certifications one can get. She also has experience with multiple Division 1 colleges, and has worked with professional athletes for private recovery sessions. Her attorney, Timothy Welbeck, added that Abulhawa has an exemplary record with her former employers and across the region as a certified athletic trainer.

But Abulhawa chose to work in high schools because she loved it. Ultimately, Abulhawa decided to take action: in March, she filed a federal discrimination charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"We believe that her termination, at least as it was related to the social media posts, was pre-textual," said Welbeck, who's a civil rights attorney for the Philadelphia chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations.

Welbeck went on to explain that Abulhawa's advocacy for Palestine, particularly as a woman of color, was one of multiple underlying discriminatory factors he believes led to her termination: "That was really the issue."

The school did not comment on Abulhawa's termination last week.

"In the interest of privacy, the school cannot comment about matters that are specifically about current or former employees," Jubin Kwon, director of marketing and communications, said in an email.

In March, Agnes Irwin contested that Abulhawa was terminated for her advocacy for Palestine, emphasizing they terminated her for posts that were offensive and violated the school's social media policy. But Welbeck said the social media posts — some of which were over 10 years old and written when Abulhawa was 14 — were made before Abulhawa was working for the school. He argues that Agnes Irwin discriminated against Abulhawa in violation of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act.

Flip the situation to a member of any other marginalized group speaking in support of human rights and progressive values, such as Black Lives Matter, and the illegality of Abulhawa's termination and its violation of her civil rights would be undebatable, Aziz said.

And yet in her case, it is perceived as debatable — which Aziz said is due to anti-Muslim, anti-Arab, and anti-Palestinian sentiment that is pervasive in the American mainstream, resulting in the significant denial of rights to the members of those groups compared to the majority.

"The most vulnerable person in America in terms of having their civil rights denied outright or circumscribed is a Muslim Arab who defends Palestinian rights," she said. "They are confronting Islamophobic stereotypes, orientalist Arab-phobic stereotypes, and anti-Palestinian racism all in one; in a country whose foreign policy is to blindly and unconditionally support Israel's state policies and practices, even if those practices and policies violate international human rights. That's why people like [Abulhawa] are sitting ducks."

The challenges escalated for Abulhawa after holding a news conference about her federal discrimination charge.

Former coworkers stopped talking to her. She lost other friends. And online trolls came out of the woodwork, constantly bullying and harassing her through direct messages, she said.

"The mental, emotional toll was really rough. The financial toll was a mess," Abulhawa said. "I'm in an OK place now, but it still hangs over my head that this career that I saw myself going so far in is now effectively over."

Note again that while much of the "advocacy" that is designated — by the reporter — as "for Palestine" (again a place that does not currently exist), the preponderance of her "advocacy" along with that of many others, in reality is purely anti-Israel/anti-Jewish.

Except her posts were in opposition to human rights for Jews!

Note that there are more unsubstantiated claims — including the false claim that "Palestinian" is a "race." Note also that throughout this news article, no other opinions that might challenge or explain the "pro-Palestinian" narrative are included, and there is no indication that there was even an attempt to include any. Thus, instead of a news article, what the Inquirer published here amounts to propaganda to make anti-Jewish and anti-Israel activity appear to be benign, and to make the aggressors appear as though they are the victims of discrimination.

Meanwhile, America's foreign policy is hardly inline with Israel's interests. Entering into a renewed Iran deal and giving US aid to UNRWA are just two stark differences. The rhetoric by Aziz and repeated by the Inquirer are more efforts to slander Jews and weaken support for Israel.

Still, Abulhawa knew she needed to take action. She's far from the only person, Palestinian or not, who has been retaliated against for speaking in support of Palestine.

"They want to effectively ruin our chances of having positions of power in any sense," said Abulhawa. "I just cannot watch it continue. I needed to stand up for every other Palestinian and pro-Palestinian person in this country. They can't keep getting away with it. It's bigger than me."

"Acknowledgment

The work produced by the Communities & Engagement desk at The Inquirer is supported by The Lenfest Institute for Journalism. Editorial content is created independently of the project's donors."

Once again, it is important to point out that this is the reporter's voice, opinion and claim — and therefore it is the Philadelphia Inquirer's voice, opinion and claim.

Meanwhile, the evidence is clear and overwhelming: On the campuses and in public life that it is Jews who are persecuted and "cancelled" for supporting Jewish rights to self-determination and security.

Note: Philadelphia Inquirer reporter **Massarah Mikati**, who wrote the above article, is one of more than 500 "journalists" who signed "An open letter on U.S. media coverage of Palestine" published on June 9, 2021.

The letter begins: "Finding truth and holding the powerful to account are core principles of journalism.

"Yet for decades, our news industry has abandoned those values in coverage of Israel and Palestine. We have failed our audiences with a narrative that obscures the most fundamental aspects of the story: Israel's military occupation and its system of apartheid.

"For the sake of our readers and viewers — and the truth — we have a duty to change course immediately and end this decades-long journalistic malpractice. The evidence of Israel's systematic oppression of Palestinians is overwhelming and must no longer be sanitized." The cite verifiably anti-Israel NGOs to support these claims."

The letter itself is laced with violations of journalist integrity, omitting essential elements of balance and context.

It continues: "As journalists, we are entrusted with a profoundly important mission in a free and democratic society, the power to inform the people and guide the national conversation, from the family dinner table to Capitol Hill.

"We are calling on journalists to tell the full, contextualized truth without fear or favor, to recognize that obfuscating Israel's oppression of Palestinians fails this industry's own objectivity standards.

"We have an obligation — a sacred one — to get the story right. Every time we fail to report the truth, we fail our audiences, our purpose and, ultimately, the Palestinian people."

<https://medialetterpalestine.medium.com/an-open-letter-on-u-s-media-coverage-of-palestine-d51cad42022d>

Note: Journalists are not supposed to "guide" conversations, and it is not their job to take sides in a conflict.

This article and others like it that are becoming more common in print media and Web-based media are little more than propaganda pieces presented as "news." Directly and subliminally, they lead to resentment and hatred of Jewish People and Israel, and work to negate or delegitimize Jewish rights to self-determination in our homeland or, Zionism. Resentment and hatred can lead to physical attacks and erode the mutually beneficial U.S.-Israel relationship — which are the true goals of the propagandists and activists. It is important to identify, expose and respond to such articles and reports, to point out journalism malfeasance and to alert the Zionist Organization of America when you encounter these articles and reports. Contact us at office@zoaphilly.org or at 610-660-9466. Thank you.